

Centre for Food Safety
Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Notes of Tenth Meeting of the Trade Consultation Forum held on
10 April 2008 at 2:30 p.m at Conference Hall, 3 Edinburgh Place, Central, Hong Kong

Present

Government Representatives

Dr Y. Y. HO	Consultant (Community Medicine) (Risk Assessment & Communication)	(Chairman)
Dr. Anne FUNG	Principal Medical Officer (Risk Assessment & Communication)	
Ms. Kay KWOK	Assistant Secretary (Food) 2, Food & Health Bureau	
Ms. Melissa LIU	Scientific Officer (Nutrition)	
Dr. Anna TANG	Research Officer (Toxicology)	
Ms. LEUNG Yuen sheung	Superintendent (Import/Export)	
Ms. CHU Kam Cheong	Chief Health Inspector (Import/Export) Special Duties	
Mr. H M WONG	Superintendent (Risk Communication)	(Notes-taker)

Trade Representatives

Mr. Peter Johnston	A.S. Watson Group (HK) Ltd.
Ms. Lucilla LEUNG	Abbott Laboratories Ltd.
Ms. Carol LAW	AEON Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Mr. Stephen KWAN	AEON Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Mr. MAN Kam Wing	AEON Stores (Hong Kong) Co., Ltd.
Ms. Ming CHEUNG	Campbell Soup Asia Ltd.
Mr. PAK Siu Wa	China Inspection Co., Ltd.
Mr. Dennis CHAN	City Super Ltd.
Ms. Grace YEE	City Super Ltd.
Ms. May KAN	Coca-Cola China Ltd.
Ms. Wendi CHAN	Dah Chong Hong, Ltd.
Mr. Conrad LAM	Four Seas mercantile Ltd.
Ms. Kelly CHAN	Getz Bros. & Co. (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Ms. Jackie LIU	Glaxo Smith Kline Ltd.
Ms. LING Pui Yee	Golden Resources Development Int'l Ltd.
Mr. Michael HUI	Hai Kang Life Corporation Ltd.

Mr. Kinnie HO	Hai Kang Life Corporation Ltd.
Mr. Perry SIT	HK Health Food Association
Mr. Covington LEUNG	HK Health Food Association
Ms. Betty LUI	Hong Kong Hotels Association
Ms. Hydde CHAN	Hong Kong Retail Management Association
Ms. Corine LIU	Hong Kong Yakult Co., Ltd.
Ms. Jessica CHUI	Kjeldsen & Co. (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Ms. Athena LEUNG	Kjeldsen & Co. (Hong Kong) Ltd.
Mr. LEUNG Kam Tong	Kowloon Chamber of Commerce
Ms. Maria HO	Lam soon (HK) Ltd.
Mr. Vincent Y.M. CHEUNG	Lee Kum Kee Int'l Holdings Ltd.
Ms. Gloria YUEN	Marks & Spencer (Asia pacific) Ltd.
Mr. Philip KWAN	Mead Johnson Co. Ltd
Mr. SO Man Lam	Mengniu Milk Industry (H.K.) Ltd.
Ms. Doris CHAN	Nestle H.K. Ltd.
Mr. CHOW Chi Yan	Nikken's Japanese Food Co., Ltd.
Mr. HUI Yiu Kai	Nissin Foods Co., Ltd
Ms. German CHEUNG	Pappagallo Pacific Ltd.
Ms. LAI Sin Man	Park'n Shop
Mr. CHAN Wing cheong	Pat Chun Int'l Ltd.
Ms. Stephanie SHUM	Saint Honore Cake Shop Ltd.
Mr. TANG Kwok Fai	San Miguel Brewery HK Ltd.
Ms. Jessie WONG	Sims Trading Co., Ltd.
Mr. HO Kwok Ying	The Asia provisions Co., Ltd.
Mr. LAU Kwong Choi	The Association for HK Catering Services Management Ltd
Mr. Allen HO	The Dairy Farm Group
Ms. Angela WONG	The Garden Co., Ltd
Mr. Ronald LAU	The Hong Kong Food Council Ltd.
Mr. Ivan CHAN	Vitasoy International Holdings Ltd
Ms. LAM Siu Ping	Winner Food Products Ltd.
Ms. HUNG Kai Yee, Olivia	Wyeth (H.K.) Ltd.

Opening Remarks

1. The Chairman welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Government Representatives attending the forum.

Agenda Item 1

Confirmation of the Notes of Last Meeting

2. The notes of last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

Agenda Item 2

The Progress of Pre-statutory Voluntary Registration Scheme

3. Ms CHU Kam Cheong said that with the impending enactment of the Food Safety Bill, the Government was introducing Pre-statutory Voluntary Registration Scheme (the Voluntary Registration Scheme) to encourage importers/distributors of different food types to notify the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of their businesses by stages so as to allow them to accommodate to the future mandatory registration scheme and better communicate with them. There were two stages for the Voluntary Registration Scheme. Stage One was introduced in 2007 and focused on unprocessed food, while Stage Two would start in mid-2008 by phases and cover processed game, meat, poultry meat and aquatic products; egg products; processed vegetables and fruit products; dairy products; legumes; nuts and seeds; cereal and grain products; herbs and spices; fats and oils; salts; condiments and sauces; beverages; baby food; Chinese herbs; health food/supplements; and mixed dishes and food. The Voluntary Registration Scheme was supported by the trade.

Agenda Item 3

Rapid Alert System

4. Dr Anne FUNG introduced the Rapid Alert System (RAS) to the meeting. The CFS closely monitored local and overseas food incidents every day, analysed the hazards, assessed the risks and disseminated messages to the public timely and efficiently through different channels. Regarding dissemination of messages to food trade, the RAS was launched officially in February 2008 to provide urgent information on food to the trade by e-mail, fax and SMS so that they could take necessary follow-up actions and help minimise the impact on public health. Dr FUNG encouraged the trade to take action(s) as advised upon receipt of the alert from the CFS and the trade associations to inform their members of the incidents as soon as possible. The trade might subscribe to the RAS through on-line registration. They might contact the CFS by e-mail, fax or phone for latest information on the alerts.

5. The Chairman thanked the trade for their support. The CFS would continue to enhance the RAS.

6. A trade representative suggested that the CFS should try not to issue press releases in the evening so that the trade could have sufficient time to better understand the incidents and take follow-up actions.

7. Dr Anne FUNG replied that the CFS usually informed the trade in advance for them to take necessary actions. Press releases would be issued when necessary.
8. The Chairman added that the CFS would like to issue the press release early but needed time to verify the accuracy of the information.
9. Another trade representative suggested that proposed action plan(s) should be added in the CFS alerts for the trade to follow. It was preferred that the plan(s) targeted a specific department of a food company to enhance efficiency and prevent any misunderstandings.
10. Dr Anne FUNG responded that the CFS would consider the views from the trade and improve the communication methods with them.

Agenda Item 4

The Levels of Total Mercury and Methylmercury in Different Fish Species

11. Dr Anna TANG made a presentation on the levels of total mercury (tHg) and methylmercury (MeHg) to the meeting. As organic mercury could bio-accumulate in food chains, particularly in fish, excessive consumption of these kinds of food would affect human health. In 2003, the Joint Food and Agriculture Organization/World Health Organization Expert Committee on Food Additives recommended a lower Provisional Tolerable Weekly Intake (PTWI) of 1.6 µg/kg bodyweight for MeHg to protect the developing foetus. Intakes of MeHg two times higher than the PTWI would not pose any risk of neurotoxicity in adults. However, in the case of women of childbearing age, their intake of MeHg should not exceed the PTWI. Two risk assessment studies on mercury in food had been conducted by the CFS. In response to the appeal of the World Health Organization, the current study was conducted to formulate health advice based on the levels of tHg and MeHg measured in different species of commonly consumed fish in Hong Kong and the mercury levels in fish reported overseas. Results of this study showed that most of the commonly consumed fish in Hong Kong contained relatively low levels of tHg and MeHg, while a small proportion contained higher levels. Mercury intake in an individual depended on the consumption amount and mercury level in the food. Hence, the public were advised to maintain a balanced diet and avoid overindulgence of a small range of food items. As fish contained many essential nutrients (e.g. omega-3 fatty acids and high quality proteins), moderate consumption of a variety of fish was recommended. High-risk groups (e.g. pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children) should avoid eating large predatory fish and

the types of fish which might contain high levels of mercury when selecting fish species in their diet. As for the food trade, they should obtain food supplies from reliable sources, maintain proper records of food products to enable source tracing when required and inform consumers of the types of fish sold, served and used in fish products to facilitate them to make good choices.

12. The Chairman added that the data obtained in this study was for the purpose of protecting high-risk groups (e.g. pregnant women).

13. A trade representative would like to know where the problem fish lived.

14. Dr Anna TANG responded that there was no definite answer as mercury levels in fish varied with different species, sources and sizes and mercury might change its forms.

15. A trade representative suggested that the CFS should follow the Australian practice by stressing fish was a nutritious food containing omega-3 fatty acid in press information instead of its toxicity.

16. The Chairman agreed and responded that many overseas studies showed that it was good to eat fish. However, some fish might seriously affect the health of developing foetus even only in small amount and the CFS needed to advise them on this.

17. A trade representative said that the levels of heavy metals in different fish species were different and would like to know whether the CFS would follow the practice in the United States to establish different standards for heavy metals in different fish species.

18. The Chairman replied that the Administration would consider the proposal when amendment to the regulation on heavy metal levels was made in the future.

19. A trade representative asked if the CFS could provide information about the safe sources of swordfish as they usually contained a high level of mercury.

20. Ms Y S LEUNG replied that no such information was available.

Agenda Item 5

Legislative Amendment on Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claims

21. Ms Melissa LIU said that the Food and Drugs (Composition and Labelling) (Amendment: Requirements for Nutrition Labelling and Nutrition Claim) Regulation 2008 (the Amendment Regulation) was gazetted. She briefed the meeting on the purposes for introducing nutrition labelling scheme and the core nutrients (i.e. energy and 7 nutrients including protein, carbohydrates, total fat, saturated fat, trans fat, sodium and sugars). When a claim was made for a nutrient, its amount should be declared and the claim was governed by the Amendment Regulation. When a claim was made on any types of fat, the amount of cholesterol should be declared. The nutrients should be labelled in per 100 g/mL of food, in per package or in per serving. The energy value could be expressed in kilocalorie or kilojoule, while the content of nutrients in gram (g), milligram (mg) or microgram (μg). The Amendment Regulation also governed all nutrition claims. When a food label had a representation stating, suggesting or implying that a food had particular nutritional properties, it should comply with all the requirements on nutrition claims in the Amendment Regulation. However, content claims for allergens that were required for mandatory labelling in law were not regarded as nutrition claims. Certain types of prepackaged food were exempt from the nutrition labelling requirements. The Amendment Regulation was expected to come into operation on 1 July 2010 once the Legislative Council completed the vetting procedure.

22. The Chairman thanked the trade for their valuable views on nutrition labelling. A technical meeting would be held to discuss the issue in depth by late April.

23. One trade representative stated that the trade found that nutrition labelling requirements published in the recent gazette were totally not acceptable.

24. A trade representative suggested that trade guidelines on nutrition claims (e.g. contained omega-3) and content claims for allergens (e.g. casein) should be provided and exemption be given to food offered during special events (e.g. food festival).

25. Another trade representative asked whether the amount of cholesterol was required to be declared if the amount of omega-3 was already shown on the package.

26. The Chairman replied that as there was no standard international labelling format for omega-3 fatty acid, a claim of “contained omega-3” was not allowed. The trade could provide only true and accurate information or its exact amount on the labels, for example, “x g of omega-3 in per 100 g of food/ per serving”. It was not required to

declare the cholesterol amount for this item. As regards casein, the Administration would look into that.

27. A trade representative enquired whether sodium content was required to be declared if a food contained sodium only and values of energy and other core nutrients were close to zero.

28. The Chairman responded that if the values of 1 + 7 core nutrients present in food (e.g. spices and tea leaves) were close to zero, the food could be exempt from the nutrition labelling requirements. As sodium was one of the core nutrients, if the food contains sodium, it was required to provide relevant information in accordance with the nutrition labelling requirements.

29. A trade representative asked if the wordings for nutrient function claims in the FDA guidelines could be used in Hong Kong.

30. The Chairman responded that nutrient function claims could be made if they could satisfy the criteria set in the Amendment Regulation.

31. A trade representative suggested that trade guidelines on the calculation of total surface area should be provided so that food could meet the exemption requirements.

32. The Chairman responded that the area of the food entitled for exemption should be calculated by the trade.

33. A trade representative said that there were small and big packages for the same product for advertising purpose and asked whether the small package could be exempt from the labelling requirements if it had a total surface area of less than 100 cm².

34. The Chairman responded that the trade should observe the nutrition labelling requirements including advertising.

35. The Chairman added that although there were a dozen of exempted items, nutrition information should be provided for products with a nutrition claim and exemption would not be given to those with small sales volume. Technical meetings would be held for the trade to further discuss the relevant legislation and workshops be organised for them to better understand the nutrition labelling requirements.

36. A trade representative asked how the amounts of nutrients and ingredients should

be declared.

37. The Chairman responded that the amounts of core nutrients should be declared and all the ingredients be shown on the ingredient list.

38. A trade representative asked if the nutrition content of aspartame was required to be provided.

39. The Chairman replied that aspartame was not a nutrient and the trade only had to provide relevant information in accordance with the current legislation.

40. A trade representative enquired if the nutrition reference values (NRVs) of other countries could be used.

41. The Chairman responded that NRVs could be provided voluntarily by the trade and the trade was recommended to adopt the Chinese NRVs. Provision of NRVs of other authorities was allowed.

42. A trade representative asked if the sugar content of a low sugar drink was required to be provided on ingredient list.

43. The Chairman responded that the sugar content was required to be provided on a nutrition label, while all the ingredients be shown on ingredient list.

44. A trade representative asked if nutrition claims could be expressed in percentage.

45. The Chairman replied that for nutrients that were not core nor claimed nutrients, the CFS would accept labelling of percentage NRV established by other national or international authorities. Although the NRVs could be expressed in percentage, the trade was encouraged to declare the exact amount of nutrients.

46. A trade representative enquired if vitamins were required to be shown on a nutrition label when a corresponding nutrition claim was made.

47. The Chairman responded that the nutrient content should be declared and all the requirements on nutrition claims be met for prepackaged food with a nutrition claim.

48. A trade representative would like to know if there were any contradictions between the NRVs for total carbohydrates and the values of available carbohydrates

as the calculations were different.

49. Ms Melissa LIU responded that the trade might choose to label either the value of available carbohydrates or the value of total carbohydrates based on the actual situation and needs. But if the latter was labelled, the value of dietary fibre must be listed out. The corresponding NRV for available carbohydrates or total carbohydrates could be used.

50. The Chairman added that the guidance notes would be discussed at subsequent technical meetings.

Agenda Item 6

Guidelines on the Use of Disposable Plastic Containers

51. The Chairman briefed the meeting on the above guidelines to help the trade to make suitable choices.

Agenda Item 7

Any Other Business

52. There being no other business. The meeting was adjourned at 4:30 pm.