



Sampling Plans for Suspect Food Lots

Introduction

In Hong Kong where over 90% of the food is imported, food surveillance is an important risk management strategy adopted by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) to ensure food safety.

What is a suspect food lot?

Under the Food Surveillance Programme, a range of food items are sampled at import, wholesale and retail levels to test for microbiological and chemical hazards. Results of individual samples taken under the surveillance programme shall be interpreted according to the existing legislative standards in Hong Kong SAR. When such standards are not available in the Hong Kong Legislation, internationally accepted standards have been recommended as action levels. When the test results of a sample collected from a food lot during surveillance are unsatisfactory or when a food is considered possibly contaminated or adulterated based on information/intelligence gained from reliable sources, the food lot in question is regarded as a 'suspect food lot'.

Sampling plans

The sampling plans were designed to ensure that fair and internationally comparable sampling plans are used to collect samples for testing to decide whether a food lot complies with relevant food safety standards and is fit or unfit for human consumption.

The plans were endorsed by the Expert Committee on Food Safety of the Centre for Food Safety. According to food commodities and hazards involved, each sampling plan stipulates the number of samples to be randomly collected from a suspect food lot for testing; the plans also guide how to divide large food lots to smaller sublots for sampling.



Principles adopted in designing the sampling plans

The sampling plans have been adopted after making reference to the following international and national food authorities.

- (a) Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) guidelines or code of practice on sampling.
- (b) When Codex documents are not available or not applicable to sampling of the considered products, reference has been made to regulations or food standard codes adopted by recognized national/regional food safety authorities such as the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China and European Union.

When would the sampling plans be used?

Once a food lot is regarded as a 'suspect lot' the food trader will be advised accordingly, and requested to stop sale and conduct recall of the affected food lot if it is considered unfit for human consumption. Suspect food lots at import and in warehouses will be subjected to follow-up sampling, if required, using the sampling plans.

Under Public Health and Municipal Services (Amendment) Ordinance (2009) (the Ordinance), published in Gazette in May 2009, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene is empowered to make orders to prohibit import and supply of any food to prevent or reduce a possibility of danger to public health or to mitigate the adverse consequence of a danger to public health. If an order is issued under the Ordinance, samples will be taken from the suspect lot for testing according to the sampling plans, if necessary.