

**Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene**

**Minutes of the Forty-seventh Meeting  
held at 2:30 p.m. on Wednesday, 9<sup>th</sup> December 2009  
at Room 2005, 20/F, Murray Building, Garden Road, Central**

Mr. FONG Wo, Felix, JP	(Chairman)
Professor CHAN Kay-sheung, Paul	
Professor CHAN Yan-keung, Thomas	
Ms. CHEUK Fung-ting	
Mr. Allen HO	
Dr. HO Pak-leung	
Mr. LAU Yiu-fai, Ronald	
Mr. LEE Chi-keung, Alan	
Dr. LEONG FUNG Ling-yee, Lilian, BBS, JP	
Ms. LI Hiu-lee, Winnie	
Dr. LO Chi-kin, JP	
Professor LO Yuk-lam	
Mrs. Elizabeth MOK	
Professor WONG Po-choi, MH	
Professor WU Shiu-sun, Rudolf	
Dr. YUE Kwok-to	
Mrs. Stella HUNG, JP	Permanent Secretary for Food and Health (Food)
Mr. CHEUK Wing-hing, JP	Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene
Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai	Deputy Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
Dr. LEUNG Ting-hung, JP	Head, Surveillance and Epidemiology Branch, Department of Health

**Absent with Apologies**

Mr. Alan WONG, JP	Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation
-------------------	--

**In Attendance**

**Food and Health Bureau**

Ms. Kitty CHOI, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)1
--------------------	---

Mr. Philip CHAN, JP	Deputy Secretary for Food and Health (Food)2
Ms. Angelina CHEUNG	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food)1
Mr. Francis HO	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food)2
Mr. Owin FUNG	Principal Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food)3
Ms. Rebecca KU	Assistant Secretary for Food and Health (Food) Special Duties 1

### **Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department**

Ms Wendy KO	Assistant Director (Agriculture) (Atg.)
-------------	---

### **Food and Environmental Hygiene Department**

Dr. LEE Siu-yuen	Assistant Director (Food Surveillance and Control)
------------------	--

### **Opening Remarks**

1. The Chairman welcomed Members to the meeting, in particular Professor WONG Po-choi, who attended the meeting for the first time.

### **Agenda Item 1 : Confirmation of the Minutes of the Last Meeting**

2. Members confirmed the minutes of the last meeting without amendments.

### **Agenda Item 2 : Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Last Meeting**

3. There were no matters arising from the minutes of last meeting.

### **Agenda Item 3 : Promotion of Local Agricultural and Fishery Products (ACFEH Paper 11/2009)**

4. Ms. Wendy KO introduced the paper.
5. A member recommended that new technologies should be adopted to produce safer and better quality local produces. Another member supported

that the future development of the local agricultural industry should be geared towards using high technology. He considered that some research institutes such as the Innovation Technology Centre should be commissioned with funding to undergo research and development projects with a view to improving the methods of cultivation and the production of local produce. Ms. Wendy KO replied that Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had sent staff overseas to learn advanced technology and invited overseas experts to come to Hong Kong to provide technical support and training to AFCD staff and local farmers. She welcomed the local institutions to join hands to study and promote new technologies and skills to improve the quality and quantity of the local agricultural produces.

6. In response to a member's enquiry about the factors hampering the development of the local agricultural industry and the direction of the local agriculture development in future, Ms. Wendy KO said that the AFCD had been promoting the adoption of good agricultural practice and environmental-friendly production methods to farmers, introducing more high-value crops and providing support to organic farming. Ms KO further pointed out that notwithstanding the assistance provided by AFCD, the development of the industry was still adversely affected by the scarcity of farm land and shortage of labour. To address the problems, AFCD had introduced the Agricultural Land Rehabilitation Scheme to increase the supply of farm land and also obtained the agreement of Labour Department to relax the requirement for importation of labour working in farms, allowing the proportion of one local worker to one imported worker.

7. In reply to a member, Ms. Wendy KO informed that since there was no faculty in agriculture in the local universities, local research and development in agriculture technologies was limited. To address the problem, AFCD had been providing the necessary technical and infrastructural support with a view to assisting the agricultural sector in the provision of quality and safe produce and enhancement of their productivity.

8. As regards the shortage of farm land in Hong Kong, a member suggested that the Government and farmers should make reference to Singapore's model of roof farming which made good use of the roof areas for agricultural purpose. Another member opined that there were still some farm land in the northern part of the New Territories available for agricultural use but the main problem was labour shortage. Ms. Wendy KO pointed out that the Agricultural Land Rehabilitation Scheme could help to provide more farm land for agricultural purpose. The department would also continue the discussion with Labour Department on the importation of labour.

9. In response to a member's question as to whether AFCD would

encourage local farmers to produce genetically modified crops, Ms. Wendy KO replied that the major focus on recommending a suitable crop to farmers depended very much on the crop's adaptability to the local environment and its acceptability in the market. At present, no genetically modified crops were allowed to grow in farms engaged in organic farming.

10. In response to a member's enquiry on whether there was any government incentive offered to farmers to participate in the Accredited Farm Scheme, the Accredited Fish Farm Scheme or organic farming, Ms. Wendy KO responded that AFCD was assisting the agricultural and fishery sectors by providing technical and infrastructural support, identifying new species, promoting the marketing of products, etc. Although no direct subsidy would be provided, low-interest loans were provided to farmers if required.

11. A member enquired whether the organic certification service for the local organic food produce was internationally recognized. Ms. Wendy KO pointed out that the scheme on organic certification run by Hong Kong Organic Resource Centre (HKORC) was a localized project which was set up to provide independent certification service in Hong Kong. Internationally, different countries and organizations set up different guidelines that catered for their local situations. Some imported organic food might even request for the certification service from HKORC though they had already possessed an overseas organic certification.

12. A member suggested that AFCD should launch some education activities on farming to the teacher-parent associations at different districts. He urged AFCD to identify some practicable means to involve young people to help out in the local farms so as to enhance their interest in agriculture and farming. He further said that by means of developing new technologies, farms could be operated in a more productive manner. Ms. Wendy KO indicated that AFCD had constantly organized guided visits for students at the Tai Lung Experimental Farm in order to introduce farming technologies and knowledge to them. AFCD also provided various promotion activities to young people such as the inter-school farming competition to develop their interest in the agricultural sector. In addition, there was close collaboration between AFCD and teachers who supervised the farming programme in schools.

13. Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai added that AFCD was endeavored to promote sustainable development in the agriculture and fishery sectors in Hong Kong by providing the necessary technical and infrastructural support. Presently, AFCD aimed to help the stakeholders to produce quality and safe products, with higher value and more profits. He also pointed out that AFCD had been collaborating with local universities to explore useful applied

technologies that could be adopted in the local farming industry. He stressed that AFCD would welcome and support any form of scientific research that could benefit the development of the agriculture and fishery sectors in the long run.

14. In response to a member's enquiry on the environmental pollution problem associated with local farming, Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai replied that environmental pollution was not a significant problem as most of the local farms were located in the New Territories where population was relatively low.

15. A member enquired about the product competitiveness of the local farm produce, including organic products. He also suggested that special assistance should be offered to the local farmers as their income was relatively lower than people engaged in other trades. Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai concurred that it was of paramount importance to assist farmers to enhance their competitiveness. He reiterated that AFCD had carried out different supportive programmes for crop and fish farmers with a view to helping them to improve profit margin and productivity.

16. A member said that AFCD should provide more training to both existing and potential farmers. Education should be made to the general public to help them to recognise the locally produced agricultural and fishery produces. Dr. LEUNG Siu-fai reassured the meeting that AFCD would continue to provide technical support to farmers. On the promotion programme, in addition to exhibitions, seminars and farm demonstration, AFCD had been collaborating closely with its partner organizations including HKORC in implementing various marketing programmes/events to allow the public to learn more about the local agricultural and fishery products.

17. In response to a member's question about the operation scale of the local farms, Ms. Wendy KO said that most of the local farms were relatively small when compared to those overseas. She further pointed out that since eco-tourism had been becoming more and more popular in Hong Kong, some larger farms should have the potential to develop along this direction.

18. A member suggested that the promotion strategies should be diversified and the government should provide more assistance to farmers to support sustainable development in the agricultural and fishery industries.

19. The Chairman concluded that there had been much discussion about the promotion of local agricultural and fishery produces. He added that new business model should be adopted in order to produce quality products. He

also supported that different promotion strategies should be adopted to rejuvenate the agricultural and fishery sectors. Emphasis should be placed on developing high-value produces which would in return help the industries to survive and strive for sustainable development.

**Agenda Item 4 : New Administrative Measures for Vegetables Imported from the Mainland (ACFEH Paper 12/2009)**

20. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen briefed members on a new set of measures implemented by the Mainland authorities titled “Administrative Measures on Inspection, Quarantine and Supervision for Vegetables Supplied to Hong Kong and Macau” (the new Measures).

21. In response to a member’s question, Dr. LEE Siu-yuen explained that many tests for pesticide residues involved rapid tests conducted at Man Kam To Food Control Office. The rapid test targeted at methamidophos and isocarbophos, and results were usually available in about half an hour. Currently, as Hong Kong did not have specific legislative control on pesticide residues in vegetables; the action level was based on results of risk assessment. More tests for methamidophos and isocarbophos were done because both pesticides were highly poisonous and were commonly used by vegetable farmers.

22. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen, in reply to a member, said that about 260-280 vehicles imported vegetable through the Man Kam To Control Point on a daily basis. About one third of the vehicles would be checked and vegetable samples would be taken for testing. Dr. Lee further said that the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) had taken around 800 vegetable samples to test for pesticide residues in November 2009. None was found to be unsatisfactory. In the past few years, there were only a handful of samples found to be unsatisfactory each year. As regards the reason why less samples were taken in the first half of November 2009, Dr. LEE Siu-yuen explained that after the implementation of the new Measures on 1 November, there was wide media coverage on smuggling of vegetables from unauthorised sources into Hong Kong. In this connection, intensive search was conducted on some selected consignments. The search was more time consuming and, as a result, fewer samples could be taken for test of pesticide residues for that month.

23. A member asked if the vegetable vehicles were still required to submit a record on the use of pesticides when crossing the border under the new

Measures. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen said that the responsibility to control and record the use of pesticides rested with vegetable farms under the new arrangement. The farms supplying vegetables were now required to issue a raw material processing certificate for every vegetable consignment to processing establishments. The latter had to check the document, keep record, and conduct testing for pesticide residues. Upon satisfactory test results, the processing establishments could apply to local authorities for export to Hong Kong. The mechanism was devised with an aim to tightening control at source.

24. A member asserted that the pesticide record was helpful in revealing the history of pesticides use in farms. Three members also shared similar views. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen responded that the concept of the pesticide record was incorporated into the new Measures in which farms were required to produce the processing certificate to the processing establishments and to keep record on the pesticides used. Both Mainland authorities and CFS would conduct visits to inspect the records.

25. In response to a member's enquiry on the limited measuring parameters of the rapid test, Dr. LEUNG Ting-hung informed the meeting that the rapid test was a screening test which aimed to identify the phosphate and chlorine related pesticides for further testing. He pointed out that testing was not the only answer to control the quality of the imported vegetables. The additional requirements in the new Measures would drive for better management of export farms and quality of the imported vegetables.

26. A member expressed gratitude to CFS for their work to safeguard food safety. He said that the Administration should maintain close communication with the Mainland authorities to ensure that all procedures in the new Measures were carried out in full and candidly. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen informed that under the new Measures, only large scale farms and processing establishments were eligible to be registered to supply vegetable to Hong Kong. They were required to implement a record system and would be disqualified upon violation of relevant requirements. She further pointed out that the new Measures had strengthened the supervision and control at source. Under the new Measures, the farms or other related establishments had to shoulder more responsibilities to ensure that their products were safe for human consumption. The punishment should be heavy enough to discourage the farmers to commit any infringement.

27. A member suggested to use third party audit to control the safety of imported vegetable. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen replied that under the new Measures, the processing plant was required to test every consignment to ensure the

safety of vegetables for export to Hong Kong. The Mainland authorities and CFS would also take random samples at different levels for testing. These controls were considered appropriate to ensure the safety of imported vegetable. In response to a member's remark on the limitation of the rapid test, Dr. LEE pointed out that better test kits would be available in the near future.

28. In response to a member, Dr. LEE Siu-yuen explained that the new Measures were only an administrative arrangement which was applicable to the importation of vegetable from Mainland. There was no requirement of declaration of the use of pesticide on vegetable imported from other places.

29. The Chairman acknowledged that it was not an easy task to ensure the quality of the imported vegetable and to promote local agricultural products which had been discussed earlier in the meeting. He extended his appreciation to the work done by both FEHD and AFCD.

#### **Agenda Item 5 : Summary of Recent Food Surveillance (ACFEH Paper 13/2009)**

30. Dr. LEE Siu-yuen introduced the paper.

31. In response to members' enquiry on whether secondary school students should be given opportunities to conduct food tests, Dr. LEE Siu-yuen pointed out that as most of the tests were carried out by qualified technicians and laboratories with sophisticated apparatus, there were practical difficulties for students to participate in the food test programme.

#### **Agenda Item 6 : Any Other Business**

32. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m. The Secretariat would inform members of the date of the next meeting in due course.

**Secretariat  
Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene  
Food and Health Bureau  
March 2010**