

ACFEH Information Paper 7

Advisory Council on Food and Environmental Hygiene

Pesticide Residues in Fresh Vegetables

Purpose

This paper briefs members on the regulatory mechanism for pesticide residues in fresh vegetables.

Background

2. At present, over 90% of fresh vegetables supplied to Hong Kong comes from the Mainland whilst local produce only accounts for 4% . The Administration takes samples for tests at import control points as well as wholesale and retail markets.

3. For imported vegetables, the State General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (ASQIQ) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) have agreed to a set of *Administrative Measures on the Inspection and Quarantine for Vegetable Supply to Hong Kong and Macao* (the Administrative Measures) which stipulates that all Mainland vegetables supplied to Hong Kong must come from registered farms. At present, there are over 100 registered Mainland farms supplying vegetables to Hong Kong. Under the Administrative Measures, the Mainland authorities regularly inspect the registered farms that supply vegetables to Hong Kong to check the use of pesticides and take samples to test for pesticide residues. Therefore, most of the vegetables in Hong Kong market are already strictly regulated with regard to their places of production/origin, use of pesticide, etc.

4. Moreover, both parties have agreed that all Mainland vegetables must be imported through Man Kam To into Hong Kong to facilitate the FEHD to take samples to test for pesticide residues and other harmful substances. Of the 20 000 samples of imported vegetables taken by FEHD for testing in 2005, only 10 (or 0.05%) samples failed to comply with our requirements. Apart from using quick tests (which requires about 30 minutes) to screen for pesticide residues, the FEHD also takes samples to test for other prohibited pesticides, including DDT and Lindane (which requires three to four days).

5. For local production, about half of the locally produced vegetables are supplied to the local markets through Vegetable Marketing Organisation (VMO) and all vegetables marketed by VMO are sampled for testing of pesticide residues. In fact, most farmers that produce in commercial volume on a regular basis have already joined the Accredited Farm Scheme of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and market their produce through VMO. Under the Scheme, these farms are required to adopt good horticultural practice and integrated pest management measures. Their vegetable production is also monitored by VMO for pesticide residues before distribution to retail outlets.

6. The methods, scope and timing of tests adopted by VMO are similar to those of the FEHD and include both quick test and screening for prohibited pesticides. Over the past six months, VMO has tested 8 900 samples of local vegetables and has not found any unregistered pesticide. Only six samples were found to have pesticide residues exceeding permitted levels.

7. Like other countries around the world, the inspection and quarantine authorities of Hong Kong take samples to test for pesticide residues for highly perishable farm produce, including vegetables. These samples are taken at various levels. At the point of import, FEHD strives to take samples from vegetables placed at various points of transport vehicles. At the wholesale and retail markets, the authorities also take samples from a variety of vegetables, including leafy vegetables, pulses and rhizomes, for tests. For the farms, there is legislation that regulates the possession or use of prohibited pesticides (see paragraph 8 below). But for permitted pesticides, the only feasible and effective monitoring method is to take samples of farm produce at the wholesale and retail level to test for pesticide residues since the amount of residues vary with time and the permitted residue levels also vary for different vegetables.

Regulating the use of pesticides

8. The use of pesticide in Hong Kong is regulated by *Pesticide Ordinance* (Cap. 133) and its subsidiary legislation. Under the law, no person shall import, manufacture, sell or supply any pesticide unless he has a licence issued by the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation

9. Of the six pesticides allegedly identified by a NGO in its screening tests recently, four of them, namely DDT, Lindane, hexachlorocyclohexane and methamidophos, have not been registered in Hong Kong and, therefore, are unavailable in the local market. AFCD staff also routinely inspect pesticide retail outlets to ensure compliance with the Ordinance. Anyone who breaches the provision is liable to one-year imprisonment and \$50,000 fine.

On reports of illegal pesticides and excessive pesticide residues in vegetables

10. In view of the recently released findings from a NGO on illegal pesticides and excessive pesticide residues in vegetables on sale in local supermarkets, we have contacted the organization concerned to seek further information on their testing standards and methods. We have also met with the management of the supermarkets concerned to urge them to improve the system for tracking and tracing the source of their vegetables and other farm produce to safeguard the safety of consumers. To address public concern, the Administration will explore the feasibility of instituting a voluntary registration system for farmers engaged in commercial production of food produce and will consult the public in due course.

ADVICE SOUGHT

11. Members are requested to note the content of this paper.

**Health, Welfare and Food Bureau
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