

Import of poultry meat and products from areas in Hungary and Italy suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (October 3) that in view of a notification from the Ministry of Agriculture of Hungary and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) about outbreaks of highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza in Békés County in Hungary and Metropolitan City of Venice in Veneto Region in Italy respectively, the CFS has instructed the trade to suspend the import of poultry meat and products (including poultry eggs) from the above-mentioned areas with immediate effect to protect public health in Hong Kong.

A CFS spokesman said that Hong Kong has currently established a protocol with Hungary for the import of poultry meat but not for poultry eggs. According to the Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong imported about 40 tonnes of frozen poultry meat from Hungary, and about 40 tonnes frozen poultry meat and about 10 000 poultry eggs from Italy in the first six months of this year.

"The CFS has contacted the Hungarian and Italian authorities over the issues and will closely monitor information issued by the WOAH and the relevant authorities on the avian influenza outbreaks. Appropriate action will be taken in response to the development of the situation," the spokesman said.

Provisional statistics of retail sales for August 2024

The Census and Statistics Department (C&SD) released the latest figures on retail sales today (October 3).

The value of total retail sales in August 2024, provisionally estimated at \$29.2 billion, decreased by 10.1% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of the value of total retail sales in July 2024 decreased by 11.7% compared with a year earlier. For the first 8 months of 2024 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of total retail sales decreased by 7.7% compared with the same period in 2023.

Of the total retail sales value in August 2024, online sales accounted for 8.0%. The value of online retail sales in that month, provisionally

estimated at \$2.3 billion, decreased by 0.5% compared with the same month in 2023. The revised estimate of online retail sales in July 2024 increased by 0.8% compared with a year earlier. For the first 8 months of 2024 taken together, it was provisionally estimated that the value of online retail sales decreased by 0.2% compared with the same period in 2023.

After netting out the effect of price changes over the same period, the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales in August 2024 decreased by 11.8% compared with a year earlier. The revised estimate of the volume of total retail sales in July 2024 decreased by 13.2% compared with a year earlier. For the first 8 months of 2024 taken together, the provisional estimate of the total retail sales decreased by 9.3% in volume compared with the same period in 2023.

Analysed by broad type of retail outlet in descending order of the provisional estimate of the value of sales and comparing August 2024 with August 2023, the value of sales of commodities in supermarkets decreased by 3.6%. This was followed by sales of jewellery, watches and clocks, and valuable gifts (-24.0% in value); other consumer goods not elsewhere classified (-5.0%); wearing apparel (-13.4%); electrical goods and other consumer durable goods not elsewhere classified (-2.8%); commodities in department stores (-15.8%); motor vehicles and parts (-35.1%); fuels (-9.9%); footwear, allied products and other clothing accessories (-6.3%); furniture and fixtures (-21.3%); Chinese drugs and herbs (-11.9%); and optical shops (-17.0%).

On the other hand, the value of sales of food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco increased by 0.2% in August 2024 over a year earlier. This was followed by sales of medicines and cosmetics (+4.5% in value); and books, newspapers, stationery and gifts (+3.0%).

Based on the seasonally adjusted series, the provisional estimate of the value of total retail sales decreased by 2.0% in the three months ending August 2024 compared with the preceding three-month period, while the provisional estimate of the volume of total retail sales decreased by 2.8%.

Commentary

A government spokesman said that the value of total retail sales recorded a year-on-year decline in August amid the continued impact of the change in consumption patterns, the relatively strong Hong Kong dollar, and increased outbound travels by residents during the summer holidays, among other factors.

Looking ahead, the spokesman said that the retail sector will still face challenges in the near term. Nonetheless, the Central Government's various measures benefitting Hong Kong, as well as the Special Administrative Region Government's various initiatives to boost market sentiment and support the development of the sector, would benefit retail businesses. Continued economic growth, rising employment earnings, and an easing Hong Kong dollar exchange rate alongside the US interest rate cut, would also provide support to the retail sector.

The spokesman added that the Hong Kong Trade Development Council has organised the inaugural Hong Kong Shopping Festival in August to help Hong Kong enterprises increase brand awareness and expand into Mainland e-commerce business. The Government will continue to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including those in the retail sector, through various measures, including the SME Export Marketing Fund and E-commerce Easy, so as to assist enterprises in expanding their market, as well as encourage enterprises to upgrade and transform their operations and develop e-commerce businesses, thereby promoting more diversified development and new quality productive forces.

Further information

Table 1 presents the revised figures on value index and value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for July 2024 as well as the provisional figures for August 2024. The provisional figures on the value of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet as well as the corresponding year-on-year changes for the first 8 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 2 presents the revised figures on value of online retail sales for July 2024 as well as the provisional figures for August 2024. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first 8 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 3 presents the revised figures on volume index of retail sales for all retail outlets and by broad type of retail outlet for July 2024 as well as the provisional figures for August 2024. The provisional figures on year-on-year changes for the first 8 months of 2024 taken together are also shown.

Table 4 shows the movements of the value and volume of total retail sales in terms of the year-on-year rate of change for a month compared with the same month in the preceding year based on the original series, and in terms of the rate of change for a three-month period compared with the preceding three-month period based on the seasonally adjusted series.

The classification of retail establishments follows the Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification (HSIC) Version 2.0, which is used in various economic surveys for classifying economic units into different industry classes.

These retail sales statistics measure the sales receipts in respect of goods sold by local retail establishments and are primarily intended for gauging the short-term business performance of the local retail sector. Data on retail sales are collected from local retail establishments through the Monthly Survey of Retail Sales (MRS). Local retail establishments with and without physical shops are covered in MRS and their sales, both through conventional shops and online channels, are included in the retail sales statistics.

The retail sales statistics cover consumer spending on goods but not on services (such as those on housing, catering, medical care and health

services, transport and communication, financial services, education and entertainment) which account for over 50% of the overall consumer spending. Moreover, they include spending on goods in Hong Kong by visitors but exclude spending outside Hong Kong by Hong Kong residents. Hence they should not be regarded as indicators for measuring overall consumer spending.

Users interested in the trend of overall consumer spending should refer to the data series of private consumption expenditure (PCE), which is a major component of the Gross Domestic Product published at quarterly intervals. Compiled from a wide range of data sources, PCE covers consumer spending on both goods (including goods purchased from all channels) and services by Hong Kong residents whether locally or abroad. Please refer to the C&SD publication "Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure Component" for more details.

More detailed statistics are given in the "Report on Monthly Survey of Retail Sales". Users can browse and download this publication at the website of the C&SD (www.censtatd.gov.hk/en/EIndexbySubject.html?pcode=B1080003&scode=530).

Users who have enquiries about the survey results may contact the Distribution Services Statistics Section of the C&SD (Tel: 3903 7400; email: mrs@censtatd.gov.hk).

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government

does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on October 2 to noon today (October 3), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 178 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website (www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24, 2023, to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 89 283 samples of food imported from Japan (including 57 023 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 20 206 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

Phishing instant messages related to Fubon Bank (Hong Kong) Limited

The following is issued on behalf of the Hong Kong Monetary Authority:

The Hong Kong Monetary Authority (HKMA) wishes to alert members of the public to a press release issued by Fubon Bank (Hong Kong) Limited relating to phishing instant messages, which have been reported to the HKMA. A hyperlink to the press release is available on the [HKMA website](#).

The HKMA wishes to remind the public that banks will not send SMS or emails with embedded hyperlinks which direct them to the banks' websites to carry out transactions. They will not ask customers for sensitive personal information, such as login passwords or one-time password, by phone, email or SMS (including via embedded hyperlinks).

Anyone who has provided his or her personal information, or who has

conducted any financial transactions, through or in response to the instant messages concerned, should contact the bank using the contact information provided in the press release, and report the matter to the Police by contacting the Crime Wing Information Centre of the Hong Kong Police Force at 2860 5012.

CFS follows up on seaweed product imported from Japan suspected of breaching Food Safety Order

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department announced today (October 3) that a seaweed product from a regulated Japanese prefecture was suspected to be in breach of the relevant Food Safety Order when the CFS inspected food imported from Japan. The product concerned has been marked and sealed by the CFS and has not entered the market. The CFS is following up on the case.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "During an inspection of the consignment of food concerned imported from Japan, the CFS found 30 packs of dried seaweed product manufactured in Ibaraki Prefecture after the Order was issued. The importer concerned is thus suspected of breaching the relevant Order."

According to the Order, all aquatic products originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, are prohibited from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong if they are harvested, manufactured, processed or packed on or after August 24, 2023, including all live, chilled, frozen, dried or otherwise preserved aquatic products, sea salt, and unprocessed or processed seaweed.

The CFS will continue to follow up on the incident and take appropriate action, including informing the Japanese authorities concerned of the incident. Prosecution will be instituted against the importer concerned should there be sufficient evidence. The investigation is ongoing.