

Agriculture and Fisheries

BLUEPRINT FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

In order to promote the upgrading and transformation, modernisation and sustainable development of the industry, the Environment and Ecology Bureau and the AFCD work hand in hand with the agriculture and fisheries industries to formulate the “Blueprint for the Sustainable Development of Agriculture and Fisheries” which was published in December 2023. An array of measures covering finance, infrastructure, land and technical support will be rolled out in phases to raise the quantity, quality and value of local produces.

AGRICULTURE

Geographically, Hong Kong consists largely of steep hillside. Only about 7 square kilometres of land are actively farmed. Farms are generally small in size and they produce mainly leafy vegetables, pigs or poultry.

Consumption: The daily fresh food consumption by Hong Kong’s population of more than seven million in 2023 included 715 tonnes of rice, 2 288 tonnes of vegetables, 3 106 heads of pigs, 30 heads of cattle and 22 tonnes of poultry. Many of the above were imported, but Hong Kong’s primary producers helped satisfy some of the demand.

Local Production: The gross value of local agricultural production totalled \$1,027 million in 2023. Two per cent of the vegetables Hong Kong people consumed, together with 100 per cent of the live poultry and 12 per cent of the live pigs, came from local farms. Local production is geared to complement rather than compete with other major market suppliers. Production efforts are aimed mainly at high-value fresh food.

Principal Crops: The value of crop production amounted to \$391 million in 2023. Vegetable and flower production account for about 96 per cent of the total value, being \$374 million.

Vegetable crops grown all year round include Chinese white cabbage, flowering Chinese cabbage, lettuce, Chinese kale, radish, leaf mustard, spring onion and chive. Spinach, watercress and matrimony vine are produced in the cooler months. Yard-long bean, water spinach, Chinese spinach, cucumber and several species of Chinese gourd are produced in summer. A wide range of temperate vegetables including tomato, sweet pepper, cauliflower, carrot and celery is grown in winter.

Flower cultivation has gained importance in recent years. Gladiolus, lily, chrysanthemum and orchid are grown in winter; and ginger lily and lotus flower in summer. Peach blossom is grown especially for the Lunar New Year.

A wide range of fruit is grown on the lower hill slopes, the main types being lychee, longan, wampi, local lemon, orange, tangerine, guava, papaya and banana.

Animal Husbandry: There were 43 local pig farms and 29 local poultry farms as of 2023. In 2023, local pig production was valued at \$353 million and local poultry production including eggs was valued at \$283 million.

To reduce the public health and environmental pollution problems associated with livestock keeping, the government introduced a Voluntary Surrender Scheme for Poultry and Pig Farms in 2005 and 2006 respectively as well as a Buyout Scheme for Poultry Farms in 2008. These schemes encourage livestock keepers to surrender their Livestock Keeping Licence (LKL) and cease their farm operation permanently in return for exgratia payment. Nevertheless, the government continues to formulate codes of practice for those livestock farmers who choose to continue operation, and to provide technical and financial assistance to help them meet relevant biosecurity and hygiene standards.

Hong Kong has two licensed dairy farms located in Sha Tau Kok and Tai Po, New Territories.

Agricultural Development: The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and its closely related marketing organisations, namely Vegetable Marketing Organization, also provide infrastructural support and technical services to the various primary industries.

The department’s crop specialists undertake studies into practical problems in pest control, crop husbandry and soil management. They also investigate specific production technologies to enhance the efficiency and economic benefits of the industry. This work is carried out in an experimental station in Sheung Shui and results are made available to farmers by the department’s advisory services.

Agricultural advisory activities are aimed at assisting farmers to improve productivity through the introduction of new and improved produce varieties and production techniques, backed up by adequate credit facilities and efficient and orderly marketing services.

Promotion of smart greenhouse, hydroponics and organic production techniques to local farms are currently being undertaken.

Examples of well-received new produce varieties include supersweet corn, milky pak choy, round eggplant, mini watermelon, strawberry and white bitter cucumber.

Loans issued to farmers for farm production and development purposes in 2023 amounted to \$6.08 million. As at December 31, 2023, the total accumulated deposit under three separate loan funds administered by the AFCD amounted to over \$51.81 million.

Agricultural development also includes improvement of basic infrastructure, rehabilitation of fallow land and studies in farm management problems. Infrastructural work concentrates on the maintenance and improvement of communal irrigation and drainage facilities.

An Accredited Farm Scheme for protecting the environment and consumers against residues of agricultural pesticides was introduced in 1994. Accredited farms are strictly monitored and supervised on uses of pesticides and produce is further checked for pesticide residues before they are sold at accredited retail outlets. As at the end of 2023, a total of 305 farms in Hong Kong and the mainland of China were accredited, supplying about 18 tonnes of accredited produce daily.

The AFCD has been providing technical support to local organic farmers since December 2000. The AFCD introduces the organic production standards and requirements to farmers, and helps farmers resolve the problems on integrated pest management, horticultural practices and soil management. As at the end of 2023, a total of 359 farms in Hong Kong joined the service, supplying about 6 tonnes of organic vegetables daily.

The AFCD also launched the Local Vegetable Farms Voluntary Registration Scheme in July 2006. As at December 31, 2023, a total of 1 893 vegetable farms had been registered. The department provides technical assistance and agricultural services to registered farmers to enhance their awareness of safe production, good farming techniques and produce quality.

The Government will continue to implement the New Agriculture Policy (NAP) to promote the modernisation and sustainable development of local agriculture. A \$500 million Sustainable Agricultural Development Fund was launched in December 2016, to enhance the overall competitiveness of the agricultural industry. To further support the development of the industry in terms of application of advanced technology and intensification of production, and to help them seize the opportunities arising from the Greater Bay Area (GBA) development, the Government further injected \$500 million to the Fund and appropriately expanded its coverage in 2022 to increase resources to support the sustainable development of the industry. Other major measures under the NAP include establishing the Agricultural Park; exploring the feasibility of designating agricultural priority areas; providing better support and assistance to help farmers move up the value chain; enhancing food safety and marketing as well as brand-building of local farm produce; facilitating development of hydroponics and agro-technology; and developing leisure and educational activities related to agriculture. The supportive measures under the NAP will be implemented by the Government progressively in stages.

To comply with environmental protection legislation, all livestock farms are required to be licensed and must install appropriate livestock waste treatment systems.

Sporadic outbreaks of diseases in livestock, such as foot-and-mouth disease and porcine reproductive and respiratory syndrome, are kept under control by good biosecurity and vaccination. In response to the threat of African Swine Fever (ASF) in the Asian continent since 2018, the AFCD has implemented a number of measures to mitigate the ASF transmission risk, such as banning swill feeding in local pig farms, enhancing cleansing and disinfection for local pig conveying vehicles in slaughterhouses, stepping up routine local pig farm inspection and collecting samples as necessary to check for potential ASF infection. Extensive avian influenza prevention and control measures are also in

place for local poultry farms to safeguard animal and public health. The AFCD's veterinary services are equipped not only to investigate and combat major livestock diseases, but also to contain the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) in livestock in Hong Kong. With the increasing threat of AMR globally, the Government launched the Hong Kong Strategy and Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (2023 – 2027) (Action Plan) in November 2022. This is the second Action Plan on AMR that maps out response strategies towards AMR threat for the next five years. The Action Plan details the relevant measures to be implemented by the AFCD in the local livestock production sector. The relevant measures are aimed at developing appropriate sustainable systems for the surveillance of antimicrobial usage (AMU) and AMR at the local livestock farm level. The AFCD will also facilitate and support the development of projects for the provision of veterinary services to local livestock farms while enhancing the knowledge, attitude and practice of relevant stakeholders towards the problem of AMR through educational and publicity activities. It is anticipated that AMR will be closely monitored and AMU will be reduced in the local livestock production sector so as to alleviate the development of AMR.

FISHERIES

Capture and aquaculture fisheries make an important contribution to Hong Kong by maintaining a steady supply of fresh fish to local consumers. The total capture fisheries and marine fish culture production is equivalent to about 17 per cent of seafood consumed in Hong Kong, while pond fish farmers produce about two per cent of the freshwater fish eaten.

Capture Fisheries: Hong Kong's fishing fleet comprises about 5 090 vessels, almost all of which are mechanised. About 80 per cent of the local fishing vessels are sampans using multiple fishing gears and other smaller non-trawler vessels (such as gill netters, long liners, purse seiners, etc.) which operate mainly in the coastal waters around Hong Kong. The remaining 20 per cent of the vessels are trawlers and other larger non-trawlers generally operating in the adjacent waters of the South China Sea. In 2023, the estimated production was about 86 600 tonnes, valued at \$2.35 billion. Major species of fish catch include hairtail, threadfin bream, squid, mullet and sardine.

Aquaculture Fisheries: Fish ponds in use total 1 129 hectares and are located mainly in the north-western New Territories. The majority of fish farms are engaged in carp polyculture (bighead carp, silver carp, common carp and grass carp) in combination with tilapia or grey mullet. Other cultured species include jade perch, seabreams and spotted scat. Total fish pond production in 2023 amounted to 1 052 tonnes, valued at \$28 million.

910 licensees are engaged in marine fish culture in the 28 fish culture zones designated under the Marine Fish Culture Ordinance. Common species cultured include green grouper, hybrid grouper, Russell's snapper, mangrove snapper, cobia and pompano. Total marine fish culture production in 2023 amounted to 499 tonnes, valued at \$54 million.

Development and Services: To promote sustainable development of the fishing industry and conserve fisheries resources in Hong Kong waters, the AFCD pursues a number of fisheries conservation and management measures. The ban on trawling in Hong Kong waters came into effect on December 31, 2012 to restore the seabed and the depleted fisheries resources. The department has strengthened enforcement against trawling activities and other destructive fishing practices. To complement the trawl ban and bring local fisheries industry back to a sustainable path, the Government implemented other fisheries management measures including setting up a registration system for local fishing vessels; limiting new entrants to control the number of fishing vessels and fishing effort; and prohibiting fishing activities of non-local fishing vessels. To combat its adverse impact on the local fisheries resources, the AFCD regulated the use of snake cages for fishing in 2022 as well. The department is also preparing for the designation of fisheries protection area to protect important fish spawning and nursery grounds.

The AFCD has deployed more than 600 units of artificial reefs with a total volume of about 180 000 cubic metres in Hong Kong waters, with a view to enhancing the fisheries resources. Results of underwater monitoring survey revealed that the deployed artificial reefs supported a higher diversity and abundance of fish species as compared with the nearby natural habitats. Over 200 species of fish, including many high-valued species such as groupers, breams, snappers and sweetlips, are using the reefs for feeding, shelter and as spawning and nursery areas.

Besides, continuous emphasis is placed on assisting fishermen to switch to sustainable fisheries and other related operations through provision of technical advice, training, liaison services, grants and credit facilities.

To alleviate the manpower shortage of the fishing industry, the AFCD operates the Mainland Fishermen Deckhands Scheme to allow Mainland deckhands to enter Hong Kong to help fishing vessels operators unload their catches at wholesale fish markets. As at December 2023, 4 343 deckhand quotas have been issued to vessel owners and their corresponding fishing vessels in 678 applications.

The AFCD introduced the voluntary Accredited Fish Farm Scheme (AFFS) in 2005 in a bid to enhance the environmental hygiene standards of local aquaculture farms and the quality of aquaculture products. Participating aquaculture farms under the scheme are required to adopt a set of good aquaculture practices. Quality assurance tests including analyses of drug residues and heavy metals in AFFS products are conducted to ensure that food safety standards are met prior to marketing. AFFS products are marked with specially designed tags under the "Accredited Fish Farm Scheme" brand name to enable easy recognition by the public. To enhance consumer confidence in AFFS products, a unique and traceable QR code is printed on these tags. By scanning the QR code, consumers can obtain information of the relevant aquaculture farm and food safety test results of the aquaculture product consignment. In 2023, 168 aquaculture farms have been accredited under the AFFS.

The AFCD conducts aquaculture studies and provides technical services for efficient fish culture methods and

husbandry techniques. Techniques on pond fish water quality monitoring, over-wintering installation, aeration by venturinozzles and oyster depuration are being transferred to the fish farmers. The AFCD continues to promote the development of local fish hatchery and nursery by conducting training workshops, providing on-farm technical support and offering live feed stock cultures to the interested fish farmers. To help the industry adopt a modern and sustainable aquaculture operation, the AFCD has established a steel truss mariculture training farm as a modern and scientific aquaculture training platform at the Tung Lung Chau fish culture zone. The implementation and demonstration of the project encouraged fish farmers to adopt modern and sustainable aquaculture operation. The training farm is equipped with the latest automated aquaculture equipment, enabling fish farmers to learn new aquaculture techniques, and providing practical training to current fish farmers and new entrants.

With a view to enhancing biosecurity measures and surveillance of AMR in aquaculture, "Good Aquaculture Practices Programme" aims to promote modern fish farm management and monitor AMU and AMR at the local fish farm level. Under the programme, the AFCD conducts regular farm visits to facilitate early detection of disease outbreaks, collect water and fish samples for analysis, and collect AMR-related information. The AFCD introduces modern fish farm and health management techniques and practices to fish farmers via workshops and seminars. The department also provides fish disease diagnosis and viral screening services.

The AFCD has strengthened the red tide reporting network and the proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme with a view to providing early red tide warnings to mariculturists, thereby minimising the impact of red tides on mariculture. In 2023, 13 red tide incidents were recorded in Hong Kong waters.

With a view to creating room for the mariculture sector to grow further and to promote the upgrading and transformation, modernisation and sustainable development of the industry, the AFCD designated new fish culture zones at Wong Chuk Kok Hoi, Outer Tap Mun, Mirs Bay and Po Toi (Southeast), with a total area of some 590 hectares, for the development of deep sea mariculture. The Wong Chuk Kok Hoi and the Mirs Bay fish culture zones commenced on 13 December 2023. Deep sea cages and steel truss cages will be adopted for the culture operation which are more efficient in fisheries production, more durable and can withstand much stronger wind and wave action when compared to traditional wooden fish rafts.

The AFCD administers various loan funds for fishermen and fish farmers for production and development purposes. In 2023, 204 loans and at the amount totalling \$106.4 million were issued. The Government also set up a fund to provide grants to help the local fishing community move towards sustainable or high value-added operations. As at December 2023, 201 applications had been approved, involving a total commitment of about \$206 million.

The department administers the Fish Marketing Organization which is a non-government, non-profitmaking corporation vested in the Director of Marketing (currently the Director of Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation) to provide

orderly fish marketing services to both the fishermen and fish traders. The Organization currently runs seven wholesale fish markets in Cheung Sha Wan, Aberdeen, Castle Peak, Shau Kei Wan, Kwun Tong, Tai Po and Sai Kung. Revenue comes from charging commission on the proceeds of sales and fees for using the market facilities. Surplus earnings are channelled back into the industry through the provision of low-interest loans to fishermen, improved services and facilities in the markets and scholarships for fishermen and their children. It also helps promote the marketing of the local fisheries products through its marketing network and participation in trade fairs and exhibitions.