

**Business Facilitation Advisory Committee
Wholesale and Retail Task Force**

Implementation of the Food Trader Portal

Purpose

This paper briefs Members on the implementation of the Food Trader Portal (FTP) developed by the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department.

Background

2. To implement the long term strategies for IT-enabled business transformation, the CFS fully reviewed its IT systems at the end of 2017 and started to enhance them to increase efficiency, reinforce its capability in food import control and surveillance, improve the effectiveness of food incident management and step up food traceability. While the CFS is developing the IT systems on multiple fronts, the FTP is the first system to be completed and launched.

The Food Trader Portal

3. The FTP is a one-stop electronic platform for communication between food traders and the CFS. Launched in stages since December 2019, the FTP aims at strengthening the CFS' capability in food import control, streamlining workflows and facilitating the trade through IT applications. Import control related functions covering food subject to import regulations, namely meat, poultry, game, milk, frozen confections and eggs, were completed in phases and fully implemented by late May 2021. Food traders can now register as food importers and/or distributors, renew registration and update trader information online. They can also apply electronically for import licences for meat and poultry and import permissions for meat, poultry, game, milk, frozen confections

and eggs. Moreover, they may report online the arrival of food consignments. FTP has features to allow importers to use past information for new applications, minimizing their effort of data input. It can also review submitted information automatically to ensure accuracy. The CFS has also taken the opportunity to recast the formats of import licence, import permissions, relevant notices and letters to make them more user-friendly.

4. In tandem with the launch of the online application platform, the Import Licensing Office of the CFS has increased its working days from five days to seven days a week since the end of March 2020, with operation hours extended to 9:00 p.m. from Monday to Friday, for expeditious handling of online applications for import licences. The time required for processing an online licence application for import of meat and poultry by air and chilled meat and poultry by land has generally been shortened to a few hours. Applicants are no longer required to send staff to submit applications or collect import licences/permissions in person. They can also check their application status and records conveniently on the FTP.

5. Development of the FTP provided a golden opportunity for the CFS to strengthen food control at the import level. Health certificates or export declarations are now integral supporting documents for import licence application. The FTP has also made available to importers electronic health certificate data to facilitate import licence application. At the moment, the CFS has established government to government (G2G) platforms with the Mainland, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands for direct issue and receipt of electronic health certificates. The CFS will continue to explore the feasibility of developing G2G electronic health certification arrangement with other countries / places.

6. Reporting of arrival and releasing of food consignments can now be performed through the FTP easily. To prepare food consignment arrival reports, importers only need to retrieve data from relevant import licences and import permissions, supplement some shipment details and upload the required documents. After reports are accepted, the CFS will notify importers regarding inspection and release of the food consignments so that they can prepare in advance before the consignments arrive, such as making appointment with CFS for physical inspection. Relevant

notifications and release letters are issued electronically, thus saves a lot of time.

7. In preparation for the rollout of the FTP services, the CFS has organised seminars, briefings and training workshops for food traders to help them familiarize with the online operation. Online resources including tutorial videos, frequently asked questions and operational manual have also been uploaded to the FTP website (www.ftp.cfs.gov.hk) for reference of food traders.

8. Food importers may still choose to submit their applications in paper form. However, over 4 100 food importers and distributors have already opened accounts on the FTP. In the first half of 2021, about 600 importers of meat, poultry, game, milk, frozen confections or eggs (about 80% of applicants) have applied for import licences and import permissions online. Furthermore, more than 90% of import licences and import permissions are applied for and issued through the FTP.

9. In May 2021, the FTP has rolled out all the services in connection with food importation. While existing functions will continually be enhanced, development of food exportation related modules are in the pipeline. The FTP will interface with other IT systems in CFS to provide a well-connected information network in support of risk profiling and risk-based surveillance for strengthened food safety control and traceability.

Advice Sought

10. Members are invited to note the content of this paper.

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