

AVAvision

May 2004

The authority for food safety and animal and plant health



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A meeting of the old and the new AVA Board members at a lunch hosted by Minister for National Development, Mr Mah Bow Tan.

Six new members for AVA Board

The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority welcomed new members to its Board of Directors to replace seven outgoing members. The new members bring with them a wealth of knowledge and expertise, based on years of experience in industries as varied as law, healthcare, food science and public relations.

The six new Board members are Assoc Prof Philip Barlow, Dr Ling Ai Ee, Mr Cavinder Bull, Mr Alan Lee Ah Sim, COL (Dr) John Wong Chee Meng and Mr Lee Ark Boon.

Mr Koh Poh Tiong, Mr John Lim Kok Min, Dr Ernest Kan Yaw Kiong and Dr Ngiam Tong Tau have been re-appointed as the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members of the AVA Board respectively, for another two-year term.

AVA also expresses its appreciation to the seven outgoing Board members: Prof Lee Soo Ying, Assoc Prof Gilbert Chiang, Mr Soh Kim Siang, Mr Koh Soo Keong, Ms Goh Soon Poh, BG Bernard Tan and Mr Quek Peck Leng, for their valuable guidance during their term.

Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority Board Members (wef April 1, 2004)

CHAIRMAN Mr Koh Poh Tiong Chief Executive Officer Asia Pacific Breweries Ltd	DEPUTY CHAIRMAN Mr John Lim Kok Min Director Pan United Marine Ltd
MEMBERS Dr Ernest Kan Partner Deloitte & Touche	Assoc Prof Philip Barlow Director of Food Science & Technology Programme National University of Singapore
Dr Ling Ai Ee Senior Consultant Virologist & Head of Virology Section, Department of Pathology Singapore General Hospital	Mr Cavinder Bull Director Drew & Napier
Mr Alan Lee Managing Partner August Consulting Pte Ltd	COL (Dr) John Wong Chee Meng Senior Medical Officer (Health Care) Ministry of Defence
Mr Lee Ark Boon Director of Air Transport Ministry of Transport	Dr Ngiam Tong Tau Chief Executive Officer Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority

A Charitable Affair

Romance and charity mingled in this year's AVA Charity Bazaar held on January 13 in aid of the Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund. From a candlelight dinner setup, aimed to drive home the message of food safety while selling fresh seafood and crocodile meat, to stalls selling lovely ethnic handbags, and shawls, no effort was spared by AVA staff in putting up their stalls and cajoling customers to buy their wares.

Even key-chains placed on sale got a good reception thanks to the kind-hearted people who thronged the stalls and were willing to part with their money for a worthy cause. The sheer hardwork of AVA staff paid off with a total collection of \$6,835.05 that was donated to the ST Fund.



The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund gets a boost from the sale of greens by staff at the AVA Charity Bazaar.

Postharvest Technology - Gaining the Korean edge

Korean expert is impressed by Singapore's postharvest practices.

Future bilateral collaboration with Korea is in the pipeline judging by the outcome of a recent visit by a Korean expert on postharvest technology. AVA played host to Dr Byeong-Sam Kim, Head, Postharvest and Packaging Research Group from the Korea Food Research Institute (KFRI) from February 12 -24.

Checking out the postharvest scene

The special visit by the expert was organised under the auspices of the ASEAN-Republic of Korea Expert Despatching Program on Improvement of Efficiency in the Handling of Perishable Crops in ASEAN Member Countries. Dr Kim's areas of expertise include precooling, postharvest treatment, distribution and storage of fresh produce.

During his visit, Dr Kim was given an overview of the postharvest and field handling practices, distribution and retailing of vegetables in Singapore. Included in his busy itinerary were visits to the Pasir Panjang Wholesale Centre, Chinatown wet market and major distribution centers, supermarkets and farms, such as the NTUC Fresh Food Distribution Centre, Cold Storage Supermarket and the Oh Chin Huat Hydroponic Farms.

Serving fresh ideas

Dr Kim also held a 2-day seminar on postharvest technology of fresh produce for AVA officers and the private sector on February 19 - 20. The 2-day seminar, which was well-received, illustrated how practices in postharvest can affect the quality of fresh produce. Seminar topics included physiology of fresh produce, field handling, precooling and temperature control, and modified atmosphere packaging of fresh-cut produce. Drawing his examples from the recent visits to Singapore establishments, he remarked that he was impressed by current postharvest infrastructure, facilities and practices in Singapore but added that there was still some room for improvement in areas such as packaging design and harvesting and storage practices for vegetables to enhance shelf-life.

Strong ties for future growth

In the course of his visit he expressed optimism for future areas of collaboration between the Republic of Korea and Singapore that included:

- Using Singapore as a training and R&D hub for ASEAN region on postharvest technology for tropical fruits and vegetables.
- Initiating a joint research project in Singapore between AVA and KFRI on forced-air / vacuum precooling for the extension of shelf life of tropical fruits and vegetables. The project will include the setting up of forced air/vacuum precooling facilities that could serve as a prototype, which could be applied to other ASEAN countries.
- Organising a study tour for local farmers and AVA officers to visit KFRI and Korean fruit and vegetable farms and farmers' cooperatives. It is anticipated that the trip would serve to develop other areas of collaboration such as in postharvest processing of aquaculture products.

Dr Byeong-Sam Kim explains how postharvest practices can impact the quality of fresh produce at the seminar.

About Expert Despatching Program

The EDP is one of the two programmes under the ASEAN-ROK Project (2002) on Technology Cooperation on Improvement of Efficiency in the Handling of Perishable Crops in ASEAN Member Countries. The objective of this programme is to transfer the advanced technical know-how in handling and distribution technologies for reducing the postharvest loss of perishable crops, to improve scientific and technical expertise of personnel, to enhance the quality, and thus market competitiveness, of fresh produce and to collaborate on matters of common interest in the field of postharvest technology of fresh produce.

Mind the mark for safer greens



AVA recently launched the Good Agricultural Practice for Vegetable Farming Scheme to help boost production of safer greens for local consumption.

Ensuring food safety, extends beyond the regular checks and inspections on end products. To ensure safe and wholesome supply of fresh, quality produce for Singapore, AVA also emphasises upstream control through the accreditation of foreign farms and food processing plants. This ensures that food imports are from reputable and reliable sources that meet AVA's stringent and internationally-aligned requirements.

Seeing introduction recently was a new scheme by AVA to help boost the production of safer, local greens for consumers. The Good Agricultural Practice for Vegetable Farming Scheme (GAP-VF) is aimed to reduce the risk of contamination at the point of food production and ensure the quality and safety of vegetables produced locally.

Benchmark for safe greens

Targeted to also recognise the effort of local vegetable farms in keeping up with good agricultural practices, the GAP Scheme is adapted from a similar scheme in the European Union known as EUREGAP. Other countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, Taiwan and Malaysia have also developed similar safety assurance schemes. The GAP Scheme aligns local farming practices with internationally recognised guidelines and sets the national standards for the production of safe and quality vegetables.

Officially launched on February 6 by Senior Parliamentary Secretary, MND, Assoc Prof Koo Tsai Kee, the scheme signifies another step towards closer partnership with the vegetable industry for safe food supply and agri-business vitality. The event was co-launched with Singapore's largest retail supermarket, NTUC Fairprice, at the atrium of Thomson Plaza.

Elaborating on the role of the retailer, Assoc Prof Koo remarked, "Retailers like NTUC Fairprice also play a key role in the success of the GAP Scheme. By demanding the best from suppliers, retailers can raise the bar on food safety standards of their products offered to Singaporeans". Of the 62 local vegetable farms, 10 farms were awarded the inaugural GAP-VF certificate and they are:

- Tropical Aeroponics Pte. Ltd.
- Ho Ka Clean Vegetable Farm
- Oh Chin Huat Hydroponic Farms Pte. Ltd.
- Yili Vegetation & Trading Pte. Ltd.
- Wong Kiow
- Oh Cheong Yeow
- Wong Joon Tay
- Wong Kok Fah
- Yong Teck Khen
- Hon Fo Hing



The GAP-VF certificate award winners pose with Assoc Prof Koo Tsai Kee at the GAP-VF Certification Scheme launch ceremony.

A mark of distinction

GAP-VF certified farms can now distinguish their produce from others in the market with a GAP certification mark, thereby enhancing their profile and market access. The transparent production system and traceable farm produce required under the scheme boost consumer confidence in buying from GAP-VF certified sources.

In addition, vegetable retailers now have an added tool to source vegetable from quality farms and supply premium vegetable produce for consumers. The GAP scheme also sets the benchmark for vegetable importers in sourcing vegetables from overseas. This is especially important as Singaporeans consume nearly 400,000 tonnes of vegetables a year with more than 95% of our vegetable supply being imported.

While AVA takes the lead to introduce such quality assurance systems, it is equally important that the vegetable industry players also promote the relevance of the GAP-VF Certification for food safety assurance.

Safety stamp for vegetable farms

The GAP-VF Certification Scheme is a voluntary scheme introduced by AVA and comprises a code of practice for safe and quality vegetable production. It applies the Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points (HACCP) and quality management principles.

Similar to the ISO9000 in that business processes and management practices are certified, it varies in terms of components assessed. Specifically tailored to vegetable farming activities, attention is paid to farm location, structure, environment (soil and water), maintenance (hygiene and cleanliness), practices, methods, techniques (pesticide and fertilizer applications, pest and disease management, postharvest handling) and management (farm records, traceability, staff training).

A GAP-VF certified farm undergoes thorough AVA screening that includes evaluation and farm audits. Audits are based on site investigations, examination of farm records, assessment of farming and post-harvesting procedures, interviews with the farmers and analysis of soil, nutrients and farm produce.

Open to farms with a valid farm licence and at least one year of farming activities, the certification will be rescinded if farmers do not comply with the guidelines set out by the scheme.

For more information on the GAP-VF Certification Scheme, please contact our AVA officer at Tel: 6751 9825.

Second win for Best Annual Report



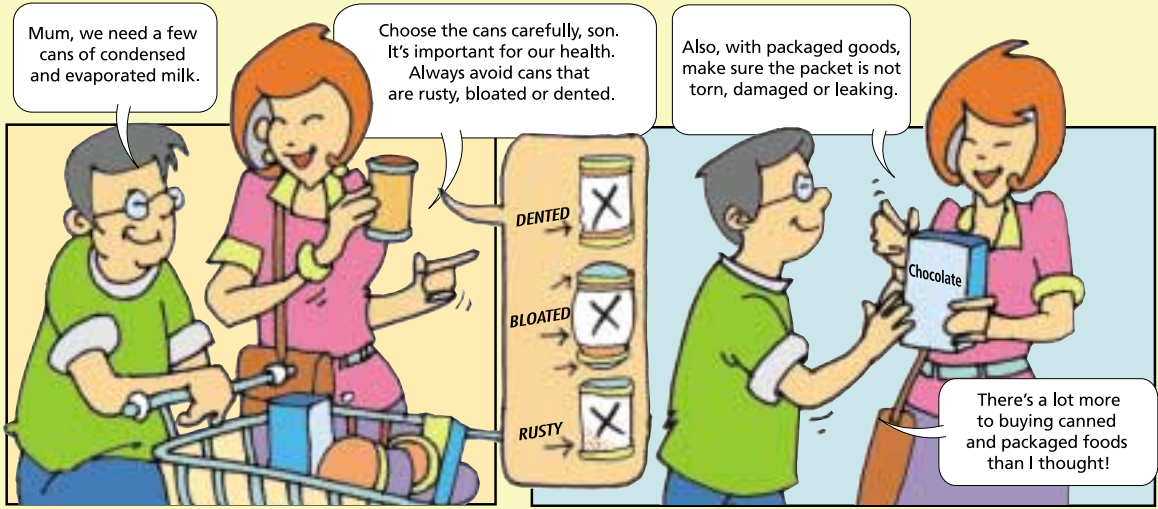
AVA has done it again! For the second consecutive year, AVA has won the Best Annual Report Award under the statutory board category of the 30th Annual Report Award. The competition that is jointly sponsored by the Institute of Certified Public Accountants of Singapore and other agencies recognises excellence in annual report presentation and enhanced disclosure beyond the minimum regulatory requirements by listed companies and statutory boards

The award presentation dinner, held on March 11 at the Mandarin Hotel, was attended by among

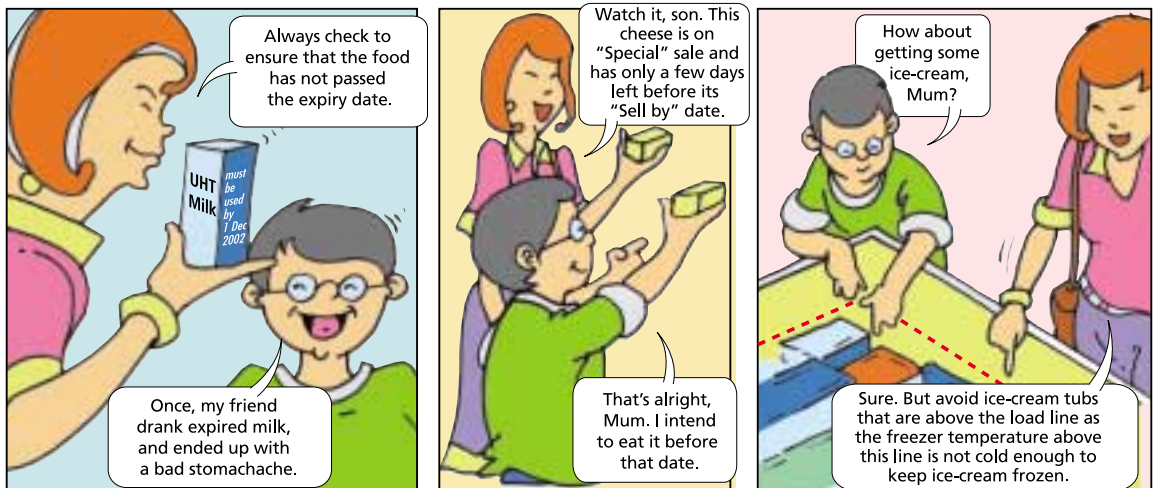
others, Dr Ngiam Tong Tau, AVA's Chief Executive Officer. Dr Ngiam went on stage to receive the top award from the Guest of Honour, Dr Richard Hu.

Clinching the award for AVA was a comprehensive report complete with glossy pictures that come alive to narrate a lyrical tale of how AVA's many activities impact people's daily lives. Interspersed with contrasting images of humans, animals and food items, the all-important AVA role of safeguarding animals, plants and ensuring food safety is linked to the routines of life. Notable in this report are the creative photoshoot poses adopted by AVA staff that got a mention in the local newsprint.

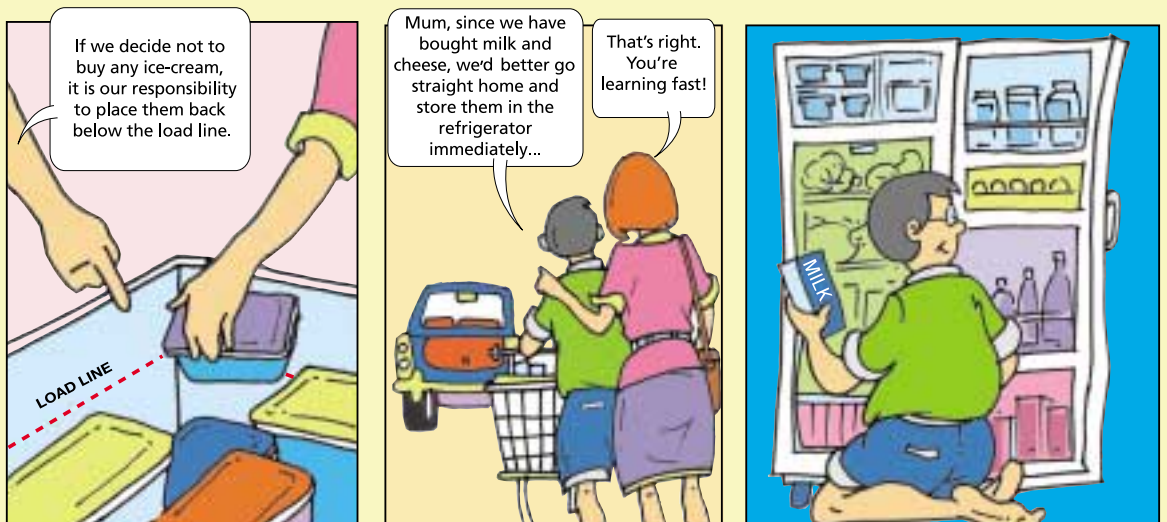
Check the package closely when selecting



Remember to read the label



Store properly to avoid spoilage



Keep dairy products safe for your family!

As the national food safety authority, AVA has implemented an integrated food safety system to ensure safe food supply, from production to just before retail.

Dairy products are rich in nutrients which are nourishing. However, these nutrients also encourage the growth of bacteria. Therefore, stringent measures are taken by AVA to ensure our dairy products are safe for consumption.

As a consumer, you can minimise your health risks by buying dairy products from merchants who

purchase from credible sources and observe good food safety practices. Head back home immediately after buying your dairy products, and refrigerate or store them according to instructions found on the product labels.

Buy only enough dairy products for immediate consumption and take special care in handling them to avoid contamination.

Together, let's keep food safe!

Your cut & keep guide on buying, handling and storing dairy products

Things to look out for when buying dairy products:

- Make sure that the packaging is intact. Do not buy dairy products that are not properly sealed.
- Avoid canned dairy products that are dented, leaking or swollen.
- Buy chilled and frozen dairy products last and head home directly.
- Check the expiry date on dairy products and do not buy items that are past their expiry date.
- Dairy products such as butter, cheese, pasteurised milk, yoghurt and cream should be kept chilled at temperatures of -1°C to 3°C. Do not buy them if they are left un-chilled.
- Buy ice-cream that is displayed within the load line of the freezer.
- Do not buy ice-cream that has ice on the packaging, indicating that it has been partially thawed and refrozen.

Handling dairy products

- Take out only what you need to consume and return the unused portion to the refrigerator or freezer.
- Do not leave dairy products sitting at room temperature.

Storing dairy products

- Do not place dairy products together with hot food in the same shopping bag.
- As soon as you reach home, read the storage instructions on the label and keep the dairy products at the correct storage temperature.
- Dairy products that can be kept at room temperature should be stored in a cool dry place. Avoid extreme heat or direct sunlight.
- Although Ultra Heat Treated (UHT) milk can be stored at room temperature until its expiry date, it should be kept chilled once it is opened.
- To prevent the growth of bacteria and spoilage, keep pasteurised milk refrigerated.
- Once a can of condensed or evaporated milk is opened, transfer its contents into a non-metallic container and cover tightly and refrigerate.
- Store butter and cheese in their original packaging in a covered non-metallic container and keep them refrigerated.
- Pasteurised and UHT milk should be consumed within a week after the package is opened.

Oscar, the Food Safety Otter

AVA has chosen the otter to be Singapore's national food safety mascot. He has been named Oscar.

The otter is a resilient animal, which enjoys a wide variety of food and observes good food safety habits.

Through Oscar, AVA hopes to bring the food safety message closer to the hearts of consumers.

In this regard, AVA has adopted the otter enclosure at the Singapore Zoo. Do pay the otters a visit when you are there!



**Together
Let's Keep
Food
Safe!**



The Food Safety Otter

Battle-fit for Bird Flu



Inspection of imported poultry was intensified in response to the threat of Bird Flu.

Armed with a contingency plan, AVA was all geared-up to take on Bird Flu when it struck neighbouring countries and threatened to invade Singapore.

Grabbing the headlines and flustering more than a few feathers was the news of a Bird Flu outbreak late last year. First reported in South Korea, it rapidly spread to Vietnam, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia and more recently Cambodia, leaving in its trail a human death toll of 23 and devastated poultry industries.

On patrol to protect

Far from being sitting ducks waiting for the enemy to strike, AVA has been taking pro-active steps to protect Singapore and its poultry industry from Bird Flu. When human casualties were reported in the Hong Kong outbreak in 1997 and Bird Flu emerged as a public health concern, AVA became even more vigilant against the disease. Close tabs were kept on global developments and surveillance and control measures for Bird Flu were incorporated into existing animal health programmes in anticipation of potential outbreaks. Among the slew of measures introduced was intensified surveillance to test for Bird Flu in the wild bird populations, the poultry in our 7 poultry farms and birds in the Jurong Bird Park.

Stepping up the checks

Bird Flu is not a significant public health threat in Singapore as there are only 7 poultry farms in Singapore and the slaughter of poultry is not carried out in wet markets. Hence, the general public is not exposed to live chickens. Nonetheless, when news of the Bird Flu epidemic broke in late 2003, AVA took no chances. Swift action resulted in the immediate ban of poultry imports from affected countries and stepped up inspection and testing for Bird Flu in live poultry and birds entering Singapore.

Inspection of local poultry farms and slaughterhouses was intensified and AVA assisted the operators to put in place biosecurity measures such as disinfection of delivery trucks, restriction of visitors and bird-proofing in the farms. Poultry industry operators were also taught how to monitor for signs of Bird Flu in their poultry and to report suspect cases instantly, to AVA. Given the public health risk of Bird Flu, the workers in farms and

poultry slaughterhouses are also made to protect themselves with masks and adhere strictly to hygiene practices.

The Jurong Bird Park and Singapore Zoological Gardens were assisted by AVA to enhance their biosecurity and surveillance measures for the virus. Additional precautions were also taken to protect the birds, staff and visitors. The AVA tests and surveys for Bird Flu in the crow, mynah, pigeon and migratory bird populations and the wildbird populations in the Sungei Buloh Wetlands Reserve were continued. To date, AVA has not detected the virus in these birds. An operation was also conducted in Pulau Ubin to remove the poultry there as they were more exposed and could contract the disease from migratory birds.

Geared-up for the charge

To cover all grounds, AVA also geared-up to deal with the Bird Flu virus should it cause an outbreak in poultry farms. Put in place was a contingency plan to take immediate and comprehensive action to eradicate the disease. The plan includes the culling of all poultry in poultry farms. The culling exercise would require the mobilization of multiple agencies that include the Police, the Ministry of Health, the Civil Defence Force and the National Environment Agency. To ensure that AVA and the relevant agencies are operationally ready to handle an actual outbreak, an exercise was held in February to test out the contingency plan.

To safeguard AVA staff and external workers who would be involved in the culling exercise in the event of Bird Flu in Singapore, training in personal safety such as the use of personal protective equipment and decontamination procedures were conducted by AVA via training videos, talks and practical exercises.



Firing up the chat channels

To address the concerns the public may have over the disease and the safety of poultry meat and eggs for consumption, AVA held briefings for grassroots leaders and MPs. The participants were informed of the control measures taken to protect Singapore from Bird Flu and assured that the supply of poultry meat and eggs is safe and that AVA had diversified sources of supply for poultry and eggs that would be adequate to meet any shortfall.

In addition, AVA provided technical information to the Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts for the set-up of a dedicated website for Bird Flu and for the production of brochures and posters for public consumption. Information on Bird Flu and a list of Frequently Asked Questions and their responses were also made available on the AVA website.

Through these proactive measures and contingency planning, AVA continues to keep Bird Flu at bay.

For more information on Bird Flu visit our website at www.ava.gov.sg

'Eggstra' sources of supply

Eggs are ever popular in Singapore judging by the per capita consumption of 302 hen eggs in 2003. Currently, 5 farms located at Singapore's Agrotechnology Parks supply about 392 million eggs for local consumption. However, local farms only meet 32% of the demand and an estimated 827 million eggs or 68% of our supply of hen eggs have to be imported.



Breaking out of the shell

When it comes to imports, AVA believes in the maxim of diversification of food sources to ensure resilient supply. In its continual search for alternatives, AVA embarks on food sourcing missions and currently has on its platter, a total of 26 overseas farms that are accredited to supply eggs to Singapore. Should there be a shortage of eggs from traditional sources, these alternative sources can be activated.

Malaysia is currently the major supplier of hen eggs due to its proximity to Singapore. Being in the region makes Malaysia vulnerable to Bird Flu. To ensure that the alternative trade links are well-oiled and that importers would be able to respond immediately should Singapore ban eggs from Malaysia due to Bird Flu, AVA encouraged imports of eggs from accredited sources in Australia and New Zealand. As a result, eggs from the Golden Eggs Farms in Perth went on sale in selected supermarkets in February.

Putting the heat for safety

Ensuring food safety at source is a priority when accrediting farms. Both the capability of the sanitary and inspection system in countries exporting food to Singapore as well as the bio-security of the farms are assessed before eggs are allowed to be imported. As part of the requirements for import of eggs into Singapore, the veterinary authority of the country of export is required to certify, among others, that the country has been free from highly pathogenic avian influenza for the past 12 months prior to export.

Dishing out alternatives

Though breaking away from tradition may be hard, AVA also has a ready stock of sources for liquid eggs (pasteurised eggs that come in cartons). Largely the preference of restaurants and confectioners, pouring out your egg instead of breaking an egg may mark the start of the day for the average Joe should Singapore face a shortage of shell eggs in the future.

Norovirus hits AVA's radar screen

Christmas cheer went sorely missing for 227 people who fell ill after feasting on half-shelled raw oysters served in hotels and restaurants last December. From December 13 – 31, 2003, the Ministry of Health (MOH) was notified of a total of 11 outbreaks of food poisoning, all apparently associated with consumption of half-shelled raw oysters. While MOH tested those who fell sick, AVA swung into action to investigate the source of the outbreak.



Tracing the source

The half-shelled oysters were traced to a specific shipment of imported frozen oysters from Shengdong, China, in November 2003. The importer voluntarily recalled all remaining cartons and these were collected and sent for investigation at AVA's Veterinary Public Health Laboratory.

All imports of frozen oysters require health certification from relevant overseas authorities and each consignment is routinely sampled and tested for food poisoning bacteria before it is released for sale by AVA. However, notwithstanding such tests, there is no guarantee that food poisoning will not occur as bacteria can accumulate in the oyster if the oyster is not properly handled or thawed.

Identifying the guilty

The implicated oysters would have had undergone a battery of tests to detect food poisoning bacteria when first imported, before being released for sale. However, a second round of screening was conducted to eliminate the possibility of a bacterial pathogen causing the food poisoning episode. The tests, as expected, came out negative again. Due to the absence of a bacterial pathogen and judging from the clinical and epidemiological characteristics displayed, AVA's radar screen shifted focus to a human enteric virus, the

Norovirus. The Norovirus has a history of being implicated in a number of acute non-bacterial food poisoning outbreaks. Oysters grown in polluted waters appear to be a common vehicle for transmission of the Norovirus. Though largely spread from person to person, the virus has, in 5 percent of cases, been spread by food, notably oysters.

Developing the test

Without delay, AVA developed a rapid molecular diagnostic test using the Real-time Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RRT-PCR) technique. This highly reliable technique is based on the detection of specific Norovirus genetic material. The use of RRT-PCR as a diagnostic tool has greatly enhanced detection rates and the sensitivity and specificity of this test enables low contamination of Norovirus to be detected in oysters. Oyster samples were also sent for electron microscopy examination for presence of Norovirus. In the absence of RRT-PCR techniques, electron microscopy is used for detecting the presence of Norovirus.

Both the RRT-PCR and the electron microscopy test results proved conclusive for the presence of Norovirus in the oyster samples tested. The Norovirus was found guilty of causing the food poisoning episode and from then on, an additional test for Norovirus appeared on AVA's list of routine tests performed on oyster imports into Singapore.

Pest busters get checked for safety

AVA's pesticide registration requirement ensures safety for the environment, pesticide operators and food we consume.

Did you know that pest busters or pesticides have to be registered with AVA, for use in local farms? This is because pesticides used in the commercial cultivation of plants in Singapore come under the Control of Plants Act and the Control of Plants (Registration of Pesticides) Rules.

Listed for safety sake

The purpose of the registration of pesticides and the equally important certification of pesticide operators is to ensure that pesticides are used properly and safely on local farms.

To ensure that the safety of the environment, the worker (during pesticide application) and food (when used on food crops) are not compromised when pesticides are used, the pesticides are carefully evaluated for their toxicity and the way in which they are used on the farms.

Pesticides are poisons. How hazardous they can be really depends on how they are dispensed and the dose that is dispensed. The directions indicated on the pesticide container label are the keys to safe use.

Expert review and evaluation

Anyone who manufactures, imports or distributes pesticides intended for agricultural use and has a registered company in Singapore, may apply for the registration of the pesticide products. The applicant is required to submit the application form together with the required information to AVA for evaluation.

The pesticide technical data are required to ensure that indicated pesticide delivery dose would not prove hazardous to human health, wildlife and the environment. For new pesticides and pesticides with higher than usual concentrations or novel formulations, the applications are sent for evaluation and assessment by committees of experts.

When a pesticide product is approved, a Certificate of Pesticide Registration, together with a designated AVA Registration Number, is issued. The AVA Registration Number is to be printed onto the product label of every pesticide product. This allows the registered pesticide products to be used for agricultural farming.

The registration of pesticide products is also notified in the Gazette for general information of the public, and a register of all approved agricultural pesticides and the application form for pesticide registration can be obtained from the AVA website.

Pest war checklist

Before you declare war and charge against a plant pest take note of the following:

- Know your pests; read and be informed on common plant pests
- Gauge if it is necessary to spray pesticide by first monitoring the pests
- If you have to spray pesticide, select appropriate pesticides and formulation
- Use only properly labelled pesticides
- Select suitable equipment
- Select an appropriate timing and area
- Wear protective clothing

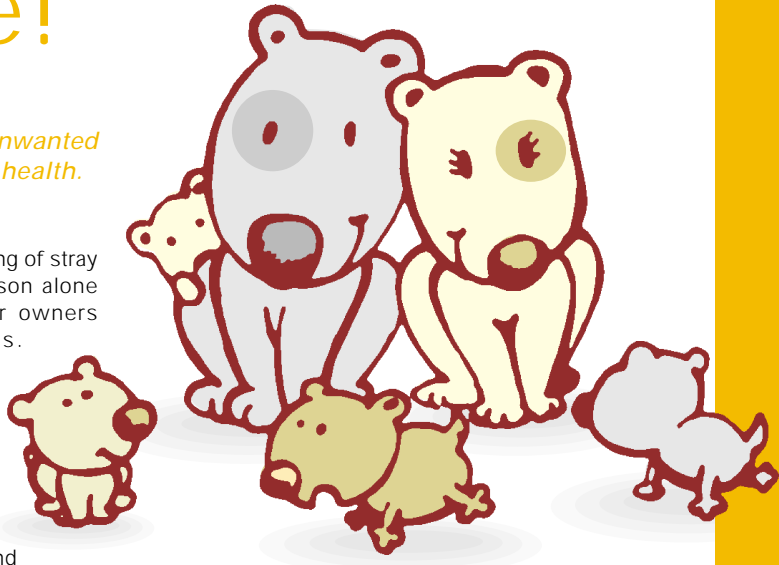


Photo Credit:
Extension Entomology, Department of Entomology,
Texas University

Stop surplus pets - Sterilise!

Sterilise your pet to put a stop to unwanted litters and to safeguard your pet's health.

Sterilisation can put a stop to the killing of stray and unwanted animals. This reason alone should be important enough for owners to consider sterilising their pets. A recommended operation to prevent unwanted litters, sterilisation also makes pets more docile and manageable by reducing aggression and undesirable behaviour (such as straying, urine spraying/markings and mounting of people or objects). Sterilisation can also help reduce the incidences of cancer and infection of the reproductive organs in pets.



Sterilise at six months

The recommended age for sterilisation is around six months of age when the pet is almost at its adult size. The pet need not have bred before. It is a myth that letting your pets breed makes them better or healthier pets. The sterilisation procedure can be performed on male and female cats, dogs, rabbits and guinea pigs by a licensed veterinarian.

“Spaying” refers to the sterilisation of the female and “castration” to that of the male. Neutering is a general term for the sterilisation of either sex. Spaying involves the surgical removal of the uterus (womb) and the ovaries, and male neutering involves the surgical removal of the testes.

The procedure is done under general anaesthesia so the animal does not feel any pain during the operation. The sedative and anaesthesia will continue to have effect for sometime after the operation so your pet will not feel much pain. Most pets are back to normal after 48 hours.

The dollars and sense

The cost of sterilisation depends on the type, size, condition and sex of your pet. Sterilisation of female pets is usually costlier, as it is a more difficult operation. The estimated cost would range from \$50 to a few hundred dollars. However, no matter what the cost, sterilisation is cheaper than breeding, feeding, taking care of and vaccinating your pet's babies. You might also end up spending more money on treatment of conditions such as certain cancers that could have been avoided with sterilisation. Sterilising your pet will also be more humane if you cannot ensure that each of your pet's offspring will have a good caring home for the rest of their lives.

Being a responsible pet owner

Being a responsible pet owner extends beyond providing the basic care and comfort for your pet. Sterilising your pet ensures a well-behaved and healthy animal that will be a joy to you and your family but most of all, it will prevent pet overpopulation and the unnecessary killing of unwanted animals.

Myths about sterilisation

Owners hesitate to get their pets sterilised for many reasons, but most of them happen to be misunderstandings of what sterilisation really is or what it does for their pet. Some myths about sterilisation are:

Myth 1a: My (male) pet will become less of a male and thus will be unhappy

Myth 1b: It is cruel and unnatural to sterilise and take away the pet's chance to be a parent

Fact: Animals are not affected emotionally by sterilisation and continue to live an active and healthy life after sterilisation.

Myth 2: My pet will become fat and lazy

Fact: Although some sterilised pets may be less active, they usually become fat because they are fed too much and not exercised enough! Dogs will continue to guard the house because it is their instinct to do so.

Myth 3: I'll be able to find good homes for all my pet's offspring

Fact: There are many pets that have to be put down because there are not enough homes for them. There is no guarantee that your pet's offspring will find good homes. We should not add to the already urgent problem of pet overpopulation.

CITES reins in seahorses



CITES permits are now a must to trade in seahorses.

Seahorses have been widely sought for use in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and for aquariums. But from May 15, the trade in all species of seahorses will be regulated.

A proposal to list all seahorses (Hippocampus species) under CITES Appendix II was adopted at the 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Santiago, Chile in November 2002. This new inclusion under CITES which took effect on 15 May 2004 implies that seahorses which are threatened by trade can only be traded internationally with proper CITES permits.

For more information on the import, export and re-export of seahorses, please contact AVA at Tel: 6751 9804 (for live seahorses) or Tel: 63257 102 (for dried seahorses). Application forms for CITES permits can be found on AVA's website at <http://www.ava.gov.sg>.

The AVA, as the management authority for CITES, will regulate the import and export of seahorses through the issuance of CITES permits and approval of trade declarations. Live and dried seahorse specimens will be subject to CITES controls.

Seafood traders, TCM dealers and all aquarium seahorse dealers trading in live and dried seahorses will be required to obtain CITES permits from AVA when they import, export or re-export seahorses. For seahorses that are personal effects, owners would still need to obtain CITES permits from both importing and exporting countries.

Seahorses are largely caught in direct fisheries and as by-catch from trawl fisheries. It is hoped that the additional reins on the trade in seahorses would contribute positively to the conservation of the species. Currently there are 32 recognised species of seahorses within the genus Hippocampus that inhabit both temperate and tropical waters.

Traded internationally for use in aquaria pet trade and as curios and as an ingredient in TCM, seahorses are vulnerable to over-exploitation. Last year alone, Singapore imported approximately 47,700 live seahorses for aquaria trade. The seahorses imported were worth about \$40,000. In addition each year, Singapore imports about 2 tonnes of dried seahorses worth about \$170,000 for the TCM trade.

Through the permits control and a host of other conservation efforts such as collection of trade and biological data, research, captive-breeding programs and proper fisheries management, seahorses may be saved from becoming another statistic in the extinct list.

Quiz 5/2004

Answer these simple questions and five correct entries will stand to win AVA souvenirs. Just select the correct answer to each of the three questions that follow, and fax, e-mail or mail your entry together with your name, NRIC, address and contact details to:

Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority,
5 Maxwell Road, #04-00 Tower Block
MND Complex, Singapore 069110
Fax: 6220 6068, E-mail: ava_info@ava.gov.sg

Closing Date: 30 June 2004

1. You should buy dairy products that are past the expiry date.
(a) True (b) False
2. When handling dairy products, take out only what you need to consume and return the unused portion to the refrigerator.
(a) True (b) False
3. Pasteurised and UHT milk should be consumed within ____ week(s) after the package is opened.
(a) 1 (b) 2 (c) 3

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