

## The Star : China food on alert list

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KUALA LUMPUR: Honey, oyster sauce and dried mushrooms are among food products from China which have been placed on the food alert list for contravening regulations in Malaysia.

Data from the Health Ministry Food Quality and Safety Division indicated, in samples taken on specific dates, that pesticide residue was detected in the dried mushrooms on four occasions from April to July this year.

Drug residue was found in the honey sample taken in June while the cancer-causing agent 3-MCPD was found in oyster sauce tested in May.

There were 32 Chinese products placed under the ministry's Food Safety Information System (FoSIM) level five alert, where products are held, tested and then released, from January to October this year.

There are six levels of alerts the first is auto clearance and the sixth is auto rejection.

Other products included frozen eel, seaweed, frozen royal red prawns, shitake mushrooms and salted turnip. All other China-imported food items were put on level four alert which requires examination.

Food found to have contravened the Food Act 1983 and Food Regulations 1985 was either destroyed or returned to the country of origin.

Malaysia imports US\$680mil (RM2.3bil) worth of food items from China yearly.

Thailand had 17 food products on the list while nine food products from India contravened regulations including groundnut kernels in which aflatoxin, a cancer-causing agent, was found on six occasions from sampling done from March to September.

Six products from Indonesia including natural honey, kicap manis, prawn crackers and chilli sauce were also put on the watch list.

Roasted seaweed from Singapore was found to contain metal contaminants on four occasions from July to September.

In all, 103,480 imported food consignments were tested until September. A total of 49 consignments were rejected or destroyed.

Minister Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek told reporters yesterday that the quality of imported food was safe because of constant monitoring at 36 entry points with the cooperation of the Customs Department and other agencies.

Dr Chua said the monitoring and inspection of food and premises was also carried out.

Some operators do not practise cleanliness. That is why food poisoning happens from time to time, including at school canteens. They think that if the food is cooked, it is safe to be eaten, he said, adding that factors like how the food was kept and the equipment used also contributed to food poisoning.

From January to June this year, a total of RM416,260 in fines was collected from 2,290 cases. The ministry also shut down 2,957 unsanitary food outlets.