



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பினாங்கு பயனர்களர் சங்கம்

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Press Statement

15 July 2020

CAP: Recall winter melon strips from the market

The Consumers Association of Penang calls upon the Ministry of Health to immediately recall winter melon strips from the market.

The call is made in response to the Singapore Food Agency (SFA) recall of winter melon strips from Malaysia which was found to contain sulphur dioxide that exceeded the maximum limit stated in the Singapore Food Regulations.

Winter melon strips are used in the making traditional Chinese and Malay pastry fillings, *mooncake* fillings, herbal teas, and desserts such as barley and *ais kacang*. It is made from fresh winter melon and sugar. These sweet and translucent candies are also believed to aid in detoxification, ward off heat and reduce fluid retention.

According to the Sixth Schedule (Regulation 20) of the Food Act 1983 winter melon are allowed to contain 2000 ppm (parts per million) of sulphur dioxide.

Sulphur dioxide is used as a preservative owing to its antimicrobial properties. As a preservative, it maintains the appearance of the fruit and prevents rotting. However, sulphur dioxide can trigger an attack in individual with asthma with symptoms such as wheezing or laboured breathing. Excessive levels of sulphite in food could also result in allergic reactions in individuals who are hypersensitive to sulphite with symptoms such as hives, itchiness, stomach ache, diarrhoea and vomiting.

The main legislations regulating food safety in the country are the Food Act 1983, Food Regulations 1985 and Food Hygiene Regulations 2009. They aim to protect the public against food-related hazards and frauds, to promote safe preparation, handling, distribution and the sale of healthy and high quality food.

As food safety has to be maintained from production to consumption, many ministries and agencies are involved in the process. Among them are the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Agriculture, local authorities and Customs (for import and export of food).

In spite of the existence of the law and the enforcement body entrusted to ensure that Malaysian citizens get safe and wholesome food we rarely hear of our local produce being recalled.

This is not the first time that Malaysian produce was rejected in foreign countries. Following are some of incidences that have been reported:

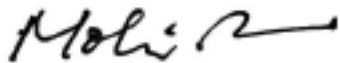
- In 2019, bottled mineral water was recalled by the Singaporean authorities. The particular bottled mineral water was found to contain *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* – a common bacterium that is found in faeces, soil, water and sewage.

- In 2018, iceberg lettuce was recalled by Singaporean authorities after it detected high levels of pesticide in the vegetable imported from a Malaysian farm
- In 2017, China rejected fruits from Cameron Highlands due to the presence of living modified organism (LMO).*
- In 2016, Malaysian prawns, mostly from Penang aquaculture farms, were rejected by the US government due to the presence of banned antibiotics (nitrofurans and chloramphenicol.)
- In 2015, some 300 batches of vegetables - mostly leafy greens - and fruit were stopped from being sold in Singapore, after pesticide residues found on samples exceeded levels allowed by the authorities. It is said that 3%-5% of veggies and fruit from Malaysia exceeded pesticide limits set by the Singaporean authorities.

In view of the latest recall, CAP calls upon the Ministry of Health to immediately recall winter melon strips from the market, at the same time they should conduct test on the winter melon strips for the amount of sulphur dioxide present.

The government should set up a committee to investigate why the issue was not discovered earlier by our local authorities. It is strange that each time such an incident occurs it takes the authorities from another country to bring up the matter to the Malaysian public.

Meanwhile consumers should refrain from eating winter melon strips until the authorities can ensure that it is safe for consumption.



MOHIDEEN ABDUL KADER
 President
 Consumers Association of Penang

*** LMOs are defined as any living organism that has a combination of genetic material obtained through modern biotechnology. Modern biotechnology enables gene-transferrals between different organisms. Presently LMO products imported into our country include seeds, animal feed and rice. Common LMOs include agricultural crops that have been genetically modified for greater productivity or for resistance to pests or diseases.**