



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Press Statement

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How safe are our chicken eggs?

The recent report on eggs from a farm Teo Seng Capital Berhad being suspended by the Singaporean authorities shows that Malaysians are being rated as second-class consumers where food safety is concerned. The eggs were rejected as they were found to be contaminated with *Salmonella Enteritidis* bacterium.

Again we hear the authorities saying that the eggs are not sold in Malaysia and it is only from some affected farms.

It is strange that such an incident was not discovered by our local authorities earlier even though it is estimated that Malaysians consumed 30 million eggs daily. Given the situation many Malaysian consumers may have unknowingly consumed contaminated eggs. The bacterium *Salmonella Enteritidis* causes diarrhoea, abdominal pain, fever, nausea 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 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 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 2017, China rejected fruits from Cameron Highlands due to the presence of living modified organism (LMO).

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 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 2020, the Singaporean authorities recalled winter melon strips from Malaysia as they were found to contain sulphur dioxide that exceeded the maximum limit stated in the Singapore Food Regulations.

In year 2021 The Department of Veterinary Services (DVS) has taken follow-up action by visiting and conducting an investigation on Lay Hong Bhd's 'CES 008' farm in Jeram, Selangor, to identify the cause of *Salmonella enteritidis* (SE) contamination, which led to a recall of the company's eggs in Singapore.

In view of the latest recall, CAP calls upon the authorities to:

- Investigate all poultry farms in the country to ensure that they comply with our food safety regulations.
- Look into how chickens are reared which could have contributed to the salmonella contamination.
- Set up a committee to investigate the weaknesses of our monitoring system with regards to food safety.
- The recurring reports on unsafe Malaysian food products by overseas authorities clearly show that our food safety monitoring is inadequate.

Meanwhile consumers are advised to cook their eggs thoroughly before consuming.

Mohideen Abdul Kader
President
Consumers Association of Penang (CAP)