Research Note

Border inspections of imported food and related products in Taiwan from 2011 to 2013

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With inspection of imported food and related products, relevant affairs formerly under the Bureau of Standards, Metrology, and Inspection has returned to the Taiwan Food and Drug Administration (TFDA) in accordance with the Regulations of Inspection of Imported Foods and Related Products. These regulations were effective from January 1, 2011 [1]. The border inspection for hygiene and safety of the imported foods was conducted in 12 ports/airports [2]. From 2011 to 2013, 1,396,980 batches of imported food products were inspected and the annual growth rate of imports was 9.8% and 11.5%, respectively, in the past 2 years. The total volume of imported food and related products was approximately 21.87 million metric tons (total value, US$ 26.96 billion). Of all the imported products, biscuits (7.9%) had the highest proportion, followed by food utensils (7.8%), processed food (6.2%), sauce (6.2%), and candies and chocolates (5.6%). With regard to the imported volume of products, miscellaneous grain crops (42.5%) had the highest proportion, followed by molasses (8.8%), grain product (7.5%), fruits (fresh, chilled, or frozen; 4.7%), edible oil (3.8%), and so on.

The top five importing country of origin for batches of food and related products were Japan (22.5%), USA (15.3%), Mainland China (10.6%), Thailand (7.2%), and Vietnam (4.9%). Besides, the main countries of origin of the products imported were USA (36.1%), Brazil (13.5%), Thailand (10.3%), Australia (7.2%), and Mainland China (5.4%), contributing to 72.5% of the total imported volume. However, based on cost (insurance and freight charges), the United States occupied the first position (33.2%), followed by Brazil (13.3%), Australia (6.9%), New Zealand (5.9%), and Thailand (5.5%).

The approaches for border inspections in Taiwan are visual inspection, hygiene-qualities examination, and document verification. A total of 10,896 batches were identified as noncompliant during the past 3 years (8606, 1213, and 972 batches in 2011, 2012, and 2013, respectively; 105 batches...
“Noncompliance of label requirements” was the main finding from visual inspection and documents verification, which included labeling errors, lack of Chinese label, small font size, nutrition-labeling- and claim-violating stipulations, no expiration date, added ingredient without safety assessments, and violation of “Standards for Specification, Scope, Application and Limitation of Food Additives” specified by the TFDA.

An examination of hygiene qualities found that 1.2% of the products were noncompliant. Table 1 shows the top 20 noncompliant product categories and the corresponding noncompliance rate. The table illustrates that fresh, chilled, or frozen fruits and vegetables; herbal foods; live, fresh, or chilled crustaceans; and spices were the main products that were found to be noncompliant with the recommended hygiene standards. An examination of these products revealed that the most frequent noncompliant issues identified were pesticides residue; food additives; veterinary drugs residue; heavy metals; mycotoxins; breakdown products of leaching of food utensils, containers, and packages; food microbiology; food components; and pharmaceutical adulterants in dietary supplements (Fig. 1). Products that violated the Standards for Pesticide Residue Limits in Foods contained residues for which there were no tolerance and overtolerance limits. The items that violated Food Additives Regulation included preservatives, bleaching agents, artificial sweeteners, formaldehyde, artificial pigments, antioxidant, nitrates.

All products that were noncompliant with regard to the recommended label requirements were requested to make corrections. Once the corrections are made, they should be confirmed and approved by the local health authorities. Products that did not meet the recommended hygiene requirements were returned or destroyed in accordance with the related regulations. Further stricter actions will be
reinforced by analyzing samples from each batch imported (batch-by-batch examination). Meanwhile, the TFDA intends to take precautionary steps to safeguard the imported food products and conduct inspections overseas for source management through bilateral agreements to ensure the quality of imported products and protect the safety of the consumers [3].

Conflicts of interest

All contributing authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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