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GAIN Report

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Hong Kong Bans Imports and Sales of California Romaine Lettuce

Report Categories:

Sanitary/Phytosanitary/Food Safety

Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

Effective November 27, 2018, Hong Kong bans the import and sale of romaine lettuce harvested in California as a result of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's advisement that California romaine lettuce may be contaminated with *Esherichia coli* (E. coli).

In the evening of November 27, 2018, the Hong Kong government informed ATO Hong Kong that it would suspend the import and sale of California romaine lettuce effective immediately. The restriction is limited to products harvested in the State of California. Products clearly labeled as having been harvested outside of California are not included in the ban. The notification was soon followed by the press release below.

Hong Kong government press release dated November 27, 2018

Import and sale in HK of romaine lettuce harvested in California, US, suspended

The Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department said today (November 27) that the import into and sale in Hong Kong of romaine lettuce harvested in California, the United States (US), has been suspended with immediate effect, in the light of the latest information announced by the US authorities concerned on the incident of US romaine lettuce suspected to be contaminated with *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*). The CFS urged the trade to stop using and selling romaine lettuce harvested in California immediately should they possess it.

A spokesman for the CFS said, "The CFS has been closely following up on the US romaine lettuce incident and has earlier held all romaine lettuce from the US and Canada for testing at the import level. According to the latest information provided by the US Food and Drug Administration upon investigation, the outbreaks of *E. coli* infection were likely linked to romaine lettuce harvested in California. The CFS has decided to immediately suspend the import into and sale within Hong Kong of romaine lettuce harvested in the area concerned.

"The Centre will continue its surveillance of romaine lettuce harvested in other areas of the US at import and retail levels to safeguard food safety."

People will contract *E. coli* causing gastro-intestinal disease through consumption of contaminated water or undercooked and contaminated foods. Intestinal bleeding and serious complications such as haemolytic uraemic syndrome may also develop in some people. Moreover, due to poor personal hygiene, person-to-person transmission of this pathogen is possible through the oral-faecal route. *E. coli* cannot survive under high temperature and can be killed by thorough cooking.

The CFS urges the public not to consume romaine lettuce from California and unknown sources.

The CFS has informed the US authorities concerned of the import suspension and will alert the trade. It will continue to closely monitor the latest developments of the incident and take appropriate follow-up action. Investigation is ongoing.

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