



Review

Comparative study of imported food control systems of Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and the European Union



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ABSTRACT

The growth of the global food trade has increased significantly over the last two decades. The purpose of this review paper is to compare imported food safety controls in Taiwan, Japan, the United States, and the European Union. Our key findings are: 1) imported food of animal and non-animal origin is by separate, competent authorities in Taiwan, Japan, and the US, whereas it is controlled by a single authority in the EU, 2) foreign facilities require registration in the US and Japan, 3) importing high-risk food in the EU, Taiwan and Japan requires the competent authority to inspect the food chain process and facilities in the third country, whereas a US FDA's accredited third party auditor can do so in the US, 4) an advanced developed support systems for enabling the effectiveness and efficiency of imported food control can only be found in the EU and US. These findings may help the competent authorities responsible for imported food safety in Taiwan and the other countries to develop and enhance their own systems, not only to meet the international standards but importantly for the sake of public health protection.

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1. Introduction

The global trade in food is a complex and diverse operation which needs to take consideration of food quality and safety. An analysis of sixty-four countries by the World Trade Organization (WTO) stated that none of these countries has lessened their food imports between 1990 and 2015. During this period food imports increased by 342 percent in the United States, 101 percent in Japan, and 239 percent in Taiwan (WTO, 2015). The same pattern of imported food growth was also apparent in the European Union: 174 percent growth from 2000 to 2011.

In particular, due to a drawdown of agricultural production and arable land scarcity, Taiwan seems more reliant on imported food (Roberts, Hite, & Chorev, 2015). A recent report by the Food and Drug Administration in Taiwan (TFDA) showed an increase in imported food, amounting to 616,000 batches or 7,966,000 tons in 2014 (TFDA, 2015c). However, 1.4 percent of these foods were non-compliant. In addition, food scandals in Taiwan have degraded consumer confidence (Chen, 2008). These scandals, for example, the chemical adulteration of processed food (Peng et al., 2017), food-borne due to bacteria contamination (Cheng et al., 2013; Su, Chiu, Tsai, Lee, & Pan, 2005; TFDA, 2014), and the utilization of phthalates (Chen, 2011; Lu, 2011; Wu, Chang-Chien, Su, Chen, & Wu, 2014; Wu et al., 2012; Yang, Hauser, & Goldman, 2013). These finding have important implications for food producers, safety programs and policies. They might lead to consumers changing their purchasing habits, with consequent losses to producers, but more importantly they show that public health is exposed to risk and should be addressed appropriately.

With that in mind, a growing number of guidelines regulating food imports and exports has been established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) with the intention of improving food safety in all countries (CAC, 2005). However, these guidelines seem to be less influential in countries that tend to deal with foreign food manufacturers (Handford, Elliott, & Campbell, 2015; Kwak, 2014). In addition, not all countries have been able to follow the guidelines, in particular developing countries (Trienekens & Zuurbier, 2008).

Given these trends, this study systematically reviews and compares several imported food control systems in Taiwan, Japan, United States of America and European Union. Taiwan — as the fastest growing economy in Asia after Japan — is an appropriate benchmark for the Asian region. Taking into consideration that the European Union (EU) and United States (US) systems generally are used as an international standard they were an obvious choice as a comparator for this paper. These finding may help the competent authorities responsible for imported food safety in Taiwan and the other countries to develop and enhance their own systems to meet the international standards of traded food.

2. Methodology

Reviewing documents or reports is considered as an adequate approach to understand the subject, discover the gaps, investigate a possible solution, and draw a conclusion (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2012; Hart, 2001; Webster & Watson, 2002). In this

paper, data has been mainly obtained from the official government documents, reports, and websites of the competent authorities: Food and Drug Administration in Taiwan (<http://www.fda.gov.tw/EN/>), Ministry of Health and Welfare in Taiwan (www.mohw.gov.tw/EN/Ministry/index.aspx), Directorate-General for Health and Food (DG SANTE) in the European Union (ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_food-safety/index_en.htm), Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare in Japan (www.mhlw.go.jp/english/), Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) in Japan (www.jetro.go.jp/en/), Food and Drug Administration in the United States (www.fda.gov/), Department of Agriculture in the United States (www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome). In addition, we also used articles published by professional publishers and the official reports published by relevant authorities, such as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), World Trade Organization and World Health Organization (WHO). We considered only materials related to imported food safety control systems. We also discussed our project with professional experts in the field in a workshop at the “2016 International Symposium on Safety Management of Imported Foods” organized by Taiwan FDA in September 2016 in Taipei.

3. Results

The results we obtained yielded the list of the imported food control systems in four regions: Taiwan, Japan, the United States and the European Union. Later on a comparison is given.

3.1. Taiwan

3.1.1. Competent authority

The Committee of Food Safety under the auspices of Executive Yuan manages the food safety management in Taiwan (see Fig. 1). The Taiwan Food and Drug Administration (TFDA) under the Ministry of Health and Welfare is responsible of controlling the safety and sanitation of imported food and related food products in Taiwan (TFDA, 2013). Related bodies are the Bureau of Animal and Plant Health Inspection and Quarantine (BAPHIQ) under the Council of Agriculture, which controls the animal and plant health and quarantine (TFDA, 2015a, 2015d). In addition, the Custom Administration (CA) and Bureau of Foreign Trade (BOFT) are responsible for administration and fees (BOFT, 2010; TFDA, 2015d). To enable the coordination between government departments, the Office of Food Safety was established in 2014. Additionally, Department of Consumer Protection is responsible for ensuring the implementation of consumer protection affairs.

3.1.2. Legislation on imported food

The substantive legislation controlling imported food in Taiwan is the Act Governing Food Safety and Sanitation (TFDA, 2015b) which was last amended in 2015. In this act, food safety management was shifted from an industry orientation to a consumer orientation. It also emphasized that all actions taken by the competent authorities shall be based on risk assessment, scientific evidence, precaution, and information transparency to manage the risk. Furthermore, related legislation aims to control inspection and its procedures are contained in the Regulations for Inspection of

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