

## Inspection to assess quality of *Sekam* and unavailability of fresh pork in Thimphu

### A. Background

On November 16, 2022, the OCP received a complaint stating two issues: i) that meat vendors in Thimphu are selling *sekam* (cold dried sliced/stripped pork) which are not sufficiently dried; and ii) consumers are 'obliged' to buy *sekam*, which are priced approximately double the price of fresh pork. This allegedly deprives consumers of fresh pork and are obliged to pay high prices for *sekam* that is not fully dried.

### B. Coverage

To validate the complaint and to see what changes can be made, inspection was carried out on November 17, 2022 of a total of 16 meat shops located in Norzin Lamtag, Norzin Lam Wog (CFM area) Changzamtog, Hejo and Taba.

### C. Finding & Discussion

The Inspection Team found out the following:

- i. All pork available was said to be of local origin. Both *sekam* and fresh meat were available in almost all the shops,
- ii. *Sekam* is priced in the range of Nu. 650 to Nu 800 per kg, while fresh pork is priced at Nu. 450 per kg,
- iii. Except for those located at Norzin Lamwog, all other meat shops had a mix of 'properly dried' and 'partially dried' *sekam* displayed for sale,

According to the vendors, it takes a minimum of seven days to convert fresh meat into proper *sekam*. It is understood from them that there is weight loss of between 50 to 80 per cent when fresh meat is converted into *sekam*.

The reasons cited for selling even 'partially-dried' *sekam* at a higher price is also because of the extra work involved in processing fresh meat into *sekam*, such as freezing and slicing into strips, use of fans to cool dry and the higher wastages incurred during cutting.

Strips of meat are being dried within the shop, which is not in compliance with the ‘Guidelines on Safe Retailing of Mean and Meat Products in Bhutan’. Clause GA5.7 states that ‘*the drying of meat should not be allowed in the meat shop. It should be allowed only in spacious and properly ventilated rooms with insect nets in place and away from environmentally polluted areas.*’ Further clause GA5.8 stipulates that ‘*where necessary, an appropriate drying machine should be used for drying meat. Sun drying of meat openly outside should not be recommended.*’

#### **D. Recommendations**

Since both fresh pork and *sekam* are available, it was not possible to ascertain if shops refused fresh pork and compelled consumers to buy only the ‘partially-dried’ *sekam*. Nonetheless, to protect vulnerable consumers from being compelled to buying *sekam*, which is also not of premium quality, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The OCP should inform the Committee that fixes the Maximum Selling Prices of meat to also include *sekam* in that list.
- ii. The OCP should asked Department of Livestock/ BAFRA to develop a simple common quality standard for *sekam*, that can be enforced objectively,
- iii. The OCP should inform BAFRA on the observation on non-compliance by the meat vendors of clauses GA5.7 and GA5.8 of the Guidelines.
- iv. Inform the public on the need to complain to OCP directly if any meat vendor is denying sale of fresh pork at any point in time.

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