

China vows to ensure food safety as new law takes effect

Chinese authorities Sunday pledged to use the new Food Safety Law as a platform to intensify monitoring and law enforcement, hoping to curb repeated food scandals battering the industry's reputation and consumer confidence.

The law, approved by China's legislature three months ago, will go effective on Monday to replace the current Food Hygiene Law.

It aims to improve the efficiency of the food safety monitoring network through tougher standards, strict supervision, a recall system for substandard products and severe punishment of offenders.

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State departments of health, agriculture, quality supervision, industry and commerce administration, which shoulder different responsibilities, have made plans for the implementation of the law, Xinhua learned on Sunday.

The Ministry of Health, the leading authority to coordinate the law implementation, has drafted at least three supplementary government rules to regulate the making of food safety standards, the management of new products, and the control of food safety risks.

Two national panels of experts will be set up to oversee safety standards and safety risk control. A national risk control center will also be established to enhance the level of safety evaluation, detection of toxic ingredients, and risk precaution, said Health Minister Chen Zhu.

"We hope to complete a national surveillance network of food safety in two years, on the basis of disease control and medical service networks," he said.

Some old rules that are contradictory to the new law will be abolished or revised, he said.

Even before the new law was passed, the ministry has carried out nationwide campaigns to crack down on illegal use of uncertified additives into food products since December last year, he said.

Ministry of Agriculture, which is responsible for monitoring the safety of farm products, has been formulating regulations concerning the proper use of feed, feed additives and pesticide, and the quarantine of animals, said Deputy Minister Chen Xiaohua.

State Administration for Industry and Commerce vowed to enhance the supervision of food circulation market, particularly food retailers who are asked to ensure the safety of sold food.

Bian Zhenjia, deputy head of the State Food and Drug Administration, said the department would increase the awareness of catering industry to guarantee food safety through various steps, including a new certification system for restaurants to become effective on Monday.

Although China had certain food quality control systems in place for many years, lots of loopholes emerged in past years, mainly due to varied standards, lack of sense of social responsibility among some business people, too lenient punishment on violators and weakness in testing and monitoring work.

China has a food hygiene law, which took effect in 1995, to regulate issues of food safety. But it was outdated and the food monitoring system has long been blamed for lacking efficiency, which led to repeated scandals ranging from tainted dairy products to vegetables with excessive pesticide.

The adoption of the new food safety law was widely hailed as a landmark move to grapple the problems.

