

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: COVID-19 Disruptions to Cross Border Ground
Transportation Temporarily Shorten Vegetable Supplies

Country: Hong Kong

Post: Hong Kong

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the Economy, Agriculture in the News

Prepared By: Caroline Yuen

Approved By: Jennifer Clever

Report Highlights:

Detections of two COVID cases among Hong Kong drivers transporting vegetables from mainland created a backlog of vegetable trucks at the border and shortened Hong Kong vegetable supplies over the weekend. Traders expect lower supplies to continue in the coming weeks until the transport industry adapts to tighter health control measures at the border. Over the past few days, vegetable wholesale prices rose 20 percent while retail prices soared between 20 to 40 percent, according to various media reports. Hong Kong's daily production of fresh vegetables accounts for only 1.6 percent of its total consumption. In 2021, Hong Kong fresh vegetable imports rose 14 percent to \$812 million, China is its largest supplier. Imports of U.S. vegetables from the United States lowered 12 percent to \$17 million.

Over the weekend, fresh vegetables imports from China lowered drastically following the Chinese government's detection of two COVID-19 cases among Hong Kong cross border drivers transporting vegetables. The first case was detected on Friday, February 4. Reportedly, the Man Kam To border (the key border for food supplies from mainland) was immediately closed for several hours on February 4 to allow Chinese health officials to disinfect and conduct an investigation. Another Hong Kong truck driver tested positive for the virus on Saturday (February 5) while staying in a designated hotel. In response, officials tightened health controls causing a new round of backlogs of about 80 vegetable trucks stuck at the border for disinfection. Various local media outlets reported that the transportation of vegetables gradually resumed the evening of February 5, but the backlog took time to clear. Industry sources stated at one point there were 70 to 80 trucks at the border while the Hong Kong government stated 30.

According to the Hong Kong government, one driver did not fully declare the history of his whereabouts so all the close contacts of the two confirmed cases have to be quarantined in mainland China in order to stop the spread of the virus. Since then, the Chinese government has strengthened border controls. Effective February 7, all cross border drivers, in addition to the existing requirement of providing a negative COVID-19 test result within 24 hours, are subject to another COVID-19 test at the border. In addition, they are required to do a daily test if staying in China.

With the recent transport disruptions and stricter testing requirements at the border, Hong Kong was short of vegetables supplies over the weekend and is expected to have reduced supplies in the coming weeks until the transport industry can figure out and cope with the new health requirements. In the past few days, wholesale prices rose 20 percent while retail prices soared between 20 to 40 percent, according to local media.

While tighter COVID-19 precautionary measures are expected to last, acute shortages of vegetables are expected to be temporary. Given that Hong Kong relies prominently on food supplies from China, the Hong Kong government's respective departments are already in close contact with the Shenzhen authorities to work out new arrangements and solutions. The Hong Kong government, through media interviews, assured the public that although this development has shortened the supply of vegetables, the general supply situation is stable. In addition, the supply of meat, poultry, and eggs remains normal.

Hong Kong's daily local production of fresh vegetables is about 40 tons, only 1.6 percent of total consumption. In 2021, Hong Kong's global imports of fresh vegetables rose 14 percent to \$812 million. China is the largest supplier accounting for over 91 percent by volume and 80 percent by value. Hong Kong's imports of U.S. vegetables lowered 12 percent to \$17 million.

This latest development adds to the pain of Hong Kong consumers already grappling with high food prices as the pandemic has disrupted global supply chains and the government's tightening of health measures on cargo aircrews since January 2022 (see related [GAIN Report](#)).

Attachments:

No Attachments.