

## **Government sets up “Agricultural Food Safety Services Zone” to clarify food safety rumors on the internet**

Min-Hsien Yang, Professor, Feng Chia University, Taiwan

Mei-Chen Lo, Assistant Professor, National United University, Taiwan

*Source: Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, Taiwan*

It is true that Eating more hormone ripening pineapple could cause sickness, using potions could hasten the ripening of bananas? Tomatoes contain then fatal *Solanum nigrum* alkaloid, really? A lot of friends forward these seemingly controversial messages, and many people are unable to distinguish between true and false information. So they directly refuse dealings with these agricultural products, and also indirectly hurt peasants. The Council of Agriculture (COA) said, that in order for consumers to be more direct, the proper obtaining of agricultural food safety related information, could result in misunderstanding-issues to ordinary people. So there should be focus on collecting and classifying those related information, and create a list of Food Safety frequently asked questions (FAQ). On the COA website, in a set up entitled “Agricultural Food Safety services zone”, the site is supported by more than 100 experts and scholars to explain and comment on concerned food safety issues.

The COA explains that the site of “Agricultural Food Safety services zone”, has combined several subordinate organizations, experimental/improved laboratories, expertise from more than 100 domain experts and scholars. Currently, aggregated collection contains more than 100 questions in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, livestock and other products which are frequently informative and dealing with consumer issues. In addition, if people have any doubts about the public safety of agricultural products, they can use the site function "I have something to say" to ask question in the zone, within 7 work-days, they can receive a reply from experts in the field. Also, consumers in the service zone found the answers to questions, they can also press the “Share” button to share via Facebook and other social network sites with more friends, so that the correct information can be clarified and quickly proliferate in the network.

Many people receive most information from the Internet. Therefore, the spread of information from the Internet or network connections may mix with lots of rumors which are misleading. For example, recently users turn to forward message about Tomatoes containing *Solanum nigrum* alkaloid, which in fact is the alkaloid-containing tomato, its structure is different from *Solanum nigrum* alkaloid. Furthermore, alkaloid content will decrease as tomatoes ripen. And the consumption has no effect on the public’s food safety issue. COA, as an agricultural authority consists of all kinds of crop specialists, responsible to react instantly and effect response to consumers through this special service site (zone) in order to make a

clear explanation to avoid false information which continually spread around.

COA appeals to people who are receiving agriculture-related information from network contacts, they can visit the website of "Agricultural Food Safety Service Zone" (<http://www.coa.gov.tw>) to confirm the accuracy of information content, and avoid malicious messages spread by innocent people or those who are interested in deliberately spreading false rumors. They could influence market prices, which result in causing consumers to panic, letting many hard working farmers lose everything from their harvest, but also invade consumers' rights. This website zone-service provides justice and truly factual (communication platform) and sincerely invites people to join and care for Taiwan's high-quality agricultural products.

Date submitted: May 5, 2015

Reviewed, edited and uploaded: May 6, 2015