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Study on the Personal Submission of Agricultural Product Samples for Quality and Safety Inspection

Dan ZHAO¹, Yan WANG², Yongzhi ZHANG³, Yehan CUI², Pengcheng LIU², Yunlong ZHOU², Yueru LI^{1*}

1. Quality Supervision and Testing Center of the Ministry of Agriculture for Ginseng and Antler Products, Jilin Agricultural University, Changchun 130118, China; 2. Technology Development Center of the Ministry of Agriculture, Beijing 100122, China; 3. Quality and Safety Supervision and Testing Center of the Ministry of Agriculture for Agricultural Products and GMO Products, Hangzhou 310021, China

Abstract This paper carries out a questionnaire survey on 30 quality inspection institutions at the level of the Ministry of Agriculture, and based on systematic analysis, analyzes the causes of difficulties in personal submission of samples for inspection from six aspects in order to meet the real needs of personal submission of agricultural product samples for inspection under the new situation. In accordance with the actual situation of China's current regulatory system and quality control system, this paper sets forth the relevant recommendations to correctly guide the personal submission of samples for inspection and promote the development of quality inspection system.

Key words Agricultural products, Personal submission of samples for inspection, Causes, Recommendations

1 Introduction

The quality and safety of agricultural products are related to people's health and life safety, and in recent years, issues concerning the quality and safety of agricultural products have caused great concern among the majority of consumers and production industries. Both government institutions and individuals are trying to explore solutions to this major livelihood problem. Based on the demands of production safety, food safety and protection of consumers' rights, there is an increasingly strong demand for testing the quality and safety of agricultural products, and more and more consumers send the product to testing departments for identification. However, there are reports in recent years on personal submission of samples for inspection being rejected by quality inspection institution, and consumers find no way to submit samples for inspection, causing a tremendous negative impact in the society. Based on the survey of demand for personal submission of agricultural product samples for inspection, this paper makes a preliminary analysis of difficulties in personal submission of samples for inspection and puts forth the specific recommendations.

2 Survey of current personal submission of agricultural product samples for inspection

In July 2013, Technology Development Center of the Ministry of Agriculture conducted a survey of 50 agricultural quality inspection institutions, and called back 30 valid questionnaires. The inspection of the quality inspection institutions surveyed covers food, agricultural products, and agricultural inputs. The survey focus is the personal submission of samples for inspection, share in all en-

trusted task, reception situation, cause analysis, and purpose of submitting samples for inspection.

2.1 The practical needs of personal submission of samples for inspection According to survey results, 70.4% of 30 quality inspection institutions have accepted personal submission of samples for testing (see Fig. 1), and the samples involve meat products, aquatic products, vegetables, fruits, eggs and their products, milk products, and agricultural inputs. The purpose of inspection is mainly focused on "production needs", "rights safeguarding" and "food safety", and particularly the first two account for more than 60% (see Fig. 2). The survey of actual demand for personal submission of agricultural product samples for inspection demonstrates that there are "many" behaviors of personal submission of samples for inspection in 25.9% of quality inspection institutions; there are "a few" behaviors of personal submission of samples for inspection in 44.4% of quality inspection institutions; there are "few" behaviors of personal submission of samples for inspection in 29.6% of quality inspection institutions.

2.2 Reasons for personal submission of agricultural product samples for inspection (i) Production needs. More and more individuals and cooperative organizations submit the ready samples for testing to solve production problems, improve production mode, promote large-scale production, and increase income. The quality inspection institutions have become important technical support for agricultural production and consumption. (ii) Rights safeguarding needs. The food safety incidents sometimes occur, and consumers do not trust the quality of products, leading a strong demand for the detection. The personal submission of samples for inspection has become an important means of self-protection in the food safety incidents. (iii) Food safety needs. People are increasingly concerned about the safety of fruits, vegetables, meat and eggs, and "safety" is a word that people are most worried about.

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* Corresponding author. E-mail: lycszx6407@126.com

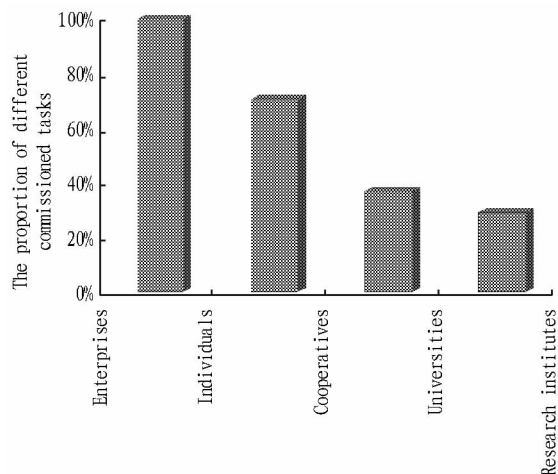


Fig. 1 The proportion of different commissioned tasks of inspection

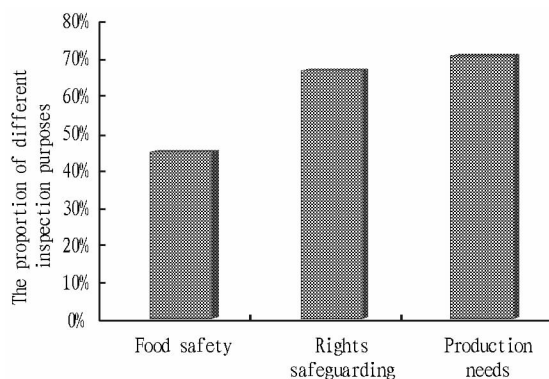


Fig. 2 The proportion of different inspection purposes

2.3 The testing institutions' attitude towards the personal submission of samples for inspection Survey results show that 14.8% of 30 quality inspection institutions will not accept the personal submission while the remaining 85.2% of institutions have indicated that they will normally receive individual submission. As to the reasons for the refusal of personal submission of samples for inspection, 48.1% of institutions opt for "many other tasks", and only 3.3% of institutions opt for "institutional provision". From this, we can see that the quality inspection institutions hold a positive attitude towards personal submission of samples for inspection.

2.4 Lack of laws and regulations concerning personal submission of samples for inspection As of now, there are no clear national laws and regulations providing the rights and obligations between testing organization and submission party during the personal submission of samples for inspection agricultural products. Although the State General Administration for Quality Supervision pointed out that the consumers should test the products in the hands amid "melamine incident" in 2008, it is recommended to contact the local qualified inspection institutions. It should be noted that it is a civil act for the consumers to commission inspection institutions to test melamine, and the test results are only responsible for the samples submitted. However, these measures are

only expedient when responding to the emergencies, and they do not have a long term effect.

3 Causes of difficulties in personal submission of samples for inspection

3.1 Conflicts between quality inspection institutions' social responsibility and legal dispute concerns Some quality inspection institutions refuse to accept personal submission of samples for inspection in a way to avoid legal proceedings. Through research, it is found that 37% of quality inspection institutions have not yet conducted inspection arbitration tasks and the arbitration tasks of nearly 40.7% of quality inspection institutions are less than 1% of annual tasks, as shown in Fig. 2. The personally submitted samples for safeguarding rights account for about two-thirds of total personally submitted samples for inspection.

3.2 Conflict between personally required testing items and quality inspection institutions' testing capability For all the qualified testing organizations, the scope of inspection activities they can carry out is clearly defined in the certification form. But in practice, the detection parameters of personal submitted samples do not fall within the scope of certification, making the testing institutions refuse to test. In addition, from the survey results, some submission persons are unable to explain clearly the testing items. Due to the temporary lack of detection method for some submitted samples, the testing institutions have no choice but to reject.

3.3 Conflict between the government task and individual task Since 2001, the Ministry of Agriculture has gradually established the routine monitoring system for the quality and safety of agricultural products. Currently, the monitoring scope has covered 150 cities, 80 kinds of agricultural products and 87 test parameters. With the expanding and deepening of supervision and inspection of the quality and safety of agricultural products, the testing institutions assume more and more government-directed tasks. The survey results (Fig. 3–5) show that almost all of the ministerial-level testing institutions are undertaking tasks commissioned by the government; the tasks commissioned by the government are more than half of annual tasks for more than 50% of testing institutions; the tasks of personal submission of samples for inspection are less than 1% of annual tasks for more than 50% of testing institutions; nearly 50% of testing institutions reject the personal submission of samples for inspection due to numerous government tasks.

3.4 Conflict between authenticity of products submitted for inspection and rights safeguarding For the testing institutions, the authenticity of samples submitted by government departments and manufacturers is most reliable, and the inspection report will mark the product manufacturers and trademarks. If the samples are personally submitted, it is difficult to prove the authenticity of the product. In the test report, there are only test results, so it is difficult to take the test report as the basis of rights safeguarding, which is also one of the reasons for individuals' reluctance to submit samples for inspection.

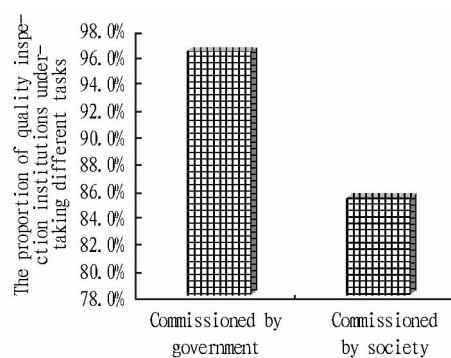


Fig. 3 The proportion of quality inspection institutions undertaking different tasks

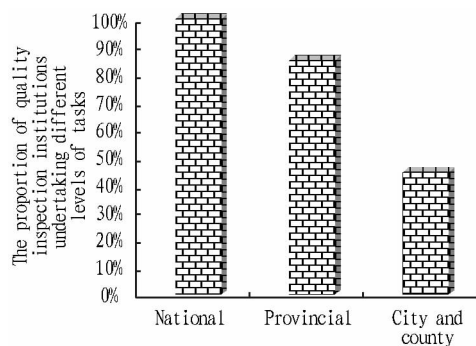


Fig. 4 The proportion of quality inspection institutions undertaking different levels of tasks

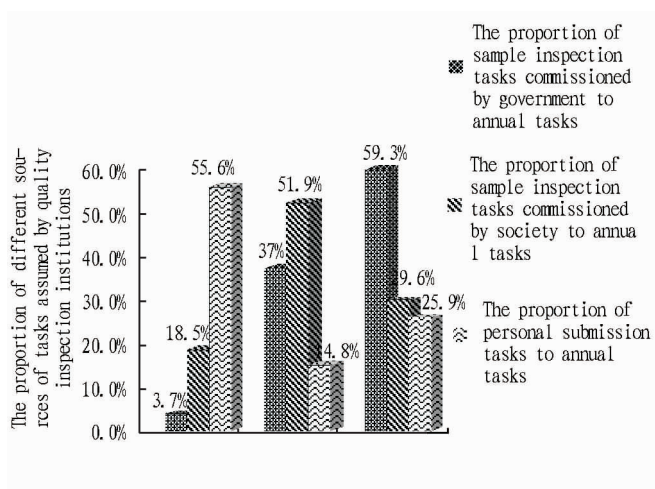


Fig. 5 The proportion of different sources of tasks assumed by quality inspection institutions

4 Recommendations

4.1 Formulating the relevant laws and regulations and improving the relevant system In order to meet the needs of personal submission of samples for inspection, the relevant state departments should introduce the relevant regulations and policies to stipulate the social welfare responsibility assumed by the testing institutions to accept consumers' personal submission of samples for inspection. At the same time, different departments should improve the policies to ensure the interests of individuals and quality inspection institutions.

4.2 Developing the rapid detection products and improving the rapid detection standards For nitrite, melamine and other common harmful substances easy to detect, the use of rapid detection products for testing can meet the basic requirements. It is necessary to develop rapid detection products and constantly improve the rapid detection standards. Meanwhile, the government departments should improve the evaluation mechanism for rapid detection method and qualify the reliable rapid detection method to make the rapid detection method really work.

4.3 Scientifically using test results to avoid unnecessary economic losses With the increasing demand for personal submission of samples for inspection, there are no corresponding legal regulations on the reporting of personal submission of samples for inspection. Once some results having not been confirmed by professionals are made public, it may bring litigation risks to submission individuals. Therefore, when consumers want to test samples for rights safeguarding, the submission of samples can be jointly commissioned by government departments, consumer council and production companies to avoid unnecessary economic losses.

4.4 Correctly guiding personal submission of samples for inspection and giving full play to the function of management departments There are myriad types of food and agricultural products, involving a wide field, and testing is a highly professional job which requires participants to have high professional level, so the consumers should not blindly submit the samples to quality inspection institutions for inspection. The local administrative department of agriculture should lead the testing of agricultural products to guard a pass for the public by virtue of professionals in the department.

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