

## LETTERS

## ADULTERATION OF THE FOOD CHAIN

# Fake meat scandals add to Chinese food fears

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First there were 20 000 dead pigs floating down the Huangpu river,<sup>1 2</sup> a main source of water for Shanghai city. That was followed by thousands of dead ducks in the Nanhe river in the southwest province of Sichuan. Dead pigs and ducks had been used in the production of fake meat. Farmers in Fujian province who were contracted to destroy diseased pigs have been detained for allegedly selling the carcasses collected from farms and roadsides to restaurants in neighbouring provinces.

Now the Ministry of Public Safety says that it has apprehended meat traders in eastern China who were passing rat off as lamb. The police arrested 63 suspects accused of selling rat labelled as lamb for more than \$1.6m (£1.1m; €1.2m). As well as the scandals involving pigs, ducks, and lamb, the Public Security Ministry says there have been at least another 10 meat scandals recently involving cattle and chickens. If this state of affairs does not change, the consequences of similar cases could be extremely serious.

Meat smuggling and food adulteration are rampant in China. In these cases, the suspects are accused of using gelatin, red pigment, and nitrates to alter the dead pigs, ducks, and rats. Chinese food production is now on a larger scale and more technological, and sophisticated technology is being used to beat regulators and cheat customers. Tainted meats are an ongoing problem. China's government says it is making food safety a top priority in the first year of president Xi Jinping's leadership.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Wise J. "Bute" in horse meat presents very low risk to health, says England's chief medical officer. *BMJ* 2013;346:f1066. (15 February.)
- 2 Liu CY, Hua J. Dead pigs scandal questions China's public health policy. *Lancet* 2013;381:1539.

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