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منظمة  
الغذية والزراعة  
للأمم المتحدة

# COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

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### International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex): Updates on International Standard Setting

#### I. Introduction

1. FAO is hosting the Secretariats of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex). These two bodies are recognized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in its Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures, as the international standard setting bodies together with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE).
2. The standards developed by the IPPC and Codex have become the benchmarks against which national SPS measures and regulations are evaluated within the legal parameters of the WTO Agreements. This ensures that these standards are science-based reference points for WTO members should a trade dispute arise.
3. This document provides the updates of the standards setting activities of the IPPC and Codex to protect plant and human health and to ensure fair practices in relevant trade.

#### II. Recent developments in common for the IPPC and Codex

4. The FAO introduced a new framework in formulating the Medium Term Plan 2014-17 and Programme of Work and Budget 2014-15, and reformulated its thematic Strategic Objectives (SOs). In doing so, the standard setting activities of the IPPC and Codex were located mainly under FAO's Strategic Objective 4 (SO4) and partially under SO2. In parallel to this development and as a partial response to the results of statutory body discussions, the status of the two Secretariats of the IPPC and Codex have been shifted from divisional units to departmental units and are now under the direct supervision of the Assistant Director-General, Agriculture and Consumer Protection Department (AG).
5. Coordination in such planning has facilitated more collaborative actions between the two Secretariats, often involving the FAO food safety unit, also part of AG Department, which supports the development and implementation of the Codex standards. Examples include: i) the use, maintenance and further development of the On-line Comment System (OCS) which was originated by the IPPC<sup>1</sup>; ii) coordination for the WTO SPS Committee and for the participation under the

<sup>1</sup> The OCS, developed and introduced by the IPPC Secretariat in 2011, allows members to provide their comments on draft ISPMs directly to the Secretariat electronically with increased efficiency.

*This document can be accessed using the Quick Response Code on this page;  
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Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), which is a global partnership and of which the FAO is a partner; and iii) coordination regarding the possible impacts from the recently agreed WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (ATF), for which the legal review process is taking place based on the agreement made at the WTO Ministerial Meeting at Bali in 2013.

6. Regarding the WTO ATF, the results of the legal review will have been reported and published for initiating national process by the time of the COAG meeting. For this new agreement, concerns have been expressed in terms of the possible diverse interpretation mainly due to the unclear coverage with articles of exceptions<sup>2</sup>. The Secretariats of IPPC and CODEX, in collaboration with other relevant units in the Organization, will seek possible contributions to facilitate implementation of ATF as necessary.

### **III. The International Plant Protection Convention**

7. Currently, 181 contracting parties adhere to the New Revised Text of the IPPC that entered into force in October 2005. The Commission on Phytosanitary Measures (CPM) meets annually and the inter-sessional work is overseen by the CPM Bureau composed of representatives of the seven FAO Regional Groups. The Bureau provides guidance to the IPPC Secretariat and CPM on strategic direction, cooperation, financial and operational management. One of the primary outputs of the CPM is the adoption of new International Phytosanitary Measures (ISPMs) or standards within the IPPC Strategic Framework.

8. Through the development of ISPMs, contracting parties share the same goal: to protect the worlds' cultivated and natural plant resources from the spread and introduction of plant pests while minimizing interference with the international movement of goods and people<sup>3</sup>.

9. The IPPC Secretariat works with a number of international partners in order to implement the CPM work programme. These include the WTO, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the Inter-American Development (IDB) Bank, and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

#### ***Current Status and Recent Developments***

10. Despite continuous critical financial conditions facing the IPPC Secretariat, the past two years have seen some significant success. Four new contracting parties have joined the IPPC bringing the total membership to 181. The number of the adopted ISPMs has reached 36, plus 15 phytosanitary treatments and 4 diagnostic protocols in total. Additional standards are presented to CPM each year for adoption.

11. While the IPPC has the primary task of development of ISPMs, the CPM recently recognized that the ability to nationally implement those standards is equally important<sup>4</sup>. The emphasis on capacity development is based on the implementation of the phytosanitary capacity building strategic framework adopted by the CPM. The IPPC Capacity Development Committee (CDC), which started its work in 2011, has established the procedures, collected and analysed the relevant information available, developed the tools, manuals and the Phytosanitary Resources Page<sup>5</sup> to facilitate the information sharing.

12. The IPPC has continuously facilitated the use of the Phytosanitary Capacity Evaluation (PCE) in developing countries, which helped the countries to have a clear understanding of their own phytosanitary capacity at a particular time, obtain a national framework for strategic planning to

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<sup>2</sup> An example is the CPM document (CPM 2014/29), available at: [https://www.ippc.int/sites/default/files/documents/20140327/cpm\\_2014\\_29\\_implications\\_wto\\_agreement\\_on\\_trade\\_facilitation\\_en\\_only\\_2014\\_03\\_27\\_201403271730--230.43%20KB.pdf](https://www.ippc.int/sites/default/files/documents/20140327/cpm_2014_29_implications_wto_agreement_on_trade_facilitation_en_only_2014_03_27_201403271730--230.43%20KB.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The adopted ISPMs are available on the International Phytosanitary Portal (IPP) at: <https://www.ippc.int/>, and more specifically at: <https://www.ippc.int/core-activities/standards-setting/ispms>

<sup>4</sup> Technical assistance has been always recognized in the Convention, but in reality the relevant activities were limited and only small portion of financial resources were allocated in the past.

<sup>5</sup> Available at: <http://www.phytosanitary.info/>

prioritize national activities/resources, and have the basis for dialogue with donors of development aid.

13. An Implementation Review and Support System (IRSS), at the beginning stage of its second phase, continues to facilitate and promote the national implementation of the IPPC and ISPMs. Based on the experiences in the past few years, the discussions emerge on how to improve the overall implementation of the IPPC.

14. As contracting parties are generally still weak in meeting their information exchange obligations, or national reporting obligations, under the IPPC, greater focus is now on the efforts to improve the reporting situation.

15. The IPPC Financial Committee (FC), established at the adoption of the IPPC Strategic Framework in 2011, has improved the IPPC financial reporting and budgeting process, which may help the resource mobilization efforts of the IPPC.

16. In order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the IPPC Secretariat through, e.g. optimizing the organizational structure, the CPM in 2014 approved an external evaluation of the Secretariat's structure and operations. The evaluation is currently underway engaging the Evaluation Office of FAO and an external expert panel, and is expected to be completed by end of 2014.

#### **IV. The Codex Alimentarius Commission**

17. The Codex Alimentarius Commission held its first session in 1963. The Commission is convened in the framework of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. Its objectives are to protect the health of consumers, to ensure fair practices in international food trade, and to coordinate food standardization work undertaken by international organizations. As of June 2014, its membership includes 185 member countries and one Member Organization. It is also open to 224 international organizations (governmental and non-governmental) which have been admitted as observers as they have met specific criteria. Sessions of the Commission and of its Executive Committee are normally held in Rome or Geneva.

18. There are currently more than 300 Codex standards and related texts on all aspects of food safety and quality, more than 3000 Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides, 3000 maximum levels for food additives and more than 500 MRLs for veterinary drugs. These standards are a reference in international trade as the Codex Alimentarius Commission is specifically mentioned under the WTO SPS Agreement as regards food safety, while reference to international standards applies to Codex under the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

#### ***Current Status and Recent Developments***

19. During the 2012-2013 biennium, 35 sessions of Codex subsidiary bodies were held and the Commission adopted more than 50 new standards and related texts, including several codes of practice for the prevention of chemical or microbiological contamination. The Commission finalized implementation of its Strategic Plan 2008- 2013. The Commission also agreed to establish a new Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs hosted by India.

20. In recent years the systematic approach to risk analysis was completed in all areas of food safety: microbiological contamination, additives, contaminants, residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs, and the risk analysis framework is under regular review to address emerging food safety issues. In order to establish Codex food safety standards, Codex committees rely on the scientific advice provided by FAO and WHO through their joint expert committees, such as JECFA (Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives) and JMPR (Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues) as well as expert consultations.

21. In 2003, FAO and WHO established the 12 year FAO/WHO Project and Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex, funded by voluntary contributions and administered by WHO on behalf of both organizations, which resulted in a significant increase in participation of developing countries and is complementary to other technical cooperation activities.

22. This biennium, the Commission will begin the implementation of new strategic plan and programme of work, including the convening of 33 sessions of specialized committees. The 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission was held in July 2014 in Geneva. In addition to its main task of standard-setting, it considered general issues, such as the successor to the Codex Trust Fund, the monitoring of its Strategic Plan 2014-2019, and the activities of FAO and WHO complementary to Codex work. The 38<sup>th</sup> Session will be held in July 2015 in Geneva.

23. In order to ensure that Codex standards address recurring and emerging food safety issues in an efficient manner, it is essential that FAO and WHO continue to provide timely and high quality scientific advice to the Codex programme.