

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of
the United Nations



World Health
Organization

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TO: - Codex Contact Points
- Interested International Organizations

FROM: Secretariat,
Codex Alimentarius Commission
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme

SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR COMMENTS ON NEW WORK ON WARE POTATOES

DEADLINE: 15 November 2013

COMMENTS: To:
Secretariat,
Codex Alimentarius Commission,
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme,
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BACKGROUND

1. The 17th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables considered a proposal for new work on a Codex Standard for Ware Potatoes and had an extensive discussion on the need for a commercial quality standard for this product, relevance of up-taking this work in light of Codex main objectives of protecting of consumers' health and ensuring fair trade practices as well as feasibility to develop such a standard by the CCFV.
2. An extract of the discussion on this matter at the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, the Executive Committee and the Codex Alimentarius Commission are provided below to ease the reference. The full details on the discussion of this issue can be found in the reports of the 17th session of the CCFV (September 2012), the 68th session of the CCEXEC (June 2013), and the 36th session of the CAC (July 2013) available at: <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/> by clicking on "Meetings and Reports", 2013.
3. At the 17th session of the CCFV, many delegations supported a proposal for new work on a Codex Standard for Ware Potato as timely because of the high trade volume of this produce and the intention of more countries to trade the product internationally which had in some cases founded difficult. It was therefore necessary for Codex to fulfill its mandate to protect consumers and to promote fair practices in the food trade by establishing a standard for this produce.
4. The delegation of the European Union mentioned that there was no EU standard for the commercial quality of potatoes although the potato industry was among the most important worldwide. While recognizing the importance of international trade in potato, the delegation noted that, as the proposal had been received very late, there had been no time to consult with the national stakeholders in order to take a position on this request. The delegation noted, that developing a standard for a produce that was produced worldwide and traded in high volumes internationally, might be difficult. The delegation also noted also that it should be clear which problems were to be addressed by the standard as in its opinion the main issues in international trade of potato were not related to quality issues but to phytosanitary issues, which were not within the competence of this Committee. Other delegations also noted that they needed more time to consult with their stakeholders before taking a position.
5. A delegation mentioned a specific case where all phyto-sanitary issues concerning export of ware potatoes to the European Union had been solved however, the export had not been possible because of quality requirements in the national standard of one EU member state.

6. The Representative from United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) informed the Committee that UNECE had established a standard for early and ware potatoes and that there was also an OECD explanatory brochure based on the UNECE standard for early and ware potatoes. Some delegations mentioned that the work already done by the UNECE could serve as a basis for the new Codex standard. A delegation reported that discussions in the UNECE on important standardization issues such as quality classes and a unique reference method to determine the cooking type, which was important consumer information, had not been resolved in years of discussion resulting in a UNECE standard without the relevant section on classification.

7. The majority of delegations agreed to forward the project document to the CCEXEC and the CAC requesting approval of new work for the establishment of a Codex standard for ware potato recognizing that this would give countries around 10 month time to consult with their stakeholders and to make any relevant comments at the 36th session of the CAC. This would allow Codex to move forward in a timely manner to establish a standard for this important produce.

8. Several other delegations agreed that more time was needed to take a decision and supported to annex the project document to the report of the session and to request all members and observers to consult with their stakeholders in order to take a decision on a way forward at the 18th Session of the CCFFV in early 2014, in this case a decision on the approval of new work could be taken at its 37th session of the CAC in mid 2014. These delegations noted that time was needed not only to consult with their stakeholders but also to come up with a clear project document identifying the difficulties that might arise with the international standardization of ware potatoes. The current project document did not clearly identified whether the produce was amenable to standardization and this was an important criterion for the CCEXEC and the CAC when examining proposals for new work. They were also concerned that, by moving too quickly, a technical discussion that should be held in the CCFFV would be moved to the CAC level, which was not preferable.

9. The Committee agreed with the proposal of the Chair to approve new work on a Codex Standard for Ware Potato. The Committee acknowledged the views of several delegations that, while not opposing the development of the standard, indicated that more time was needed to consult with their stakeholders as the proposal was received late. However, the Committee noted that the period between this session and the next session of the CCEXEC would allow for sufficient time for countries to consult with their stakeholders and bring any concerns to the CAC in relation to the approval of this new work.¹

10. At the 68th session of the CCEXEC, two Members proposed to return this proposal for further discussion to the CCFFV for the following reasons: the proposal had been submitted very late; it had not been possible for delegations to consult with their national experts; no substantial technical discussion had taken place in the session; the proposal did not take into account the views of the major producers and exporters of potato; and no specific issues had been identified in international trade. Another member noted that the process had been followed as the discussion on new work had taken place in the CCFFV.

11. The Executive Committee recommended that new work should not proceed and that the proposal should be returned to the CCFFV for further consideration of technical issues.²

12. At the 36th session of the CAC, many delegations intervened in favor of approving new work on a standard for ware potatoes at the present session, as ware potatoes were widely produced, traded and consumed all around the world. Many countries were either importers or exporters, or consumers of potatoes and thus there was a need for an international reference. In their view technical discussions could be held when discussing the proposed draft standard in the CCFFV and there had been sufficient time since the last session of the CCFFV for all delegations to consult with their national experts. A delegation mentioned that setting a standard for ware potatoes fit well with the new strategic plan. Another delegation recalled that FAO had celebrated the International Year of the Potato in 2008 and that potatoes were one of the most important products in the world to ensure food security and poverty reduction and that a Codex standard could make an important contribution to its trade.

13. Many delegations intervened in support of the recommendation of the CCEXEC and said that as the proposal for new work had been submitted very late, it had not been possible to consult with national experts and thus no substantial technical discussion had been possible in the CCFFV. They were of the opinion that the scope of the proposal should be very clearly defined and agreed in the CCFFV before new work could be approved. Several delegations mentioned that the international trade volume of ware potatoes was low, that the proposal did not take into account the views of the major potato producers and exporters and that no specific international trade issues had been identified. A delegation said that they did not see the urgency of starting new work. If new work was started it should be on the basis of a common understanding that the standard did not deal with safety issues but with quality. Another delegation said that it should be evaluated if there were any issues in the international trade of potatoes that could be addressed by a quality standard.

¹ REP13/FFV, paras. 111-124.

² REP13/EXEC, paras. 52-54.

14. A delegation said that there was clearly a lot of support for starting new work on ware potatoes, however there were many other delegations who wished to have more technical discussions in the CCFFV before agreeing on new work. The delegation suggested to have a clear project document otherwise the development of the standard could be problematic. Another delegation supported the intervention and requested the Chair to define the scope of the discussion within the CCFFV, as it should be clear that the discussion should not be opened on whether or not to proceed with the elaboration of a standard, but the discussion should focus on the scope of the standard and the technical aspects.

15. The Commission recognized the importance of starting new work on ware potatoes in view of the importance of the production, consumption and trade and requested the CCFFV to submit a clear project document with a well defined scope for consideration at the next sessions of CCEXEC and the CAC. In order to assist preparation of the project document, the Codex Secretariat will prepare a circular letter in accordance with the format for project documents as contained in the Codex Procedural Manual.³

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

16. The Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables elaborates worldwide standards as may be appropriate for fresh fruits and vegetables mainly addressing issues related to the commercial quality of these products. Safety issues related to fresh fruits and vegetables such as hygiene provisions, maximum levels for contaminants, maximum residue limits for pesticides, etc. are usually addressed by cross-referencing the appropriate safety texts developed by the pertinent horizontal safety commodities e.g. Committees on Food Hygiene, Contaminants, Pesticide Residues, etc. therefore they are not subject to discussion in the CCFFV.

17. Codex Members and Observers are invited to submit relevant information in the format of a project document. The full list of criteria required for a project document including the *Criteria for the establishment of work priorities* are reproduced in the Annex for easy of reference. In addition, the *Guidelines on the application of the criteria for the establishment of work priorities applicable to commodities* are also reproduced in the Annex to assist Codex members and observers in providing relevant information for the criterion concerned. These documents are contained in the Procedural Manual available at: <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/> by clicking on "Procedures and Strategies".

18. Criteria (1); (2); (3); (4); (5); (6); (8) and (9) are particularly important for the development of agricultural quality standards developed by the CCFFV. In addition, criteria (b); (d); (e) and (g) are of particular relevance for the development of a quality standard for ware potatoes in addition to any relevant information that countries may wish to provide on the other criteria.

19. The project document as considered by the CCFFV and presented to the CCEXEC and the CAC for consideration are available for information / consultation in Appendix VI of the report of the 17th session of the CCFFV (REP13/FFV).

³ REP13/CAC, paras. 107-117.

ANNEX

PROJECT DOCUMENT

- (1) Purpose and scope of the standard;
- (2) Relevance and timeliness;
- (3) Main aspects to be covered;
- (4) An assessment against the *Criteria for the establishment of work priorities*;
- (5) Relevance to the Codex strategic objectives;
- (6) Information on the relation between the proposal and other existing Codex documents;
- (7) Identification of any requirement for and availability of expert scientific advice;
- (8) Identification of any need for technical input to the standard from external bodies so that this can be planned for;
- (9) Proposed time-line for completion of the new work, including the start date, proposed date for adoption at Step 5, and proposed date for adoption by the Commission. The time frame for developing a standard should not normally exceed five years.

CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES

General criterion

Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries.

Criteria applicable to commodities

- (a) Volume of production and consumption in individual countries and volume and pattern of trade between countries;
- (b) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade;
- (c) International or regional market potential;
- (d) Amenability of the commodity to standardization;
- (e) Coverage of the main consumer protection and trade issues by existing or proposed general standards;
- (f) Number of commodities which would need separate standards indicating whether raw, semi-processed or processed;
- (g) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies).

GUIDELINES ON THE APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES APPLICABLE TO COMMODITIES

1. These Guidelines provide guidance on the application of the criteria, including the information that needs to be examined by the Executive Committee while performing the Critical Review, in accordance with points (a) through (g) in the *Criteria applicable to commodities for the establishment of work priorities*.

2. In principle, an evidence-based approach that addresses multiple factors shall be taken when the Executive Committee examines proposals of new work to develop or revise commodity standards. Therefore, project proposals (project documents) for commodity standards should contain information indicated below.

(a) Volume of production and consumption in individual countries and volume and pattern of trade between countries

Information should be provided on:

- volume of production and consumption in individual countries expressed in monetary terms, tons, proportion of GDP⁴, etc.;
- volume and patterns of trade, including trends in trade volume and patterns, expressed in monetary terms, tons, proportion of GDP⁴, etc.:
 - between countries,
 - in intra-regional trade, i.e., between or among countries of a region,
 - in inter-regional trade, i.e., between or among regions.
- credible sources or citations of information and/or references in order to support credibility of the above information, if possible.

Note: When proposing to develop a regional standard, the coordinating committee concerned should fully take into account paragraph (d) of the Terms of Reference of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (Section V of the Procedural Manual), and provide well-documented and objective evidence that there is significant intra-regional trade, and that there is no significant trade, between or within other regions. This requirement will help to avoid the development of more than one standard for the same (or similar) product in different regions.

In case there is substantial production and trade of a regional commodity in countries outside the region, the Executive Committee should recommend to the concerned commodity committee to consider elaborating a global standard taking into account its work program.

(b) Diversification of national legislation and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade

Information should be provided on existence of diverse national legislation that may lead to potential or actual impediments to international trade. Evidence of impediments may be provided as quantitative information on volume and/or frequency of rejection of consignments, as expressed, for example, as absolute numbers or as rates of rejection.

(c) International or regional market potential

Information should be provided on:

- international and/or regional market potential; and, where necessary,
- potential of regional products to enter international trade, including an analysis of current production trends as well as market potential in the foreseeable future.

(d) Amenability of the commodity to standardization

Information should be provided on:

- which quality factors are essential for the identity of the product e.g. definition, composition, etc.,
- characteristics of the commodity (e.g. differences in definition, composition, and other quality factors that may vary across countries and regions) that would have to be accommodated in the standard.

⁴ Information on the volume or percentage of trade (import/export) in the commodity may be useful to demonstrate that trade in the commodity represents a significant proportion of the domestic economy of the relevant country or countries.

(e) Coverage of the main consumer protection and trade issues by existing or proposed general standards

Information should be provided on whether there are overlaps or gaps with existing standards. If gaps or overlaps are identified, the new work proposal should explain why revision of the existing standard is not sufficient to meet the need for a standard.

Note: This information is required in order to identify whether there are gaps between the proposed new work and existing standards or standards under elaboration. This analysis is necessary to avoid the elaboration of new standards when revision of existing standards, or of certain provisions in existing standards, would adequately address the concern.

If overlaps are identified, it may be possible to propose that new work should be started, while suggesting that existing standards should also be considered for revision to avoid inconsistency or overlap.

(f) Number of commodities which would need separate standards indicating whether raw, semi-processed or processed

Commodity standards should preferably be developed in a generic manner to cover the relevant products concerned. Information should be provided on the rationale for the need to develop separate standards indicating whether raw, semi-processed, or processed.

(g) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies)

Information should be provided on activities that have been already undertaken by other relevant international organizations, including an analysis of areas of potential complementarities, gaps, duplication, or conflict with the above activities.

Note: Even when standards exist outside Codex, a rationale for new work in Codex should be provided, based on information presented in the above analysis.