

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization



Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.codexalimentarius.org

CL 2024/10-EXEC
January 2024

TO: Codex Contact Points Contact Points of international organizations having observer status with Codex

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

SUBJECT: Request for comments on the agreed first draft of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031 and replies to questions to initiate the discussion around goals and outcomes

DEADLINE: 5 April 2024

BACKGROUND

For background information, please refer to the discussion held, and decisions made during the 85th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC85)¹.

REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

Codex Members and Observers in making comments should note the following recommendations agreed by CCEXEC85 for drafting of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031:

- A few high-level, ambitious strategic goals should be formulated;
- The strategic goals should be aspirational. As such, Codex would only be contributing to these goals, not necessarily achieving them during the strategic plan cycle; and
- The Strategic Goals should be within the Codex statutory purpose and should take into consideration the draft narrative on “drivers for change”.

Recalling that the purpose of Codex is to develop standards that protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade, Codex Members and Observers are invited to provide comments on first draft of the vision; mission; core values; drivers for change; the role of Codex; and a high-level description on Codex ways of working of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031 as contained in Appendix I herein.

Codex Members and Observers are furthermore invited to provide replies to following questions to initiate the discussion around goals and outcomes of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031:

- What could Codex do to have the greatest impact on the protection of consumer health and promotion of fair practices in the food trade in the period to 2031?
- Consistent with its purpose, how can Codex respond to the food safety, nutrition and food quality implications of, and support efforts to address, the drivers for change that have been identified in the related draft section of the Strategic Plan 2026-2031?”

Comments submitted in reply to this CL will be taken into consideration in the development of the next draft of the Strategic Plan. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CVCs) will in parallel to this commenting period hold informal consultations with the Regions through the Regional Coordinators and with Observers. The CVCs will make their best effort to hold these informal consultations as soon as possible after issuance of this CL. The purpose of the informal consultations will be to encourage interaction, discussion and reflection, and to support Members and Observers in responding to the CL.

The written comments received in response to this CL as well as the results of the informal consultations will be reported to CCEXEC86 scheduled for 1-5 July 2024.

¹ https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?Ink=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-702-85%252FFINAL%252FBREP23_EXEC2%252FREP23_EXEC2e.pdf

GUIDANCE ON THE PROVISION OF COMMENTS

Comments should be submitted through the Codex Contact Points of Codex Members and Observers using the Codex Online Commenting System (OCS).

Contact Points of Codex Members and Observers may log into the OCS and access the document open for comments by selecting “Enter” in the “My reviews” page, available after login to the system.

Other OCS resources, including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) as well as the user manual and short guide, can be found at the following link: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/resources/circular-letters/en/>.

For questions on the OCS, please contact Codex-OCS@fao.org.

APPENDIX I

FIRST DRAFT OF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS OF THE CODEX STRATEGIC PLAN 2026-2031: VISION; MISSION, CORE VALUES; A NARRATIVE ON DRIVERS FOR CHANGE; THE ROLE OF CODEX; HIGH-LEVEL DESCRIPTION OF CODEX WAYS OF WORKING

Vision

“Where the world comes together to create food safety and quality standards to protect everyone everywhere.”

Mission

“Protect consumer health and promote fair practices in the food trade by setting international, science-based food safety and quality standards.”

Core values

The Codex Alimentarius Commission re-commits itself to the following core values, which will guide its work to fulfil its strategic vision:

- Inclusiveness
- Collaboration
- Consensus building²
- Transparency

Introduction

The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1963. Today it has 188 Member Countries and one Member Organization. In addition, 240 intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations are accredited as Observers.

The Commission's statutory purpose³ is the development of international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. With increased globalization and increases in the volumes of food traded internationally, the Commission must also be capable of responding in a timely manner to the impacts of emerging trends and challenges to consumer health protection of fair practices in the food trade, to the extent that steps to address those impacts are amenable to standardization.

In conducting its work, the Commission takes into account, where appropriate, the relevant policies, strategies and guidelines of FAO and WHO, and of other intergovernmental organizations consistent with fulfilling its unique purpose to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade through the development of international food standards. Codex works closely on matters of common interest with such organizations, as appropriate.

[The objective of this strategic plan is to advance the statutory purpose of the Codex Alimentarius Commission during the period 2026-2031. This document does not supersede, extend, or contradict the Codex statutory purpose or provisions of the Procedural Manual.]

Drivers for change

The environment in which Codex operates continues to evolve. Changes in the global feed and food supply chain system, resource optimization efforts, reduction of food loss and waste, food security and safety concerns, malnutrition, demographic changes, innovations in food science and technology, food fraud, climate change, [loss of biodiversity,] pollution, and water scarcity may introduce new opportunities and challenges.

Both the FAO and WHO strategic directions on food safety acknowledge the importance of food control systems, based on scientific evidence, in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. They also recognize the importance of agri-food systems in responding to major global drivers ranging from environmental changes and digital advances to emerging hazards in the food chain and the approaches to mitigating these challenges, such as food system transformation and promotion of the One Health approach.⁴

The One Health joint plan of action (2022-2026) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World

² Consensus should be based on the Measures to Facilitate Consensus included in the Procedural Manual.

³ Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Article 1(a).

⁴ FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031, FAO Strategic Priorities for Food Safety within the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 and WHO Global Strategy for Food Safety 2022-2030.

Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) quadripartite also highlights the importance of a One Health approach to food safety.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) acknowledges the centrality of Codex standard setting in the multilateral system in the context of emerging global challenges.

All these initiatives point to the important role food safety plays to support public health, food security and trade and the need to integrate foresight and preparedness for the emerging issues to come. They further highlight that food safety has a critical role in the successful transformation of the agrifood system in order to meet the needs of the world.

The role of Codex

The Commission must maintain a steady focus on its statutory purpose. It must be sufficiently capable of being proactive, flexible and responding in a timely manner to emerging issues that impact on food safety and quality⁵ with the aim of protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.

The system for Codex standards elaboration has served well in the 60 years that Codex has been in existence. The system is anchored in the process described in the Procedural Manual with the product being Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice, commonly referred to as Codex texts. The Commission, as risk manager, establishes Codex texts that when incorporated into national legislation by Members contribute to ensuring that food is safe and can be traded. The scientific basis that underpins Codex texts is fundamental to ensuring that Codex maintains its pre-eminence as the international reference for food safety and fair practices in food trade, as well as the primary source of science-based food standards for many countries and recognized by the WTO.

As we move into the future, Codex can [continue playing a/strengthen its] pivotal role in supporting the advancement of global goals by developing international food standards. Collaboration across the multilateral system for trade and food, offers Codex and its members numerous benefits, including enhanced food safety, strengthened partnerships, effective risk communication, regulatory harmonization, and the ability to address complex global challenges.

Codex texts can provide an enabling environment which facilitates the uptake and implementation of policies and programmes to address global challenges around areas such as climate change, environment, sustainability, and trade. In doing so, Codex recognises that the inherent international diversity of food systems means that, different values or solutions may be relevant in different national or regional situations or contexts.

A high-level description of Codex ways of working

The Codex Alimentarius Commission re-commits itself to the following ways of working, through which it will develop Codex texts that will contribute to achievement of its goals:

Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner

The focus and needs of Codex Members are evolving, as is the environment in which Codex operates. Codex will need to be proactive and flexible and to respond in a timely manner to the opportunities and challenges that result.

Develop standards based on science and Codex risk analysis principles

Members and those engaged in the food trade who use Codex standards value the strong scientific base of Codex. Codex must continue to prioritize the securing of independent, timely and high-quality scientific advice to Codex through a fully and sustainably funded program.

Globally representative data are needed for scientific advice to be comprehensive and for Codex standard to be relevant to the global food supply. This requires, among other things, capacity building in developing countries that is specific to robust data generation, scientific analysis, and overall increased capacity to conduct such work.

Increase impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards

Communications that drive greater awareness, understanding, and recognition of available, harmonized standards are essential to the effectiveness of Codex. Even in the absence of adoption of Codex standards into national legislation, the greater use of Codex standards by the food trade and other actors can contribute to consumer health protection and ensuring fair practices in the food trade.

⁵ The consideration of other factors in the Codex standard setting process is governed by the *Statements of Principle Concerning the Role of Science in the Codex Decision-Making Process and the Extent to Which Other Factors are Taken into Account*. Consensus should be based on the *Measures to Facilitate Consensus* included in the Procedural Manual.

[Promote coordination of all food standards work]

[Codex works closely on matters of common interest with other relevant international organizations to avoid duplication and development of contradictory standards.]

Facilitate the participation of all Codex Members throughout the standard setting process

Members' abilities to participate actively in the development of Codex texts still varies widely and is dependent on the capacity and sustainability of national Codex systems. While the responsibility for these systems resides with Members, there is a role for support that will help to close gaps in capabilities. Sources of funding and a broad range of formal and informal capacity building, partnering and technical knowledge sharing activities all play important roles in strengthening the capacity of Members for sustainable, active participation in Codex activities, supporting all Members in maintaining national systems and expanding the potential for co-hosting of committees, consistent with our value of inclusiveness.

Enhance work management systems and practices that support the efficient and effective achievement of all strategic work plan goals

Our ways of working are supported by the continuing review and improvement of Codex work management systems and practices. Improvements to workflows, proposal prioritisation and input/comment management will support participation by Members with significant resource constraints and enhance inclusiveness in the standard-setting process.

The Commission recognises that the effective development of Codex texts depends heavily on the resources contributed by host countries of subsidiary bodies and their working groups, particularly their chairpersons and secretariats, and thanks them for their contributions.