



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING

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(Comments submitted by Costa Rica and Paraguay)

OTHER BUSINESS

Potential Work for Consideration of CCNFSDU

General Guidelines to Establish Nutritional Profiles

1. Subject

It has been identified as a potential work for CCFL to establish guidelines for the development of nutritional labeling systems on the front of pack, with the aim of having a harmonized basis. In some of the systems currently implemented by governments, nutrient profiles, defined as the science of classifying or categorizing foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to disease prevention or health promotion, are used (WHO 2015), with the aim of guiding the consumer to make better informed decisions and to promote a healthy lifestyle, however, the current Codex guidelines do not address definitions or criteria for nutritional profiles for the food labelling.

As the CCFL is responsible for establishing labelling standards and guidelines to prevent food labels from inducing consumers to confuse or mislead, there should be a harmonized basis of guidelines on which to build a nutritional profile for labeling purposes, beyond a single definition of "high in" fats, sugars and sodium.

Brief summary of the situation

a. Background

At the 43rd Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL), it was agreed to initiate discussions on nutrition labeling on the front of pack by an electronic working group (eWG) chaired by Costa Rica and co-chaired by New Zealand.

According to the information analyzed on the multiple and different systems of nutritional labeling implemented worldwide, it is evident that nutritional profiles are used to complement these systems, so Codex should also work in parallel with scientifically supported general guidelines for the development of nutritional profiles.

b. Problematic

Countries have implemented different actions to carry out the strategies recommended by WHO in relation to improving the quality of their population's food supply, establishing legislation on food labeling, front of pack nutrition labelling and nutritional profiles, among others, with the purpose of making it easier for consumers to choose healthier foods, in relation to their critical nutrient content associated with Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases.

Some labeling systems take into account approaches that include consumer information based solely on energy content, fats, saturated fats, sugars, sodium, without established reference values with an internationally recognized and harmonized scientific basis.

Due to the above, it is currently possible to find on the market product labels with requirements from other markets, or double-labeled for the same label to meet for several countries. This, in addition to barriers to trade, is confusing to the consumer and to local authorities conducting product inspections.

The information that the consumer receives from a nutritional labeling system on the front of the pack can vary significantly depending on the nutrient profile approach that supports it, being able to go through warning statements emphasizing certain nutrients or quality labels that can be confusing for the consumer. This is why internationally recognized guidelines for the development of specific nutrient profiles for labeling could be applied globally and this would facilitate the work of countries wishing to develop their own nutritional profile, while at the same time reducing barriers to trade.

For developing countries dedicated to the production and commercialization of food, this problem generates serious economic implications, for having to adapt its package to be able to export to the different markets, complying with the labeling requirements.

c. Scientific basis of Codex

The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2004, states that governments may require that information on key nutritional aspects be provided in accordance with Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling CAC / GL 2 -1985, as consumers have the right to accurate information based on scientific evidence, standardized and comprehensible, on the content of foodstuffs, enabling them to make healthy choices.

However, the Codex General Guidelines on Codex Claims (CAC / GL 1-1979) state that it is prohibited to make claims that may raise doubts about the safety of similar foods or may arouse or cause consumer fear.

For the above; the scientific principles for establishing standards should prevail and the Codex Alimentarius as an international standardization body is the forum for harmonizing issues of trade and consumer protection.

2. Conclusion

It is required that Codex establish general guidelines for the development of specific nutrient profiles for labeling, so that they can be used as a harmonized international reference in the discussion of emerging regulation in nutrition labeling. This ensures that they are also scientifically grounded, clear, transparent, non-discriminatory and facilitating global food trade and the growth of the food production sector, especially developing economies.

Likewise, we believe that any labeling system, in order to effectively meet the goal of promoting healthy diets, must necessarily be complemented by a process of education, awareness and communication to the consumer, also recommending a healthy diet based on positive aspects of packaged foods, such as being low in sodium, low in saturated fats, source of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals or essential fatty acids.

3. Recommendation

It is recommended that the CCFL agree:

- i. To request the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) to generate new work in order to establish general guidelines for the development of nutritional profiles, in accordance with current Codex provisions and scientific documentation, including documents generated by the World Health Organization (WHO).