



INFORMATION GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME DELEGATES TO A CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION SESSION

All Codex Members and observers are encouraged to participate in the process to develop Codex texts, through sending written comments and attendance at meetings. However, Codex sessions are complex events and require good preparation to ensure smooth operation and timely decision making. This document aims to assist those who are attending a Codex Alimentarius Commission meeting for the first time.

Delegates need to understand:

- The essentials of the Codex Rules of Procedure, especially the 8-Step elaboration procedure (available online in the Codex Procedural Manual on the Codex website: <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/procedures-strategies/procedural-manual/en/>)
- How to obtain documentation and which documentation to carry (relevant to the meeting they are about to participate in as well as previous and related sessions);
- The format of meetings;
- How to make interventions during a meeting;
- The procedure for reviewing and adopting the report.

DOCUMENTATION

Delegations should obtain all documentation from their respective Contact Points or the Codex website prior to a Codex session in order to familiarise themselves with the topics under discussion. They should bring those documents to the meeting as only a limited number of copies will be made available at the meetings.

Documents are distributed through the Codex electronic distribution lists, and can also be obtained from the Codex website (<http://www.codexalimentarius.org>).

Paper documents can be distributed to Codex Contact Points only on an exceptional basis.

Documents include circular letters, the invitation and provisional agenda, working papers and information documents. After meetings, the report and conference room documents are distributed electronically. Reports, final texts and publications are available on the Codex website.

Invitation

The invitation contains information such as the date, time and venue of the meeting. Personalised invitations cannot be issued. The names of the representative and other members of the delegation should be communicated through the Codex Contact Point as early as possible and in any case not less than 30 days before the opening of the meeting.

Visa requirements

It is the responsibility of participants to ensure that they have the proper documentation for travel, including visas. Therefore, where required, participants must apply for entry visas as early as possible. The Codex Contact Points in host countries can provide the location of embassies or consulates but cannot expedite visa applications.

Trust Fund Arrangements

If the FAO/WHO Trust Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund) pays for the travel of the delegate, arrangements should be made well in advance of the meeting, with the WHO secretariat managing the fund.

For contact and information see: codextrustfund@who.int:
<http://www.who.int/foodsafety/codex/trustfund/en/index.html>

Neither the Codex Secretariat nor the host government secretariat is in a position to assist in this regard.

Provisional agenda

The provisional agenda is prepared by the Codex Secretariat on behalf of the Directors-General of FAO and WHO in consultation with the chairperson. The provisional agenda also shows indicative timetables for the conduct of the meeting including elections.

Working papers

The Codex Secretariat is responsible for the preparation and distribution of working papers. Working papers form the basis for discussion during meetings and are normally distributed where possible at least two months prior to a session.

All working papers have the same reference: CX/CAC, followed by digits representing the year, the session number and then finally by the consecutive number allocated for the document for discussion on the agenda. Among the working papers are the reports of the subsidiary bodies that have met since the last session of the Commission.

Information documents

Documents that are prepared mainly for information purposes have the reference, INF.

Conference room documents

Comments received after the due date or unsolicited documents are circulated during the session itself and are referred to as conference room documents (CRDs) which are numbered consecutively. The disadvantage of CRDs is that their distribution is limited to those Members and observers present at the meeting, and usually in the original language only. A further disadvantage is that CRDs may not be fully considered due to other Members and observers not having sufficient time or expertise to consider the contents and to formulate a position. Members and observers are thus

encouraged to submit written comments by the deadline indicated in the CL.

Some important documents that should be brought to a Codex session

- Invitation, Provisional Agenda and other Working documents
- Report(s) of the Codex committees and task forces;
- Back-to-Office Report (personal report) of the head of delegation who attended the last session;
- The Codex Procedural Manual;
- A Briefing for the head of delegation containing the position on relevant agenda items and related comments;
- All other relevant documents such as the report of the last Commission and Executive Committee sessions.

FORMAT OF MEETINGS

Opening of the session

Sessions are normally opened by a senior representative of the parent organizations, FAO and WHO. After the opening, the Chairperson proceeds to the adoption of the agenda. Once comments on the provisional agenda have been considered, the Chairperson will request that the Commission adopt the provisional agenda or amended agenda as the agenda for the session.

Role of the Chairperson

The Chairperson will ensure that all questions are fully discussed, including written comments of Members and observers not present at the session.

At appropriate intervals during the discussion of each agenda item, the Chairperson will summarise the discussion by stating what appears to be the generally accepted view. The Chairperson ensures that conclusions of the discussion are clearly understood by all participants.

How are decisions reached?

The Commission makes every effort to reach agreement on the adoption or amendments of standards by consensus. Decisions to adopt or amend standards may be taken by voting only if such efforts to reach consensus have failed.

Voting may also take place for the adoption of amendments to the Rules of Procedure.

INTERVENTIONS

Who is allowed to speak?

Members and observers are permitted to intervene on issues under consideration. Normally the head of delegation has the right to speak, but with the Chairperson's permission, another member of the delegation may speak (e.g. on technical matters). Comments are always directed at the Chairperson. Protocol states that Members speak before observers and delegations speak only when acknowledged by the Chairperson.

How do I indicate my delegations desire to speak?

Delegations indicate their desire to intervene by holding up the country/organisation nameplate and placing it in an upright position until acknowledged by the Chairperson.

How many times may a Member intervene?

There are no uniform rules within Codex regarding the number and duration of interventions. The general practice is to intervene only once on a particular issue, although a second intervention may be allowed at the discretion of the Chairperson, normally to clarify a point or reply to a question raised by another delegation.

It is important to keep interventions short and concise (not more than 1 – 2 minutes) and to speak slowly to allow for effective and accurate simultaneous interpretation. Should a delegation read from written comments that appear in one of the working papers, it is essential to indicate the reference to the comments at the start of an intervention.

REPORT OF THE SESSION

A draft report of the session's proceedings is prepared by the Codex Secretariat for consideration on the final day of the session. It is customary, depending on the workload, that the second to last day of the meeting is set aside for the drafting of this report (i.e. no plenary session is held). The draft report is made available usually one hour before the adoption starts, to allow delegates to familiarise themselves with its contents.

As the report is the official record of the Codex meeting it is essential that delegations carefully read it to ensure that it accurately reflects the meeting's views, recommendations and conclusions. To the benefit of the conciseness of the final report, views and opinions summarised may not be associated with the names of specific delegations and observers.

During the review of the draft report, the Chairperson calls up each paragraph or section. This allows delegations who wish to amend the text to intervene at the appropriate moment. When doing so, it is important to make concrete proposals for changes (e.g. additions or deletions). At this stage, it is not possible to re-open discussions; nor is it possible to record in the report what was not stated during the discussion.

The adoption of report is integral part of the official agenda of the session and all delegations are requested to take part in the adoption of report.

Once adopted the report becomes the official record of the Commission session. The Commission report is later published in all languages of the Commission and distributed to all Codex Contact Points. The report is also posted on the Codex website.

To further assist delegates the FAO/WHO training package "*Enhancing Participation in Codex Activities*" is available from the FAO website at:

<http://www.fao.org/food/food-safety-quality/en/>

For further information about Codex Alimentarius:

Website: www.codexalimentarius.org

E-Mail: codex@fao.org

Trust fund enquiries: codextrustfund@who.int