



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Eighty-fifth Session

FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy

20-24 November 2023

OPENING REMARKS

Deputy Director General of FAO, Dr Maria Elena

1. Good morning. It's a pleasure to see many of you again and meet some of you for the first time.
2. We are pleased to host the 85th session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission here in person.
3. As the body that provides strategic direction to the Codex Alimentarius Commission, you have a very important role.
4. An important task this session is the drafting of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031 where you will chart a path for Codex to work as part of the multilateral system on food and trade.
5. During the 6-year period of the new Strategic Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals will have come to an end. Will the international community have achieved all 17? How will Codex have contributed?

Friends,

6. Agrifood systems need to produce increasing amounts of safe and nutritious food to meet the needs of a rising global population.
7. And they must do so to become more efficient, more inclusive, more resilient and more sustainable.
8. Looking ahead, Codex can play an even stronger role in promoting this transformation by developing international food standards that protect consumer health and ensure fair trade practices while supporting the uptake and implementation of policies and programmes that make agrifood systems more sustainable.
9. Future risk managers can aspire to making decisions that ensure food is safe for consumption, nutritional requirements are met, food loss and waste is reduced, and food trade is governed by fair and inclusive practices.
10. The way we go about that may look different in different places. Members may have their own unique approaches to achieving more sustainable agrifood systems, depending on the local or regional context – agricultural practices, climate, and culture.
11. We know that food safety and quality will continue to be part of everyone's agenda. After all, it concerns everyone everywhere.
12. I would like to refer to two key documents recently launched that can inspire you in developing the Codex Strategic Plan: the Quadripartite One Health Joint Plan of Action and FAO's Strategic Priorities for Food Safety.
13. Both offer synergies for implementing Codex standards, such as enhanced food safety, strengthened partnerships, effective risk communication and regulatory harmonization.
14. In this 60th year of Codex, as you reflect on and discuss the future of Codex and the mechanisms under which Codex can undertake its work, let me reaffirm FAO's commitment to the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme that underpins our support to the Codex Alimentarius Commission.
15. I look forward to celebrating the 60th anniversary year of Codex with you and wish you all the best in paving the way for the Commission, which has an ambitious agenda.
16. Thank you.

Assistant Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr Ailan Liu

Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo, Vice chairs of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Distinguished members of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission,

Dear FAO and WHO Colleagues,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the 85th session of CCEXEC, this time in Rome. Last July, at the 84th CCEXEC in Geneva, we commemorated the 60th anniversary of the Codex Alimentarius. We had lively discussions about the organization's past, present, and potential future. The discussion stressed the maturity of the Codex as an inclusive framework based on scientific facts and on the contributions of top experts from around the world.

It is clear that Codex is well equipped to confront present and forthcoming challenges. In this week's agenda, you will carry out the periodic review of the work of the technical committees. I congratulate you and all the experts who worked on the development of the standards and recommendations. You will also address the future of the Codex as you discuss the 2026-2031 strategic plan.

We agree that the Codex Commission must stay focused on its statutory purpose of its mandate. However, it must also be proactive, agile, and prompt in reacting to developing concerns affecting food safety and quality. Such an approach will ensure Codex protects consumers' health and ensures fair trade practices in changing societies and environments. Please consider how Codex can best help the transformation of food systems so they promote health and not harm it.

To do so, we must address the burden of malnutrition and food borne diseases as well as the risk of zoonoses and antimicrobial resistance. We must also address the impact on the environment and the health of food workers.

I will join you in person next week to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Codex Alimentarius at the opening of the 46th session.

I look forward to our dialogue regarding how we can support Codex more effectively in the future.

I wish you a very fruitful meeting.

Thank you.

Vice-Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), Mr Raj Rajasekar

Deputy Director General of FAO Dr Maria Elena Semedo, Assistant Director General of the World Health Organization, Dr Ailan Liu, Vice chairs Allan Azegale and Diego Varela, Acting Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Dr Corinna Hawkes, Members of the Executive Committee, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you all to this the 85th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and I consider it a great honour and privilege to be taking the role of acting chair for this session in the absence of the elected chair of the Commission, Mr Steve Wearne.

As we all know 2023 is a momentous year in the history of Codex as it marks the 60th year of the founding of the organization. We have much to celebrate.

Over the last 60 years Codex has evolved and grown from a relatively small and obscure organization to a truly global body with a great track record in developing sound international standards for health protection and trade.

As I reflect on our journey through 2023, I have been deeply impressed by the reach and impact of the work of Codex and how the members have all marked 2023 in their own unique and special ways. We all have a story to tell.

2023 also marked the beginning of the end of the pandemic and the rapid return to our traditional ways of working. The pandemic seems like a distant memory even if its remnants are still around.

The pandemic also clearly demonstrated the strength and adaptability of Codex as a multilateral body and its ability to embrace new ways of working and maintain the momentum of its work. Personally, it was great to start 2023 with the first full-fledged physical meeting in the Codex calendar, the meeting of the Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific in Fiji that I had the pleasure of attending along with the Chair of CAC. Since then, many subsidiary bodies have returned to full physical meetings.

There is no doubt that Codex works best when we all have the opportunity to come together physically to discuss important global food safety and trade issues. This is something to cherish and support.

Even as we return to full physical sessions it is heartening to see the efforts to learn from the experiences of the pandemic and explore options for facilitating maximum participation in Codex through the use of increasingly versatile virtual technologies.

Ladies and Gentlemen - We have a busy week ahead with much to discuss. In addition to our regular critical review of Codex, we will be discussing other key items such as the Future of Codex and the development of the new Strategic plan for 2026-2031. The world is changing rapidly and we have a real opportunity to take a forward-looking approach to our strategic discussions.

We will also have the opportunity to recognise and take note of the work of the parent bodies that are of relevance to our own work and discussing financial and budgetary issues including the resourcing of the Codex programme now and into the future.

In keeping with our practice, I will be sharing the workload with Vice Chairs Allan and Diego on the various agenda items.

In conclusion, I am looking forward to working with you all during this week and joining in the celebrations of this milestone year.

Thank you all.