

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Opening

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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Honourable Chairman, distinguished delegates, colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the FAO Representative to the Pacific Subregion, Ms Eriko HIBI, and the World Health Organization let me express my warm thanks to our host country Vanuatu for hosting the fourteenth session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific. It is an honour as the FAO's Assistant Representative to Vanuatu's to be here with you today.

Vanuatu took up the role as the regional coordinator following appointment by the 38th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission after the thirteenth session in Papua New Guinea in 2014. As such, this is the first regional Coordinating Committee hosted by Vanuatu. I know that the Vanuatu Secretariat has worked tirelessly in association with FAO and WHO and the previous host Papua New Guinea to plan and prepare the Session as well as the side events for the week ahead focusing on food safety and what it means to the Pacific region.

Pacific membership of Codex has steadily grown to 10 Pacific Island members and nine are represented here today. FAO and WHO wishes to acknowledge the commitment and dedication of the ten island members of Codex; Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States.

Effective participation in Codex work is essential for harmonization of food standards between countries. Countries that understand and contribute to the Codex standard setting process are in a better position to protect public health and facilitate trade in food and agriculture products. Participation in this fourteenth session has been particularly challenging as funding support is no longer available from the FAO/WHO Codex Trust Fund. The attendance today demonstrates the priority and is recognition of the importance and strength of the Regional Coordinating Committee. It has come of age.

All countries need science-based Food Standards and Regulations to ensure food consumed domestically and traded internationally is safe and suitable. Joining together provides an opportunity to share and address common issues and to promote regional coordination and collaboration in the area of food safety and quality. Globalization of the food chain, growing international trade as well as other emerging issues have increased the complexity of the international food system and put pressure on national food safety authorities. Recognizing the changing context and emerging issues of food safety, there is a need for Member States to adapt and strengthen national food safety systems and to work towards harmonization of food safety measures. Codex plays a key role in establishing a common framework for food quality and safety standards setting, and harmonization of food safety and quality measures across countries. In recent years, several Pacific island countries have developed new contemporary food regulations and standards in line with Codex and a common Pacific approach. This is crucial for the protection of public health as well as for facilitation of trade in food and agricultural products.

Since the 13th session of CCNASWP held in Kokopo, Papua New Guinea in September 2014, the FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees have undergone a revitalization process. As you will have noticed, the Agenda for the Session has changed considerably compared with previous CCNASWP sessions. New initiatives encompass the inclusion of a keynote speech; discussion about the food safety and quality situation in the region and priorities for the future; introduction of an online platform for information sharing on food safety control systems; and collection of information on the use of Codex texts at the national level. These new initiatives have been introduced to strengthen the role of the FAO/WHO Regional

Coordinating Committees as regional food safety fora where food safety and quality issues pertaining to the region can be discussed.

Codex and food standard setting is an important part of FAO's and WHO's mandate. Ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition is one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this goal, access by all people to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round must be ensured. This is in line with FAO's global goal of eradicating hunger and malnutrition and WHO's goal to reduce the health and social burden of foodborne diseases.

For people to be food secure, food must be safe. Over recent years, good progress has been made in the Pacific to strengthen food safety and quality. However, frequent food safety incidents and emergencies are still affecting the region. Unfortunately, we do not have good estimates of the burden of foodborne diseases in Pacific island countries. However, the WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases, which were released in 2015, show that every year approximately 125 million people become ill and about 50 000 people die from contaminated food in the Western Pacific region. A significant proportion of these are children under the age of five.

Food borne illness impedes the achievement of food and nutrition security goals. Unsafe food not only causes acute cases of diarrhea, but also chronic diseases such as cancer, neurological disorders, kidney disorder as well as reproductive and developmental problems to name a few. Codex standards applied to the food production, processing and trading chains can help prevent these illnesses.

Codex labelling standards can help prevent Non Communicable Diseases related to obesity, such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions linked to consumers eating too much food of poor nutritional quality, by providing consumers with information to make healthy food choices.

Dear Friends, Codex Standards are crucial to the Pacific islands as the Pacific is actively participating in global food trade. Pacific islands dependency on food imports have increased and in some countries imported food accounts for up to 90% of the food supply. When the food we eat is produced and processed in another country and transported to our local shops, we need to have confidence that every care has been taken to ensure its safety and quality. Adoption of Codex standards and guidelines can help to strengthen this confidence.

For the food a country produces, Codex provides standards to guide people who depend directly on agriculture and the food system for their livelihoods and to protect people who are consumers. Whether for commodities or processed products, the standards and guidelines developed by Codex provide a sound basis for development of agricultural sectors and guide stakeholders along the value chain.

Some locally produced foods are eaten domestically, others are exported. It is worth remembering that one country's exported food is another country's imported food. Foods are a major export from many of the countries in this region. The economy of these countries relies heavily on exports, and for many islands food is the biggest export such as fish, copra, coconut oil, sugar, preserved fruit products, juice, and cassava. The benefit to the livelihood of everyone in the value chain – whether they are farmers, fishers, producers, processors, transporter, retailers, and hospitality – and the benefit to the country's economy depends on safe good quality food. Official control systems which allow governments to make assurances required for market access about the safety and quality of food are supported and informed by Codex science and risk based principles and guidelines.

Honourable Chairman, distinguished delegates, colleagues, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I thank you all for coming to this very important session of CCNASWP and for showing your commitment to strengthen food safety and quality in the Pacific. FAO and WHO are committed to work with you and to support your endeavours towards securing a safer and more nutritious food supply for the people of the Pacific.

I wish you all the best in the 14th session of the CCNASWP here in Port Vila and I hope you will enjoy the local cuisines of nutritious organic food, the best Vanuatu organic beef and the taste of fresh noble kava beverage from the happiest people of this beautiful country, Vanuatu.

Thank you tumas