

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel: 39 06 57051 www.codexalimentarius.net Email: codex@fao.org Facsimile: 39 06 5705 4593

Agenda Item 12

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

***Twenty-sixth Session, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy
30 June – 7 July 2003***

OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST FROM FAO AND WHO

PROVISION OF SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

1. FAO and WHO have a long history of providing scientific advice to member countries and to the Codex Alimentarius Commission on issues related to food safety and quality. This has been carried out through the implementation of expert committees, ad hoc expert consultations and scientific meetings and the provision of direct advice to countries. Responsibility lies with different units within FAO and WHO. The scientific advice is published by FAO and WHO in several series of printed documents which are distributed to member countries, to Codex Contact Points, and to non governmental organizations. The reports are also placed in FAO and WHO WebPages and are discussed at specific Codex Committees.

2. The 24th session of the Codex Alimentarius held in Geneva, Switzerland, 2-7 July 2001, recommended to FAO and WHO “to convene a consultation to review the status and procedures of the expert bodies and to develop recommendations for consideration by the Director-General on additional ways to improve the quality, quantity and timeliness of scientific advice to the Commission”. FAO and WHO Management decided in 2002 to postpone the implementation of this consultation until the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius and other FAO and WHO Work on Food Standards was finalized as this also included an analysis of the provision of scientific advice to Codex.

3. The report of the Codex evaluation indicated that there is satisfaction with the scientific soundness of the criteria used by JECFA, JMPR and JEMRA. The questionnaires' respondents consider it adequate to very good (par. 185). The report included, however, several recommendations (Recommendations 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40) to strengthen and improve the provision of scientific advice to Codex, including the need for a clear budget and human resources allocation for scientific advice and risk assessment (recommendation 33). Some Codex members and observers have expressed their views on those recommendations (Codex member countries have expressed their views above those recommendations (ALINORM 03/26/11: Add.5)

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4. The Commission in its 25th (Extraordinary) session discussed those recommendations and reasserted the essential importance of the expert advice provided to Codex and to member countries and supported an increase in the commitment of FAO and WHO to support scientific risk assessment, in order to more effectively address current and emerging food safety issues. The Commission noted that FAO and WHO had agreed to convene the expert consultation on scientific advice requested by the 24th Session of the Commission as a matter of high priority.

5. After the 25th Commission session, FAO and WHO took immediate action to initiate a consultative process to continue the improvement of the provision of scientific advice to Commission and member states. In this process consideration will be given to all the recommendations made by the Codex evaluation on scientific advice but will not be limited to them. Some of the issues to be considered in this consultative process are: scientific advice needs; timeliness/efficiency of the advice; resources needed; management and priority setting, quality, transparency and independence of the advice; selection of experts; procedures to facilitate the incorporation of experience and data from developing and developed countries, etc. A planning meeting to discuss the strategy for the implementation of the consultative process, its time frame, required resources and budget met in Geneva, Switzerland on 29 and 30 May 2003.

6. The consultative process will analyze also mechanisms to better address the requests for scientific advice made by Codex and member countries. Presently these requests cover a wide range of issues and there is not a clear mechanism in Codex to indicate to FAO/WHO the level of priority of the different issues. As an example please refer to Table 1 of CAC/26 INF/4 which presents detailed information on the Codex requests of scientific advice presented to FAO and WHO by April 2003.

7. FAO and WHO are making all efforts possible to assure the transparency of the consultative process and the participation of different stakeholders. The consultative process will recognize ongoing activities and improvements to working procedures of Expert Committees and Ad hoc Consultations which should continue in parallel (a summary of the improvements made up to April 2003 is presented in CAC/26 INF/4) The consultative process will include the analysis of the ongoing work of the Project to Update the Principles and Methods for the Risk Assessment of Chemicals in Food.

8. The consultative process that will be concluded by 2005 should result in establishing sustainable working arrangements for the provision of scientific advice to Codex and FAO/WHO member countries. From a procedural perspective these arrangements should be clearly defined and as flexible as possible, allowing for a swift response in case of emerging issues. Procedures, however, should be transparent, safeguarding the independent advice as being scientifically sound and objective.

9. The Commission is invited to analyze the convenience to establish, in the Codex system, a procedure to define its priorities in terms of needs of scientific advice to facilitate its consideration by FAO and WHO in a more efficient way. There is also a need that the Commission reinforce its policy of accompanying any request of provision of scientific advice with a firm commitment from Codex member countries to provide data needed and offer information about availability of experts and additional resources which could facilitate the implementation of the experts meetings. Codex decisions on these matters, if adopted at the 26th session, could then be considered by the Consultative process.

CAPACITY BUILDING

10. During the last two years, a number of initiatives have been taken by FAO and WHO, in collaboration with partner organizations and institutions, to (1) further enhance the respective roles of the agriculture and health sectors in ensuring the quality and safety of the food supply, (2) to strengthen FAO and WHO's role as neutral fora for negotiation and for exchange of information and experiences in the field of food safety; (3) to further strengthen cooperation and collaboration between the two organizations and with other partners in the field of food safety; and (3) to upgrade the capacity of developing Member countries in food safety and food quality assurance and support their effective participation in Codex work.

The Standards and Trade Development Facility

11. As a follow-up to Joint Communiqué made by the Executive Heads of FAO, WHO, OIE, WTO and WB at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Doha, in which they reaffirm their commitment "...to explore new technical

and financial mechanisms for coordination and resource mobilization and to build alliances between standard-setting bodies and the implementing and financing agencies so as to ensure the most effective use of technical and financial resources”, a Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) has been established in WTO with a seed financial contribution from the World Bank. The STDF will be operated by a permanent Secretariat located in the WTO, under the guidance of a Policy Committee and the direct supervision of a technical Working Group composed of representatives of the 5 sponsoring agencies. A “Concept Note” outlining the objectives, membership, governance structure and operation of the STDF and “Guidelines for Project Selection Criteria and Evaluation” (see document CAC/26 INF/6) have been developed and agreed upon. A STDF Website is under preparation and will provide a mechanism for submission of project proposals for funding by STDF.

Global and Regional Fora of Food Safety Regulators

12. FAO and WHO jointly convened the “First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators” in Morocco in January 2002, and a “Pan-European Conference on Food Safety and Quality” in Hungary in February 2002. The main objective of these events was to promote the exchange of information and experiences among food safety regulators in developed and developing countries, with particular reference to emerging food safety issues of trans-boundary nature. Interest in follow-up to the first Global Forum and in conducting regional food safety conferences in other regions, has been expressed, in particular, at the last sessions of the Regional Codex Coordinating Committees for Asia, Africa and the Near East.

13. In this context, FAO sought guidance from the 123rd Session (28 October-2 November 2002) of the FAO Council on holding further global and/or regional food safety conferences. The Council “recognized the importance of food safety issues for consumer protection and in relation to food trade, and the need for Members to build effective food safety systems using a science-based, food chain approach. It also recognized the critical role of FAO in providing the necessary assistance and guidance to its members in building their capacity regarding food safety and quality.” It agreed in principle that FAO, in association with WHO, may initiate the preparation of a second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators (GF-2) on the understanding that a final decision on the convening of a second Global Forum would be taken at its next session in June 2003. The Council noted that regional discussions on practical actions to promote food safety issues could take place in connection with the forthcoming FAO Regional Conferences, including possibly Ministerial or high-level Round Tables. Decisions to convene further FAO/WHO Pan-Regional Conferences on Food Safety and Quality should be left to countries of the region” (Report of Council 123, part vii).

14. FAO and WHO convened a Preliminary meeting with representatives of G-8 countries and of the European Community on February 12th, 2003, in Geneva, to discuss arrangements for the convening of GF-2, including financial contributions to implement it. The meeting expressed general satisfaction with the outcome of GF-1 and recommended that GF-2 be convened with the same objective as GF-1. It further endorsed the recommendation of GF-1 for the main theme of GF-2, namely: “Building Effective Food Safety Systems”. Several participating countries informed the meeting of their willingness to provide financial and in-kind support to FAO and WHO to assist in the organization of GF-2 in 2004, in a developing country. A Preparatory Meeting for GF-2, with the participation of representatives of selected countries from all regions is scheduled to be held on 8 July 2003 to finalize arrangements.

15. In line with FAO Council’s instructions to seek the views of the countries of each region on the need to convene a regional food safety conference, FAO convened a meeting on 29 April 2003 with the Permanent Representatives to FAO of the countries of the Asia and Pacific Region to seek confirmation of their interest in pursuing the request made by the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia to FAO and WHO to organise a regional food safety conference. The meeting confirmed the interest of the countries of the region in convening the conference and welcomed with appreciation the Malaysian Government offer to host it, in May 2004. It gave useful suggestion on the substantive content of the conference and on ways and means of containing its cost. A similar meeting will be held in Geneva with the Permanent Missions of the Asia and Pacific countries to WHO.

16. The need to hold additional regional food safety conferences in other regions (Africa, Near East, Latin America and Caribbean) will be examined with the countries of each region. If requested, such conferences would be considered in 2004-2005.

Capacity Building

17. FAO and WHO Governing Bodies have, at various occasions, stressed the importance of strengthening the capacity of developing member countries to improve their food control systems and services and to participate more effectively in Codex work. Several initiatives have recently been taken by FAO and WHO to enhance their capacity building activities and to collaborate jointly and with other agencies and organizations in mobilizing extra-budgetary resources to expand technical assistance work.

18. FAO and WHO are currently engaged in a wide range of capacity building activities (see document CAC/26 INF/5). While these activities and strategies differ and are tailored to specific regions and countries, the overall objective is to assist developing countries in strengthening their food safety control systems with the specific aim of facilitating participation in standard-setting activities and compliance with international food safety standards. This is accomplished by providing technical assistance in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the institutional framework and formulating proposals for the establishment of technically sound food control systems which are harmonized with current international standards. Specific capacity building activities include: training of food control officials and technical staff (food control managers, food inspectors, food analysts) through seminars, workshops and study tours; enhancement of food control laboratory capabilities; preparation of training manuals and guidelines; support in establishing and strengthening National Codex Committees; policy advice; and establishment of regulatory frameworks.

19. During 2002-2003 and in connection with the Regional Workshops organized by FAO and WHO prior to the last session of the Codex Coordinating Committees, a questionnaire was used to sound the views of recipient countries on priority areas for capacity building in food safety and on the appropriate method for implementing it. The results of this survey (see CAC/26 INF/5) will be used by FAO and WHO in planning future capacity building activities.

FAO/WHO Supporting Material For Capacity Building

20. In support of capacity building activities, FAO and WHO are currently engaged in the development of a number of manuals, guidelines and training materials which should facilitate the capacity building effort. Most of these materials are developed jointly except for a few which are prepared under specific field projects operated either by FAO or WHO.. The materials include:

- Assuring Food Safety and Quality – Guidelines for Strengthening National Food Control Systems (a joint FAO/WHO publication - in press)
- Improving the Quality and Safety of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables – A Training Manual (a FAO publication – in preparation)
- Street Foods – A Training of Trainers Manual (a FAO publication- in preparation)
- Food Safety Management Systems for Small and Medium-scale Food Enterprises
- Food Safety Risk Analysis – A Training Manual (a joint FAO/WHO publication – in preparation)
- Enhancing the Participation in the Work of Codex – A Training Pack (a joint FAO/WHO publication – in preparation)
- Assessment of Capacity Building Needs for Food Safety (A joint FAO/WHO publication – in preparation)

21. These documents, once finalized, will be issued in multi-lingual form for wider use by member countries.

FAO Food Safety Framework Document

22. At the request of FAO's Governing Bodies for a clear policy on the role of FAO, and of the agriculture sector in general, in the field of food safety and quality, a framework document for the development of comprehensive national food safety systems was prepared and discussed at the 17th Session of the Committee on Agriculture (31 March-4 April 2003). The document contains a proposed framework for reinforcing FAO food safety programmes and for providing advice on the development of a renewed food safety strategy that best

addresses the varying needs of FAO Member countries. The framework builds on existing food standards work, the associated risk assessments, scientific advice and capacity building of FAO, the Codex Alimentarius Commission and WHO.

23. The framework is broadly based on a few key elements:

- The system should rely on a “food chain approach” in which food safety considerations are integrated into the entire chain from primary production to consumption. All players throughout the food chain have a specific role to play and must share the long- term commitment, involvement, and responsibility for food safety.
- The system should be soundly based on science and utilize a risk-based approach to the management of food safety hazards, within the risk analysis paradigm.
- The system should emphasize identification, prevention and control of the source of food safety hazards, while also addressing the consequences of the loss of control.

24. In discussing the framework document, the Committee on Agriculture (COAG) “generally supported FAO’s endeavour to address a food chain approach to food safety. However, many Members found that document COAG/2003/5 did not fully and adequately address the request of the 28th Session of the Committee on World Food Security. The Committee requested that the draft framework document be revised and further improved in line with the guidance provided and be resubmitted for consideration at the 18th Session of COAG” (March-April 2005).