

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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Agenda Item 6

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA

Sixteenth Session

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CONSUMERS' PARTICIPATION IN CODEX WORK AND RELATED MATTERS

The FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade, which was held in March 1991, made recommendations to improve the involvement of consumer organizations in the work of Codex. The CAC at its 21st Session endorsed the recommendations, and requested its subsidiary bodies to involve consumers in their Codex decision-making processes. National member governments were also encouraged to do likewise. Since then, the issues on consumer participation in the work of Codex have been on the agenda of the CAC.

At the 22nd Session of the CAC and during the debate on the involvement of non-governmental organizations in the work of the CAC, the Observer of Consumers International¹ supported the convening of seminars and workshops, especially in developing countries, to explain the activities of the Commission and offered through its offices in developing countries to support this. The observer recommended improvement of transparency through the involvement of independent NGO consumer organizations and the strengthening of NGO participation in National Codex Committees and in national delegations to Codex meetings; the inclusion of consumer representatives as observers in the Executive Committee, JECFA, JMPR and other FAO/WHO expert consultations; the continued dissemination of Codex publications on the Internet and the possible establishment of a trust fund to improve consumer participation in Codex activities.

The 23rd Session of the Commission considered consumers' involvement in Codex work and asked the Committee on General Principles to review a checklist of measurable objectives to assess consumer participation in Codex work at the national and international levels. The Commission also proposed that Regional Coordinating Committees continue to exchange experiences on the

¹ ALINORM 97/37, para. 156

means of developing consumer input into National Codex Committees and Contact Points (ALINORM 99/37, para. 43).

The 15th Session of the Committee on General Principles considered the recommendations of the Commission and endorsed with some amendments the proposed draft Guidance on Measurable Objectives to Assess Consumer Participation in Codex. The Committee called upon the Secretariat to begin the development of a set of baseline data as soon as possible. It was recommended that a report should be made to the Commission every two years (ALINORM 01/33, paras. 109-110).

This question was considered by the 49th (Extraordinary) Session of the Executive Committee. Although the Executive Committee agreed to the development of a baseline data on consumer participation as recommended by the Committee on General Principles, it was concerned that further mandatory reports at each Commission session would compromise the ability of the Commission to address its main work, namely the consideration of standards and related texts. It recommended that the Secretariat make this information available periodically to the Commission on the basis of the Checklist of Measurable Objectives to Assess Consumer Participation in Codex (ALINORM 03/3, para. 36). The Checklist of Measurable Objectives is as follows:

1. the number or percentage of member countries that have established a National Codex Contact Point
2. the number or percentage of member countries that have established a National Codex Committee
3. the number or percentage of member countries which hold public consultations when developing national positions for Codex meetings
4. the number or percentage of member countries that have identified independent consumer NGOs and invited them to participate in Codex meetings or in submitting written comments
5. the number or percentage of member countries where independent consumer NGOs have participated in developing national positions for Codex meetings.
6. the number of consumer NGOs that participate in the Codex process at the national level.

Following the decision of the 14th session of the Coordinating Committee for Africa, 15th session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa had developed the Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees for Africa region, which were adopted by the 26th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The above document had been presented by the Observer from Consumers' International.

Governments are invited to provide information and comments in the light of the "measurable objectives" listed above, and generally about consumer participation in the elaboration of national legislation and/or the preparation of Codex meetings and related matters.