codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Agenda Item 3 **CX/CF 09/3/3**
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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS

Third Session

Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 23 -27 March 2009

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM FAO AND WHO (including JECFA)

1. This document provides information on FAO/WHO activities in the area of provision of scientific advice to Codex and Member countries, as well as other activities which are of interest for CCCF.

A. Provision of Scientific Advice from FAO and WHO

Expert Consultation on the use of 'active chlorine' in the food industry

2. CCFAC and CCFH have requested FAO and WHO to address the safety of use of 'active chlorine' in the food industry. A core group of experts has been identified and met in November 2007 to clearly define the scope and outline of the project. Working papers were prepared as basis for discussion at and international expert consultation. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert meeting on the benefits and risks of the use of chlorine-containing disinfectants in food production and food processing was held 27 - 30 May 2008 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, United States of America. The expert meeting drew from the experience of 20 experts from 13 countries and was dedicated to assess the benefits of the reduction of foodborne disease risk by reduction and control of contamination of pathogenic micro-organisms by direct treatment of food with disinfectants in various steps of food production and processing and the potential health risks from ingestion of chlorine and non-chlorine chemical disinfectants and their reaction by-products. The predominating world-wide treatment scenarios for poultry, red meat, fish and fishery products, fresh produce (fresh fruit and vegetables, including sprouts and hydroponics) and food contact surfaces were used in the assessment of the benefits and risks in a step-wise qualitative approach and conclusions and recommendations were agreed. As further extensive drafting and editing of the report is necessary, a prepublication issue of the report is only foreseen 2009. Information on the project can be found at http://www.fao.org/ag/agn/agns/chemicals_chlorine_meeting_en.asp and http://www.who.int/ipcs/food/active_chlorine/en/index.html .

Expert consultation on melamine

3. An increased incidence of kidney 'stones' and renal failure in infants has been reported from September 2008 in China, associated with the ingestion of infant formula contaminated with melamine. Preliminary WHO risk assessments have provided many Member States with valuable information for action. To improve the preliminary assessment an independent international scientific expert meeting has been convened as part of WHO's emergency measures in this area, in collaboration with FAO and supported by Health Canada. The meeting was held 1-4 December 2008 in Ottawa, Canada, and executive summary, as well as conclusions and recommendations have been published on the WHO and FAO websites: http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs_management/infosan_events/en/index.html and http://www.fao.org/ag/agn/agns/chemicals_melamine_en.asp

4. Besides assessments of the chemistry, analytical methods, occurrence and exposure, the meeting established a tolerable daily intake (TDI) level for melamine of 0.2 mg/kg body weight. Based on this TDI

the meeting concluded that current limits in food as established by many authorities (1ppm infant formula, 2.5 ppm other foods) are health protective. The meeting also pointed out the importance of new findings of melamine in animal feed - melamine in feed can result in carry-over into human food (eggs, milk, meat etc.). The final report is in preparation and will be published on FAO and WHO websites.

Principles and Methods for Risk Assessment of Chemicals in Food

5. FAO and WHO are in the process of finalising the project to update the principles and methods for risk assessment of chemicals in food, including food additives, contaminants and natural toxins, residues of veterinary drugs and pesticides. The project has included several workshops on specific areas of risk assessment. The final draft document, intended to replace Environmental Health Criteria Documents 70 and 104, was posted on the websites of FAO and WHO for public comments in June 2008. A final expert consultation was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea to consider the entire document and all comments received. Joint efforts are being made to finalize the guidance and publish it as a new Environmental Health Criteria document in 2009.

Expert Consultation on the application of nanotechnology in the food industry

6. In response to concerns raised by member countries on the possible food safety implications of the application of nanotechnology to food and agriculture, FAO and WHO will implement an expert meeting to address this issue, to be held 1-5 June at FAO HQ in Rome. The aim of the meeting is three-fold (1) summarize actual and anticipated nanotechnology applications in the food and agriculture sectors, and develop a common view of their implications for food safety, (2) to review current risk assessment procedures and evaluate their adequacy for the assessment of nano-particles in relation to foods, (3) consider issues related to communication with all stakeholders, and overall agree on priority research to fill information gaps related to potential food safety issues and to develop guidance on the possible roles of FAO and WHO in addressing food safety issues linked to nanotechnology applications. FAO and WHO convened a meeting of a core group of experts from 14-15 May 2008 to further define the scope of the meeting and propose outlines for background papers to be prepared in advance of the meeting. A call for data and call for experts for the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on the Application of Nanotechnologies in the Food and Agriculture Sectors: Potential Food Safety Implications have been issued and are available at: http://www.fao.org/ag/agn/agns/meetings_consultations_en.asp.and, http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs_management/meetings/nano_june09/en/index.html

Expert meeting on the risks and benefits of fish consumption

7. The 29th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission requested FAO and WHO to consider holding an FAO/WHO consultation on the health risks associated with methylmercury and dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs in fish and the health benefits of fish consumption based on requests from 38th Session of CCFAC.

FAO and WHO are now planning an expert consultation to give advice targeted at population subgroups at risk (e.g. women of childbearing age, the foetus, infants and small children and high fish consumers) based on the assessment of the benefits and risks associated with fish consumption. The information including call for expert and call for information will be available on the FAO and WHO websites in due time.

Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)

8. The 72nd meeting of JECFA will be convened in November-December 2009 in Rome, Italy and will be dedicated to the evaluation of some contaminants in food. The call for data will be issued early 2009.

Follow-up of the FAO/WHO consultative process on provision of scientific advice to Codex and member countries

9. The “Consultative Process” which was initiated at the request of the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission held in July 2001, and recommended that FAO and WHO carry out "a review of the status and procedures of the expert bodies in order to improve the quality, quantity and timeliness of scientific advice" began in earnest in 2003 and was concluded in 2007. The Framework document has now been published in English, French, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic. For details on how to obtain a copy please contact publications-sales@fao.org or proscad@fao.org.

10. Several initiatives are underway to facilitate and support the elaboration and dissemination of data from developing countries so that such data are more easily accessible to support the provision of scientific advice. More information is available in ALINORM 08/31/9G-Add 1.

B. Other activities

Establishment of the Global Initiative for Food-related Scientific Advice (GIFSA)

11. In order to specifically address the issue of sustainability of the provision of scientific advice, FAO and WHO have established a Global Initiative for Food-related Scientific Advice (GIFSA). The specific objectives of the GIFSA are:

- To increase awareness of the FAO/WHO programme of work on the provision of scientific advice,
- To mobilise technical, financial and human resources to support the provision of scientific advice in food safety and nutrition, and
- To promote the timeliness of the provision of scientific advice by FAO and WHO, while ensuring the continuation of the highest level of integrity and quality.

The main focus of GIFSA is to establish a mechanism to facilitate the provision of extrabudgetary resources for scientific advice activities. Contributions are accepted from governments, organizations and foundations in accordance with WHO and FAO rules. Two separate accounts will be maintained, one at WHO and one at FAO. An FAO/WHO Committee manages the GIFSA, and procedures have been developed to ensure that all resources provided through GIFSA will be allocated to activities in an independent and transparent manner, taking into consideration the criteria for prioritization of activities already agreed by Codex, FAO and WHO and the specific needs of FAO and WHO member countries.

For additional information and advice on the procedure for making a donation/contribution please contact Sandra Avilés, Policy Assistance and Resources Mobilization Division (Sandra.Aviles@fao.org; Tel: + 39 06 57056733) at FAO; and Jorgen Schlundt, Department of Food Safety, Zoonoses and Foodborne Diseases, WHO (schlundtj@who.int; Tel: + 41 22 791 3445).

INFOSAN and its role in food incidents

12. The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) was initiated in 2004 by WHO in collaboration with FAO and currently has 170 countries involved. In order to efficiently support member states in case of food emergencies of international health concern, INFOSAN emergency regularly informs members on on-going events.

13. In the case of the melamine incident, INFOSAN provided 14 emergency alerts to the entire network and 4 alerts to specific member states to facilitate the identification, assessment and management of the incident. Each country is encouraged in the case of a food emergency to contact INFOSAN at WHO. More information on INFOSAN is available at the following web-links:

http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs_management/infosan/en/index.html and

http://www.who.int/foodsafety/fs_management/No_04_IHR_May07_en.pdf