

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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Agenda Item 6 a)

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE

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QUESTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION IN CODEX AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORA, AND THE NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION AND TRANSPARENCY CONCERNING GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS

DISCUSSION PAPER ON EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS CONCERNING BIOTECHNOLOGY-DERIVED FOODS

(Prepared by Switzerland)

PRESENT SITUATION

It is a goal for international bodies (eg. Codex Alimentarius Commission) to work towards harmonization in the field of foods derived from biotechnology. Harmonization largely depends on equal levels of information. There are two aspects which make it important to share information among governments concerning biotechnology-derived foodstuffs.

First, risk analysis is science based. Decision making of the authorities involved should reflect the state of scientific knowledge. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for authorities to be informed without delay about new scientific evidence or findings, especially if it suggests a change of a decision already taken.

Second, there is a need for transparency in decision making. Transparency ultimately is directed towards consumers and the public in general. This includes not only taking into account similar decisions from other authorities, but also assessment and evaluation of differences in decision making, which may be due to other factors than science. It is important that authorities have first-hand information about work in other bodies in order to justify or reassess their own work.

In the past, the flow of such information has not always been free. This leads to difficulties in information gathering as well as in controversies and uncertainty with respect to divergent rulings in different countries.

PROPOSAL ON INFORMATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS

It may be helpful to promote information exchange to minimize such problems. We therefore suggest a system to be established fulfilling this need. However, without funding, it will not be possible to set up a system dedicated only to this task. Codex Alimentarius, eg., will not be able to fund or support such a structure. In conclusion, informations should be shared among existing bodies, but through specified channels.

The information to be shared among governments should be restricted to activities that are related to governmental activities. This would include work of authorities themselves, but also of expert bodies, agencies and research institutions linked to government work. In contrast, general informations, eg. media reviews, would not need to be included in such an information exchange scheme.

MATTERS OF INTEREST

- Legal basis, up to date
- Decisions (eg. policy, authorizations, jurisdiction)
- Structures (eg. responsible agencies, scientific bodies reporting to government) work organization (eg. decision trees), contact addresses
- Projects, scientific programmes.