

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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Agenda Item 6 f)

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

Twenty-second Session
Madrid, Spain, 3 – 6 October 2000

GLUTEN-FREE FOODS FOR COELIACS: ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION AND FUTURE ACTION (Prepared by Spain)

1.- INTRODUCTION

The public health problem posed by celiac disease, the most important aspect of which is its prevention by means of a diet based on gluten-free products, has led the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme to regulate gluten-free foods.

The Codex, through the Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses seeks to offer valid references in order to make the world trade in special foods for persons with celiac disease compatible with a guarantee of safety for such persons.

Serious problems are being faced in order to ensure, through current analytical methods, that there is no gluten present in food products labelled as “without gluten”, considering the level of knowledge attained in this regard by science and technology.

To this we must add the heterogeneous nature of the clinical response and the etiopathology of the persons suffering from celiac disease.

2.- ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, in its last two meetings, has become aware of the difficulties in the study of the draft for a Revised Standard for gluten-free foods, due to the lack of analytical methods with adequate conditions of sensitivity, specificity and reliability, capable of detecting all of the prolamines involved in the etiopathology of celiac disease.

At the 21st meeting (September 1996), the most significant conclusions were:

- It was accepted that the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling would study the problem of the methods of analysis of prolamines.
- An external consultation of Experts was not accepted (for budgetary reasons).
- In these conditions, the progress of the document was not approved and it was returned to step 6 in order to obtain further comments.

At the 22nd meeting (June 2000), the most important issues dealt with in relation to this point were:

- The observer from the working group on the Analysis and Toxicity of the Prolamines reported that it would be possible to obtain a method sensitive to the analysis of gluten, reliable at low levels of detection, by the end of the year 2001, and suggested the determination of a single threshold for gluten-free foods.
- It was decided to maintain the current draft of the Revised Standard for the gluten-free foods at step 7 and to request advice from the Commission on how to resolve this issue.

3.- PROPOSALS FOR FUTURE ACTION

The document will progress on the condition that it can be oriented towards the achievement of a high level of health, for which reason it would be advisable for the representatives of the countries attending this meeting of the Codex Co-ordinating Committee for Europe to join forces in order :

- To request the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling to provide:
 - co-ordination among the laboratories that are working on the finalising of methods for the detection of prolamines,
 - a report on the current situation of the analytical techniques,
 - sampling criteria, and
 - the maintenance of fluid and transparent contacts with the working group on the Analysis and Toxicity of Prolamines.
- To request the Codex Committee on Labelling to temporarily suspend the work on the allegation “without gluten” until the analytical difficulties have been overcome.
- To request the FAO and the WHO to evaluate the insistence on the advisability of consulting with experts in relation to the range of problems identified.