

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

SUMMARY REPORT OF A WORKING GROUP OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Rome, 14-15 September 2000

INTRODUCTION

1. At the request of the Forty-Seventh Session of the Executive Committee, a Working Group consisting of the Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and the Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission met to prepare a draft of the Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007 and to develop a strategic statement of the Commission's vision for the future. The Working Group also discussed the proposed Chairperson's Action Plan as requested by the Executive Committee.¹ Representatives of FAO and WHO were present at the meeting and the meeting was assisted by a Consultant to the Secretariat (See Annex 1 for a list of Participants).

2. The meeting reviewed the relevant paragraphs of the Executive Committee report, document CX/EXEC 00/47/6, the FAO Strategic Framework 2000-2015, Resolution WHA53.15 *Food Safety* of the World Health Assembly, the report of the Melbourne Conference on International Food Trade beyond 2000, and other relevant documentation identified in the Executive Committee report (See also Annex 1).

STRATEGIC STATEMENT

3. The Working Group selected the year 2007 as a reference point for the development of a strategic statement². It envisaged possible scenarios that the Working Group expected to be in place in that year as a basis of envisaging the work and role of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in the intervening time period. The Working Group envisaged the following situation in 2007:

- Organic products would be significantly represented in the international marketplace;
- Genetically modified and novel foods would be commonplace in many markets world-wide and familiar to consumers in the marketplace;

¹ ALINORM 01/3, paras. 41 and 71.

² One Vice-Chairperson recommended the year 2015 as a reference point so as to align the strategic statement with the FAO Strategic Framework 2000-2015.

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- Medical, specially formulated and performance enhancing foods would be marketed more widely;
 - Modern information technology (including the Internet) would be more widely used to communicate with consumers and the general public;
 - Governments would be more resolved to address issues of food security and sound environmental practices to promote sustainable development;
 - New challenges for food safety would continue to emerge;
 - Technological advances in production and processing would continue;
 - Codex standards would be more focused on food safety and consumer protection and there would be less emphasis on standards for composition and identity;
 - National regulatory systems would not be harmonized fully or deemed to be fully equivalent on an international basis;
 - There would be continuing resource constraints for Codex and national governments;
 - Developing countries would capture an increased percentage of international food trade; and
 - There would be increased public expectation for timely responses to food safety emergencies and regulatory problems.
4. In order for Codex to play its appropriate role in the above listed developments and respond to future challenges, the Commission, its committees and its subsidiary bodies would need to promote the following:
- Full, active and sustained participation of all countries and relevant intergovernmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations in Codex;
 - The wide use of Codex standards as norms for international food trade;
 - Sound regulatory frameworks at national level for food control based on Codex principles and guidelines;
 - Enhanced capacity in Codex to respond effectively and efficiently to new issues, concerns and developments in the food sector;
 - Seamless integration and alignment between Codex and other relevant international regulatory conventions/instruments;
 - Enhanced application of risk analysis based on Codex principles;
 - Codex framework and processes fully recognize and integrate all aspects of the food chain system and related infrastructures, including regulatory elements;
 - The development by Codex of a comprehensive regulatory framework through standards, guidelines and recommendations to enable/permit national governments to have sound food control systems to protect the health of the consumer and ensure fair trade, with due regard to the needs and special concerns of developing countries.
5. The Working Group agreed that a strategic statement would be developed by the Secretariat on the basis of this vision for subsequent circulation to Member Governments and interested international organizations for comment and submission to the Codex Committee on General Principles, with a view to the adoption of the strategic statement by the 24th Session of the Commission.

MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2003-2007

6. On the basis of the above strategic vision, the current Medium-Term Plan and the consideration of the Executive Committee, the Working Group identified the following new Programme Areas to be included in the Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007:
- Development of a comprehensive strategic framework for Codex work linked to FAO Strategic Plan to 2015 and the World Health Assembly Resolution on Food Safety;

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- Improved efficiency, timeliness and responsiveness;
 - Extensive, effective interactions and linkages (with other organizations);
 - Improved communication, advocacy and promotion of Codex standards;
 - Maintenance of commodity standards including timely updating to ensure continuing reliance; and
 - Strengthen participation and transparency.

7. The Working Group also reviewed the current Medium-Term Plan to remove reference to areas of work that would have been completed by the year 2003 or that did not fit into the strategic framework. The Working Group did not attempt to specify detailed Objectives. It was also recognized that some of the current Programme Areas would need to be incorporated into the new Programme Areas.

8. Although the Working Group did not enter into details concerning the objectives under the respective Programme Areas, considerable attention was paid to the Area of efficiency, timeliness and responsiveness. In this regard, it was assumed that the Commission would need to meet on an annual basis. The following points were also made:

- The need to review the structure of all Codex committees and examine the reconstitution of commodity committees into Ad Hoc Task Forces with clear timelines for completion of work;
- The need to review the Terms of Reference of the General Subject Committees for clarity and consistency and to ensure proper distribution of work;
- The need for more critical scrutiny of work priorities and proposals for new work; and
- The need to re-examine the Codex Step Procedure, with the possibility of delegating approval of the transition from *proposed draft* to *draft* (Step 5) to Codex Committees under specific conditions so that the Commission would need only to approve new work and adopt final standards at Step 8.

9. The Draft Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007 will be prepared by the Secretariat on the basis of the above discussions and circulated to Member governments and interested international organizations for comment and further input. The revised draft Medium-Term Plan based on these comments and the comments themselves will be submitted to the 48th Session of the Executive Committee (2001) for review. The same documents and the opinion of the Executive Committee will be submitted to the 24th Session of the Commission and to Regional Coordinating Committees prior to final adoption by the Commission.

CHAIRPERSON'S ACTION PLAN

10. The Chairperson presented a revised version of the Action Plan presented to the 47th Session of the Executive Committee (June 2000) and invited the comments of the Working Group. These may be summarized briefly as follows:

- **Commission Meetings:** There was general agreement that the Commission should move towards annual meetings in order to facilitate both the adoption of standards and related texts and promote increased opportunity on the agenda for food control policy discussions. The modalities of convening annual meetings and the cost implications would be studied by the Secretariat and FAO and WHO as part of the preparations for the biannual Programmes of Work and Budgets of the parent Organizations. The matter would be brought to the attention of the 24th Session of the Commission.
- **Executive Committee:** It was noted that this matter was under active discussion by the Codex Committee on General Principles. It was envisaged that proposals, including a proposal outlined in the Chairman's Action Plan, would address possible alternative and/or additional mechanisms for strengthening the management of the Codex programme.
- **Leadership Structure of Codex Committees:** The Working Group noted a proposal in the plan that posts of Vice-Chairperson should be established for all Codex Committees and Task Forces, with the Vice Chairperson being from a developing country. It noted however, that some Codex Committees/Task Forces were currently chaired by developing country Members and that the proposal may not be practical or meaningful in all cases. Since the objective of the proposal was to involve more

developing countries directly in the work of Codex at committee level and benefit from the experience of organizing Codex Committee sessions, it was agreed that the best approach would be to remove any procedural obstacles and also to provide clear guidelines to encourage Host Governments to hold meetings in developing countries on either an *ad hoc* or regular basis.

- **Trust Fund to Assist Participation of Developing Countries:** The Working Group strongly supported this proposal and invited the parent Organizations to report on the progress of establishing the fund at the next session of the Commission.
- **Increased Use of the Internet:** The Working Group noted that the forthcoming session of the Committee on Food Hygiene would be broadcast over the Internet and looked forward to a report on the outcome of this experiment at the next session of the Executive Committee. Concerns were raised that the use of the Internet should not substitute the formal exchange of views or comments on matters before the Commission or its subsidiary bodies in accordance with the Commission's Rules and procedures.
- **Expert Advisory Bodies:** While sharing the Chairperson's views concerning the importance of improving the transparency while maintaining the excellence of the advice provided by the FAO/WHO expert scientific bodies, the Working Group noted that considerable steps were being taken by the parent Organizations to address current concerns and that a report would be made to the 24th Session of the Commission.

11. The Chairperson thanked the Working Group for its comments and stated that the Action Plan would be revised in the light of these comments and developments that had already given effect to several of its elements. He stated that a final version would be prepared and presented to the next sessions of the Executive Committee and the Commission.

ANNEX 1: PARTICIPANTS AND DOCUMENTATION

List of Participants:

- Chairperson:** Thomas J. Billy (USA)
- Vice-Chairpersons:** David Nhari (Zimbabwe)
Gonzalo Ríos (Chile)
Stuart Slorach (Sweden)
- Secretariat:** Alan Randell (Secretary)
S. Rajasekar (Consultant)
- FAO:** Ezzeddine Boutrif (Food Quality and Standards Service)
- WHO:** Yasuyuki Sahara (Food Safety Programme)

List of Documents Consulted:

- Report of the 47th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (ALINORM 01/3)
- Preparation of the Draft Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007 (CX/EXEC 00/47/6)
- The Strategic Framework for FAO 2000-2015 (FAO, Rome 1999)
- Resolution 53.15 of the World Health Assembly *Food Safety*
- Report of the Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-Based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition, Melbourne, Australia, 11-15 October 1999 (FAO, Rome 1999)
- Overview and Compendium of International Organisations with Food Safety Activities, Document SG/ADHOC/FS(2000)4/Final, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, Paris 2000)
- G8 Communiqué Okinawa 2000 (<http://www.g8kyushu-okinawa.go.jp/e/index.html>)
- White Paper on Food Safety, Document COM (1999) 719 final, Commission of the European Communities, Brussels 2000.