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codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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HEALTH
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Agenda Item 6 (c)

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Fifty-fifth Session, FAO Headquarters

Rome (Italy), 9 – 11 February 2005

OTHER MATTERS ARISING FROM FAO AND WHO

FAO/WHO Activities Relevant to Codex Work

Joint FAO/WHO Activities

Regional and Global Fora

1. As a follow-up to the first Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators and with the support and approval of the FAO and WHO member countries, the FAO Food Quality and Standards Service (FAO/ESNS) and the WHO Food Safety Department, held the Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators (GF-2) in Bangkok, Thailand, from 12-14 October 2004, under the main theme of: “Building Effective Food Safety Systems”. The forum focused on the two following sub-themes: 1) Strengthening official food control services and 2) Epidemio-surveillance of foodborne diseases and food safety rapid alert systems. A number of related side events were also held before, during, and after the Forum, the reports of which are available from the forum website. More information on the First and Second Global Fora, including the final report when available, can be found at: www.foodsafetyforum.org/index_en.htm

2. At the request of the member countries of the respective regions and in follow-up to the recommendations of the first Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, preparations are underway for FAO/WHO Regional Conferences on Food Safety in the following regions:

Africa. Briefing meetings with the delegates of the region who attended the 27th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2004) and the 16th Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa (January 2005) to further discuss the themes of the conference, the specific papers to be presented and other organizational matters. The Conference is planned for the second half of 2005.

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the Americas and the Caribbean. A preliminary meeting with the delegates of the region to the 27th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was held on 2 July 2004 to initiate discussions on the themes of the conference and other logistical and technical details. The meeting made very useful suggestions which will be taken into consideration in finalising the Conference programme. The Conference is planned for mid- 2005.

Near East. At the request of the delegates from the Near East countries who attended the 27th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO and WHO will be holding a joint meeting on food safety immediately prior to the next (3rd) Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East which will take in place in Amman, Jordan, from 7 to 10 March 2005. The FAO/WHO meeting will therefore be held on 5 and 6 March 2005. It will address food safety issues of particular importance to the Region.

Tools under Development

3. FAO and WHO are in the process of finalising a CD-ROM training package on Food Safety Risk Analysis which includes a framework and overview manual, a training module presentation, case studies in risk analysis, and access to FAO/WHO resources related to food safety risk analysis. An FAO(ESNS)/WHO workshop was held in Bali, Indonesia on 4 March 2004 to introduce the package to some potential users and to provide participants with practical tools for risk analysis. The workshop report is available from the following: ftp://ftp.fao.org/es/esn/food/meetings/bali_report_mar04.pdf

4. In order to assist countries in Assessing Food Safety Capacity Building Needs, FAO/ESNS and WHO are preparing a joint publication on the subject to assist countries to identify and prioritise the areas where capacity building is needed. A Technical Consultation to review the Draft Guidelines is planned for 14-16 February 2005 in New Dehli, India. The document is expected to be published in 2005, after a peer review process.

5. FAO and WHO are currently developing a training manual on Improving Participation in the Work of Codex, designed to strengthen national food safety and quality systems through enhanced participation in the Codex process. It has been field-tested in Africa and the Pacific and it is expected to be available in final form in early 2005. The manual provides information on the Codex process and the development of national Codex programmes. It should serve both as a reference document for those involved in national Codex activities and as a training tool for national/regional training courses on Codex. In addition, the manual is an important capacity building tool within the ongoing FAO and WHO programmes to increase effective participation in Codex activities.

Technical workshops

6. FAO and WHO held a joint Technical Workshop on Residues of Substances without ADI/MRL in Foods from 24-26 August 2004, Bangkok, Thailand to provide FAO, WHO and Codex with a first analysis of the disruptions in food trade that occurred in 2001/2002, identify the scientific, technical and regulatory problems related to them and discuss appropriate follow-up steps. The identification of gaps within the current framework of JECFA and Codex led to the development of recommendations for further actions by FAO, WHO and Codex. The final report including working papers and case studies is being made available to FAO, WHO and the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its relevant subsidiary bodies (e.g. FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia, Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods, etc.). The report is available for downloading at: http://www.fao.org/es/ESN/food/meetings_vetdrugs_en.stm.

FAO Activities

International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health (IPFSAPH)

7. In an effort to allow users to access complete information on international standards, national regulations, scientific evaluations, and other supporting official information on sanitary and phytosanitary

measures from a single source, FAO is leading an inter-agency initiative to develop and maintain an internet-based portal - the International Portal on Food Safety, Animal and Plant Health. This portal allows users to by-pass secondary (interpreted) information, as well as material which may be out of date – both of which can be found using typical internet search tools - and focus on the definitive official sources across the three main disciplines of food safety, animal health and plant health. Version 1.1 of the portal is now available for navigation in English and French at www.ipfsaph.org.

FAO's Strategy for a Safe and Nutritious Food Supply

8. The next session of FAO's Committee on Agriculture (COAG) will discuss a paper on FAO's Strategy for a Safe and Nutritious Food Supply. The paper will present the roles of the following stakeholders in food safety: international organizations/institutions; national governments; private and public sectors; investment sector; research and academic sectors; and the information sector. It will cover the following main elements of the proposed strategy: normative activities, particularly those related to the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its scientific basis; cooperation and coordination with other agencies and standard-setting bodies responsible for food safety; capacity building and technical assistance; investment in food safety programmes; information and advocacy; and emergency responses.

Good Agricultural Practice (GAP)

9. FAO has recently embarked in the development of a series of normative activities related to GAPs and their application in different contexts. The approach adopted aims at applying available knowledge to addressing environmental, economic and social sustainability dimensions for on-farm production and post-production processes, resulting in safe and quality food and non-food agricultural products. Several units within FAO are engaged in this work. A paper on this subject is under preparation and will be discussed by COAG at its next session (April 2005).

WHO Activities (World Health Assembly)

Enterobacter sakazakii

10. At the 35th Session of the Codex Committee on Food hygiene (February 2003), the United States introduced a risk profile recommending, *inter alia*, the revision of the Recommended Code of Hygienic Practice for Foods for Infant and Children in order to address concerns with pathogens in infant formula including *Enterobacter sakazakii*. The Committee agreed to the offer of the United States to update the risk profile and agreed that a drafting group under the direction of Canada would initiate work towards the revision of the Code. The Committee also requested FAO and WHO to convene an expert consultation on the subject to better inform the revision of the Code.

11. In February 2004, FAO/WHO convened an expert consultation on *E.sakazakii* and other pathogens in powdered infant formula. The outcome of this Consultation was presented at the 36th Session of the CCFH in March 2004, which formally proposed the revision of the Code as a new work. The Committee agreed to proceed with this work as quickly as possible as it had become clear that current microbiological criteria for infant formula were not appropriate to protect public health. This new work was approved by the 27th Session of the Commission.

12. The World Health Assembly (WHA) at its next Session in May 2005, will consider and probably adopt a Resolution on infant and young child nutrition addressing the concerns about *E. sakazakii* in infant formula and requesting the Codex Alimentarius Commission to address, among others, the microbiological risks associated with consumption of powdered infant formula and, if necessary, establish appropriate microbiological criteria or standards related to *E. sakazakii* and other relevant microorganisms in powdered infant formula.

13. Given the stated need for Codex to respond to health considerations, as specified in WHA resolutions WHA53.15 (Food Safety) and WHA56.23 (Joint FAO/WHO evaluation of the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission), as well as the option to move standards revision quickly in view of direct scientifically documented health risk, it is therefore suggested that the **Executive Committee** reiterate the need for the Codex Alimentarius Commission and in particular for the Committee on Food Hygiene to explore ways of achieving consensus on the current revised draft code and criteria as a matter of priority.

Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAS)

14. The World Health Assembly adopted the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (DPAS) on 22 May 2004. This population-wide, prevention-based strategy was developed at the request of WHO's Member States at the World Health Assembly in May 2002 through extensive consultation with Member States, UN agencies, NGOs and civil society, as well as the private sector.

15. Resolution WHA57.17, endorsing DPAS, notes *"that resolution WHA56.23 urged Member States to make full use of Codex Alimentarius Commission standards for the protection of human health throughout the food chain, including assistance with making healthy choices regarding nutrition and diet,..."*.

16. It further *"REQUESTS the Codex Alimentarius Commission to continue to give full consideration, within the framework of its operational mandate, to evidence-based action it might take to improve the health standards of foods consistent with the aims and objectives of the strategy;"*.

17. The DPAS makes specific reference to the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, namely to Codex Guidelines on Labelling and to international standards, which reads: *"Public health efforts may be strengthened by the use of international norms and standards, particularly those drawn up by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (see resolution WHA 56.23). Areas for further development could include: labelling to allow consumers to be better informed about the benefits and content of foods; measures to minimize the impact of marketing on unhealthy dietary patterns; fuller information about healthy consumption patterns, including steps to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables; and production and processing standards regarding the nutritional quality and safety of products. Involvement of governments and nongovernmental organizations as provided for in the Codex should be encouraged."*

18. The Resolution WHA57.17 and DPAS can be accessed under:
<http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/strategy/en/>.

19. WHO is presently elaborating an implementation plan which focuses on the involvement of the WHO Regional Offices, developing effective partnerships with the civil and private sectors and collating and disseminating evidence for policy.

20. Resolution WHA57.17 requests WHO to enter into discussions with Member States on how the health standards of foods can be improved through the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

21. The **Executive Committee** is therefore invited to consider the request stipulated in WHA57.17 and to agree on how best to proceed. This would allow the 28th Session of the Commission in July 2005 to further reflect upon these issues and to agree on roles, responsibilities and actions to be taken in the implementation of those parts of the Global Strategy relevant to the work of Codex.

INFOSAN

22. On 13 October 2004, WHO, in collaboration with FAO, inaugurated the new International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) aimed at promoting the exchange of food safety information and to improve collaboration among food safety authorities at national and international levels. INFOSAN has an emergency component, INFOSAN Emergency intended to serve as an alert mechanism for foodborne disease outbreaks or food contamination events of international public health significance. INFOSAN Emergency is intended to complement and support the existing WHO alert and response system in controlling international public health emergencies. INFOSAN Emergency enables WHO to maintain a list of food safety emergency contact points, which was specifically called for by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in "Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations", adopted in July 2004.