

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel: 39 06 57051 www.codexalimentarius.net Email: codex@fao.org Facsimile: 39 06 5705 4593

Agenda Item 13 (c)

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD ADDITIVES AND CONTAMINANTS

Thirty-eighth Session

The Hague, the Netherlands, 24 – 28 April 2006

DRAFT MAXIMUM LEVEL FOR TOTAL AFLATOXINS IN UNPROCESSED ALMONDS, HAZELNUTS AND PISTACHIOS AND PROPOSED DRAFT MAXIMUM LEVEL FOR TOTAL AFLATOXINS IN PROCESSED ALMONDS, HAZELNUTS AND PISTACHIOS

Comments at Step 6 and Step 3 (in response to CL 2005/36-FAC and CL 2005/22-FAC) by Argentina,
Brazil and Canada

1. DRAFT MAXIMUM LEVEL FOR TOTAL AFLATOXINS IN UNPROCESSED ALMONDS, HAZELNUTS, AND PISTACHIOS (Appendix XXII of ALINORM 05/28/12)

BRAZIL

Brazil supports the proposed maximum level of 15 ppb for aflatoxins in unprocessed tree nuts (almonds, hazelnuts and pistachios) at Step 5 and await for the discussion paper with a proposal and justifications for a maximum level for aflatoxins in processed tree nuts, to be prepared by Iran and European Community.

CANADA

We note that the proposed Codex Maximum Limit (ML) of 15 µg/kg in *unprocessed* almonds, hazelnuts and pistachios is now at Step 6 of the Codex procedure.

Canada supports the establishment of a Codex ML of 15 µg/kg total aflatoxins in unprocessed almonds, pistachios, and hazelnuts for the following reasons:

- Based on our assessment of risk, the proposed ML is considered adequate to protect human health.
- The 49th Meeting of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)¹ evaluated the effect on aflatoxin exposure of various MLs for *maize* and *groundnuts*. JECFA found that going from no ML to an ML of 20 µg/kg would achieve the greatest impact on estimated average aflatoxin levels. They also found that the liver cancer risks associated with MLs of 20, 15, and 10 µg/kg for maize and groundnuts were almost the same. Applying more stringent MLs might lead to detectably lower liver cancer rates for cases where the food supply is “heavily contaminated” with aflatoxins and where there is a relatively large incidence of hepatitis B (which appears to be associated with enhanced susceptibility to aflatoxins).

¹ Safety Evaluation of Certain Food Additives and Contaminants, WHO Food Additives Series 40: Aflatoxins; International Programme on Chemical Safety, World Health Organization, Geneva 1998. Prepared by the forty-ninth meeting of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). Available on-line: <http://www.inchem.org/documents/jecfa/jecmono/v040je16.htm>

- JECFA's evaluation of the outcome of applying MLs to groundnuts could be used as context for considering the proposed application of an ML to almonds, hazelnuts, and pistachios. Aflatoxin contamination appears to be lower in hazelnuts and almonds than in groundnuts and the average per capita consumption of hazelnuts and almonds is either comparable to or lower than that of groundnuts.² Hazelnuts and almonds would be expected, therefore, to be a comparable or smaller source of aflatoxin exposure relative to groundnuts. Aflatoxin contamination of pistachios is somewhat similar to that of groundnuts. Average per capita consumption of pistachios is far below that of groundnuts in all but one of the thirteen GEMS Cluster Diets. In this one Cluster Diet, average per capita consumption slightly exceeds groundnut consumption. Unless the distribution of aflatoxin concentrations in pistachios is very different from that for groundnuts, it would be expected that an ML of 15 µg/kg for pistachios would not give rise to an unacceptable health risk.
- Any proposal to revise the current proposal downward should not be considered unless warranted based on new data upon which a JECFA re-examination could be conducted.

Additional Comments:

Although it is presumed that "processed" refers to the hulled nut, we believe it essential that the terms "unprocessed" and "processed" be defined so as to be very clear with respect to the application of the proposed ML. For example, we have noted that in some fora, the act of hulling a nut (for those nuts that are harvested in their hulls) is considered a "processing" step, in which case, a hulled nut could be considered "processed."

It is also important that it be clearly stated whether the proposed ML would apply to the edible portion of the "unprocessed" almond, hazelnut, or pistachio nut or whether the ML would apply to the entire "unprocessed" product, including the shell (in the case where "unprocessed" is defined as the in-shell nut without its hull).

Clearly defining the manner in which the ML is to be applied will be of importance in the continued development of the draft sampling plan for aflatoxin contamination in tree nuts.

2. PROPOSED DRAFT MAXIMUM LEVEL FOR TOTAL AFLATOXINS IN PROCESSED ALMONDS, HAZELNUTS, AND PISTACHIOS (Appendix XXII of ALINORM 05/28/12)**ARGENTINA**

Argentina suggests adopting the same maximum level of 15 mg/kg (total aflatoxins) taking into account the technical and scientific assessment conducted by JECFA (1988).

BRAZIL

Brazil supports the proposed maximum level of 15 ppb for aflatoxins in unprocessed tree nuts (almonds, hazelnuts and pistachios) at Step 5 and wait for the discussion paper with a proposal and justifications for a maximum level for aflatoxins in processed tree nuts, to be prepared by Iran and European Community.

CANADA

Canada supports the Maximum Level of 15µg/kg for total aflatoxin in processed almonds, hazelnuts and pistachios.

² GEMS Food Consumption Cluster Diets (January 2006). Available on-line: <http://www.who.int/foodsafety/chem/ClusterDietsJan06.xls>