

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
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ORGANIZATION



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Agenda Item 9

**CX/FH 08/40/9
September 2008**

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD HYGIENE

Fortieth Session

Guatemala City, Guatemala

PROPOSALS FOR NEW WORK AND/OR REVISION OF EXISTING STANDARDS

Prepared by France

Governments and interested international organizations are invited to submit comments on the document below, especially on the section containing recommendations, and should do so in writing to: Mr S. Amjad Ali, Staff Officer, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Room 4861, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250, USA, FAX +1-202-720-3157, or email to syed.ali@fsis.usda.gov with a copy to: Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, Joint WHO / FAO Food Standards Programme, FAO, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy, by e-mail to codex@fao.org or fax: +39-06-5705-4593 **by 15 November 2008.**

INTRODUCTION

1. Ahead of the 40th session of the Committee, a Circular Letter CL 2008/1-FH was issued to invite members to propose new work to be considered by the Ad Hoc Working Group convened before the 40th Session and should do it in accordance with the Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities (see Procedural Manual, 17th Edition) and according to the process described in Appendix V of ALINORM 07/30/13, before August 1st 2008.

RESPONSES TO THE CIRCULAR LETTER CL 2008/1-FH

2. The member countries submitted the following one item for new work within the above deadline:

Code of hygienic practice for the control of viruses in food

3. At the 31st session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) in 1998 a first document on viruses (CRD 23, foodborne infections by norwalk-like caliciviruses) has been presented by the Netherlands. This was followed by the 'discussion paper on viruses in food' (CX/FH 99/11), prepared by the Netherlands with assistance of Finland, Germany, Italy and USA and presented at the 32nd session of CCFH in 1999. At the 37th session of the CCFH in 2005 an update of this document has been prepared (CX/FH 05/37/14) and it was recognised by the CCFH that further work on viruses had to be done. The CCFH appointed the Netherlands to prepare a written proposal for the subject viruses in food, resulting in the document 'risk profile of norovirus in bivalve molluscan shellfish' (CX/FH 06/38/10), which concentrates on one specific problem in the field of foodborne viruses.
4. In considering its priorities for future work the 38th session of the CCFH in 2006 had agreed that viruses are an important food safety concern. However, at that time the committee considered that it did not have an adequate scientific understanding of the field in order to make an informed decision on the priority virus-commodity combinations on which future work should focus. In order to gain better understanding

on this subject and facilitate the decision making process, the committee requested fao/who to convene an expert meeting on “viruses in food”. In May 2007 the FAO/WHO convened an expert meeting in Bilthoven, the Netherlands, which was attended by 20 experts from 13 different countries. this meeting reviewed 1) the current state of knowledge on viruses in food and their public health and trade impact; 2) the practical consequences of using analytical methods for detecting viruses in food; 3) existing risk profiles and other relevant information pertinent to the evaluation of risks associated with viruses in food. The meeting provided advice and guidance on the virus-commodity combinations of particular concerns, the issues that need to be addressed by risk managers and the options available to them as well as the identification of additional scientific information needed to provide risk based advice on managing risks associated with viruses in foods. the meeting report to be distributed by fao/who in 2008.

5. At the 39th session of the CCFH in 2007 it was decided that the Netherlands, with assistance from Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, Panama, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, would prepare a project proposal according to the established procedure for consideration by the ad hoc working group on ccfh work priorities and the Committee in 2008.
6. The Delegation of the Netherlands indicated that they would be proposing the development of a general guidance document for the control of foodborne viruses with series of annexes to address specific virus-commodity combinations as prioritized by the fao/who expert meeting on viruses in food.
7. Following the decision of the Committee, the project document, prepared by the Netherlands with assistance from Australia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, Panama, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, is attached as Annex 1 to this paper.

REQUEST BY THE 31ST SESSION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION (JULY 2008)

8. The Commission¹ agreed to request the Committee on Food Hygiene to consider whether it was possible to give a higher priority to the revision of the Recommended International Code of Hygienic Practice for Collecting, Processing and Marketing of Natural Mineral Waters.
9. The relevant excerpt of the report of the last Codex alimentarius Commission is attached as Annex 2 to this paper.

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE NEW WORK PROPOSAL AGAINST CRITERIA

10. It is our opinion the proposal submitted for new work broadly meets the criteria set by Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (see Annex). Sponsors of the proposals are requested to summarise their proposals at the meeting of the Ad hoc Working Group. Committee's Assignment to the Ad hoc Working Group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

11. Noting the recommendations and prioritisation of the proposed new work by the Working Group and the recommendation of the Chairperson to undertake only one new work item (ALINORM 07/30/13, paragraph 202), the *Ad hoc* Working Group made the following recommendations to the Committee:
 - The Committee may wish to consider the draft project document in Annex 1, with a view to forwarding it to the next Codex alimentarius Commission as request for permission to undertake new work on viruses in food;
 - in order to respond to the request of the 31st session of the Codex alimentarius Commission on natural mineral water, the Committee may wish to establish an electronic working group to consider how best to address this issue and to report to it at its next (41st) session.

¹ ALINORM 08/31/REP – para. 106-108

ANNEX: CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERING PROPOSALS FOR NEW WORK

The criteria for considering proposals for new work have been established using the guidance provided in the Codex Procedural Manual and from the document; “Process by which the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene will undertake its Work” (ALINORM 07/30/13, Appendix V, Attachment 3).

To facilitate the examination of new work proposals, the criteria are given in the following table² :

CRITERIA REFERENCE	
Include a risk profile, as appropriate;	ALINORM 07/30/13, Appendix V, Paragraph 5
Indicate specific nature or outcome of the new work being proposed.	
Typically address a food hygiene issue of public health significance;	ALINORM 07/30/13, Appendix V, Paragraph 6
Describe in as much detail as possible the scope and impact of the issue;	
Describe the extent to which it impacts on international trade.	
Where appropriate:	
Address an issue that affects progress within CCFH or by another committees, provided it is consistent with the mandate of CCFH;	ALINORM 07/30/13, Appendix V, Paragraph 7
Facilitate risk analysis activities;	
Establish or revise general principles or guidance. The need to revise existing CCFH texts may be to reflect current knowledge and / or improve consistency with the <i>Recommended International Code of Practice: General Principles of Food Hygiene</i>	
Proposals are to be presented as a project document and should include:	
Purpose and scope of the proposed standard (work);	Codex Procedural Manual, 17 th Edition, Page 21
Relevance and timeliness;	
Main aspects to be covered;	
Assessment against the criteria for the establishment of work priorities;	
Relevance to Codex strategic objectives;	
Information on the relation between the proposal and other existing Codex documents	
Identification of any requirement for and availability of expert scientific advice;	
Identification of any need for technical input to the standard from external bodies so that this can be planned for;	
The proposed timeline for completion (not normally to exceed 5 years).	

² See CX/FH 07/39/09

ANNEX 1

DRAFT PROJECT DOCUMENT FOR NEW WORK ON CODE OF HYGIENIC PRACTICE FOR CONTROL OF VIRUSES IN FOOD

Purpose and scope of the new work

The purpose of the proposed new work is to provide guidance on the control of viruses in food. This guidance will be supplemental to the *Recommended International Code of Practice – General principles of Food Hygiene* (CAC/RCP 1-1969, Rev. 4-2003).

The scope of the new work will include the development of a general guidance document for the control of foodborne viruses with a series of annexes to address the specific virus-commodity combinations as prioritized by the FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on viruses in food. Based on the current knowledge, these include:

- Noroviruses (NoV) and hepatitis A virus (HAV) in fresh produce – transmission mainly by irrigation water and manure;
- NoV and HAV in bivalve molluscs – transmission by faecal contaminated water in growing areas;
- NoV and HAV in prepared ready-to-eat (RTE) foods - contamination by food handlers.

Depending on the emergence of other viruses or other transmissions routes having a serious public health impact the development of additional annexes may be considered in the future.

Relevance and timeliness

Foodborne viral infections are increasingly recognized as causes of illness in humans. Reasons for this increase are most likely the improved diagnostic assays that have enhanced detection of some virus groups, and changes in food processing and consumption patterns that lead to worldwide availability of high-risk food. Implicated foods tend to be those that are minimally processed before consumption such as bivalve molluscs and fresh produce. These are typically contaminated with viruses in the primary production environment. In addition, many of the documented outbreaks of foodborne viral illness have been linked to contamination of prepared RTE food by an infected food handler. Control measures should be targeted at prevention of contamination (e.g. preventive measures at source or in food handling), rather than through food processes, as for the commodities of concern there is currently a lack of post harvest decontamination options. Intervention strategies should be focussed on the priority virus-commodity combinations. Where possible these combinations should be reviewed for specific regions.

While contaminated food has been clearly implicated in viral infections in humans, the proportion of infections that can be attributed to the consumption of contaminated food is not known.

Main aspects to be covered

The proposed new work will focus on hygienic practices and components of food safety systems that would be needed to control viruses in food.

Besides general guidelines for the control of foodborne viruses, specific guidance will be included concerning the control of NoV and HAV in fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods.

Assessment against the Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities

General criterion

Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries: *This new work will contribute to the*

prevention of human foodborne viral infections at global scale by providing guidance to prevent these infections.

Criteria applicable to general subjects

- (a) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade: *This new work will provide guidance which will enable countries to develop their own risk management strategies for the control of viruses in food. This work will assist in providing an internationally harmonized approach for the control of viruses in food.*
- (b) Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work: *The scope of the new work will include the development of a general guidance document for the control of foodborne viruses with a series of annexes to address specific virus- commodity combinations. These virus-commodity combinations include NoV and HAV in fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods. Work on the general guidelines and on the three annexes will be done in parallel without a specific priority.*
- (c) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies): *This new work does not duplicate work undertaken by other international organizations. It builds on recommendations expressed by the FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on viruses in food, the Consultation on Norovirus Prevention and Control by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), fact sheets made available by Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and other relevant sources of information.*

Criteria applicable to commodities

- (a) Volume of production and consumption in individual countries and volume of and pattern of trade between countries: *Fresh produce is a main food component in nearly all countries of the world. Fresh produce has a wide and complex distribution pattern being for the biggest part domestically, but also contributes significantly to the volume and value in international trade. Bivalve molluscs are popular as food in many countries, but mostly on a rather small scale. There is a substantial international trade in these products. Ready-to-Eat (RTE) foods are increasingly produced locally and regionally. A limited volume of these foods is involved in international trade. The persistence of some of the foodborne viruses in the environment and in foods results in survival during international trade. This means that the risk associated with foodborne viruses may lead to international outbreaks of illness and/or high economic losses. Trade in commodities known to be linked to virus hazards may be affected whenever there are reported cases, even from other sources.*
- (b) Diversifications of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade: *This new work will provide guidance which will enable countries to develop their own risk management strategies for the control of foodborne viruses in general and for specific commodities in particular. This may assist in providing an internationally harmonized approach for the control of viruses in food and specific commodities.*
- (c) International or regional market potential: *An increase in the international trade in fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods in the near future can be expected.*
- (d) Amenability of the commodity to standardisation: *Fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods constitute a wide variety of different products that are not easy to standardize.*
- (e) Coverage of the main consumer protection and trade issues by existing or proposed general standards: *Current food hygiene guidelines, most of which have been optimised for the prevention of bacterial infections, may be only partially effective against viruses.*
- (f) Number of commodities which would need separate standards indicating whether raw, semi-processed or processed: *In the first instance separate guidelines will be established for the commodities fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods.*

- (g) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies): *This new work does not duplicate work undertaken by other international organizations.*

RELEVANCE TO CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Objective 1: Promoting Sound Regulatory Framework

The results of this new work will contribute to the development of sound food control and regulatory infrastructures and consequently will promote the safety of foods, especially in relation to the risks of virus contamination.

Objective 2: Promoting Widest and Consistent Application of Scientific Principles and Risk Analysis

Because of the lack of sufficient appropriate data a complete risk analysis of viruses in food is not possible at the moment. However, the new work will include the identification and analysis of hazards associated with agricultural, manufacturing and hygienic practices in the production of fresh produce, bivalve molluscs and RTE foods. This information will be valuable for future international risk assessments for viruses in foods.

Objective 3: Promoting Linkages between Codex and other Multilateral Regulatory Instruments and Conventions

This work is based on a close coordination between FAO, WHO and Codex. For the annex on bivalve molluscs a close cooperation with CCFFP will be sought.

Objective 4: Enhance Capacity to Respond Effectively and Expeditiously to New Issues, Concerns and Developments in the Food Sector

The results of this work will enhance the capacity of Codex and will enable Codex to respond more effectively on new food safety concerns related to viruses in specific commodities or by specific transmission routes.

Objective 5: Promoting Maximum membership and Participation

The development of annexes on specific virus-commodity combinations will promote the participation of both developing and developed countries with specific interests.

Objective 6: Promoting Maximum Application of Codex Standards

The development of annexes on specific virus-commodity combinations will promote maximum application of the new document.

Relation between proposal and other existing Codex documents

As the Terms of Reference of the CCFH include the drafting of basic provisions on food hygiene, problems related to foodborne viruses should be part of the work program of CCFH. The proposed work is related and will be additional to the Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene. The development of commodity-specific annexes needs coordination with existing Codex documents such as the Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and the Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products.

Requirement for and availability of Expert Advice

Substantial scientific advice from the FAO/WHO expert meeting on “Viruses in Food”, which took place in May 2007 in the Netherlands, is available. Further expert advice may be necessary when specific questions to be identified during the process of developing the document.

Proposed timeline for completion of the new work

A period of four-five years is proposed for the completion of the general guidelines and the three proposed annexes, according to the attached work plan.

Work to be lead by

The Netherlands

Inclusion of a risk profile

Developing a risk profile for the general guidelines is not appropriate, but individual risk profiles for the different virus-commodity combinations would be useful. A first risk profile has been prepared for NoV in bivalve molluscan shellfish (CX/FH/06/38/10, Attachment 6). The report of FAO/WHO Expert Meeting on Viruses in Food also contains many components of risk profiles for the priority virus-commodity combinations. Further developing of risk profiles will be part of the preparation of the annexes.

Work plan for the development of guidelines to control viruses in food including specific annexes

Timetable	Meeting	Progress
December 2008	40 th session CCFH	Agree on purpose and scope and request permission for new work
March 2009	Intersession Working Group (Netherlands) –Physical Group	Development of proposed Draft Code and annexes. Preparation of a detailed work plan. Discussion on the need of subgroups for the annexes
July 2009	32 nd CAC,	approval as new work
December 2009	41 st session CCFH	Present proposed Draft Code and annexes. Agree on proposal.
March 2010	Intersession - Physical Working Group	Work by the Working Group on proposed Draft Code and annexes.
December 2010	42 nd session of CCFH	Consider proposed Draft Code and annexes at Step 3 and advance for adoption at Step 5.
December 2011	43 rd session of CCFH	Physical Working Group before the 43th Session in order to help review comments and finalize the document for adoption at Step 8.
July 2012	CAC	Adoption of Code of Hygienic Practice to control viruses in food, including three specific annexes.

ANNEX 2

Excerpt from the Report of the Thirty-first Session CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION (International Conference Centre, Geneva (Switzerland), 30 June - 4 July 2008) – ALINORM 08/31/REP

“Committee on Natural Mineral Waters – Amendments to the Standard on Natural Mineral Waters

106. The Commission noted the proposal of Kenya to initiate new work on the completion of the Section on methods of analysis in the Codex Standard on Natural Mineral Waters (CODEX STAN 108-1981) in view of the fact that, in the standard, there was no indication of specific methods of analysis and sampling procedures available for a number of chemical substances mentioned in Sections 3.2.17 (Surface active agents), 3.2.18 (Pesticides and PCBs), 3.2.19 (Mineral oil) and 3.2.20 (Polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons), and the proposal to revise the Section on Hygiene to make it easier to use and consistent with the Recommended International Code of Hygienic Practice for Collecting, Processing and Marketing of Natural Mineral Waters (CAC/RCP 33-1985). The Chair of the Committee on Natural Mineral Waters also noted that the proposal from Kenya had been presented orally at the last session of the Committee on Natural Mineral Waters; however it had not been examined by the Committee as it fell outside the mandate given to the Committee by the 30th Session of the Commission. The Commission further noted that the project document had been considered at the last session of the Executive Committee and, after some discussion, agreed to refer the issue on the methods of analysis raised in Project Document 22³ to the Committees on Contaminants in Foods, on Pesticide Residues and on Methods of Analysis and Sampling for review in their respective areas of competence as a matter of priority, especially whether further work was warranted and desirable.

107. The Commission also agreed to request the Committee on Food Hygiene to consider whether it was possible to give a higher priority to the revision of the Recommended International Code of Hygienic Practice for Collecting, Processing and Marketing of Natural Mineral Waters.

108. The Commission also requested the Committees concerned, as mentioned above, to inform the Executive Committee and the Commission about their findings in order to allow the Commission to take an informed decision on this matter at its next session.”

³ ALINORM 08/31/9, ALINORM 08/31/9 Add.1 ; ALINORM 08/31/3A