

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

CX/FICS 02/INF.2

January 2002

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Tenth Session

Brisbane, Australia, 25 February – 1 March 2002

TRACEABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

(Prepared by the Australian Secretariat)

BACKGROUND

1. “Traceability” has been raised in several Codex Committees and Task Forces. The matter was brought to the attention of the Commission at its 24th meeting (ALINORM 01/21 Part IV Add.1) in order to consider means of dealing with it within the framework of Codex in a uniform manner. The Commission was unable to discuss the agenda paper on the issue which was therefore taken up at the special meeting of the Executive Committee in September 2001. The Executive Committee decided, *inter alia*, to request CCFICS to consider the modalities for the application of traceability, in particular in reference to the use of official inspection and certification systems to ensure the integrity of traceability. The present paper (which draws freely from ALINORM 01/21 Part IV Add. 1) is intended to provide the basis for CCFICS to consider the issue. (Also see CX/FICS 02/2, paras. 10-15, for background details).

MEANING OF TRACEABILITY

2. “Traceability” is defined as the “ability to trace the history, application or location of an entity by means of recorded identifications”.¹ Traceability is closely linked with product identification. It may relate to:

- the origin of materials and parts;
- the product processing history;
- the distribution and location of the product after delivery.

TRACEABILITY IN CODEX TEXTS

3. Traceability is a recognized process in adopted Codex texts and texts under elaboration, even if the word “traceability” has not been used. In most cases it is linked to product identification and recall procedures. Examples in adopted texts include:

- Recommended International Code of Practice – General Principles of Food Hygiene (CAC/RCP 1-1969, Rev. 3-1997): Section 9.1 Lot Identification;

¹ International Organisation for Standardisation: ISO 8402: 1994

- Codex Code of Practice for Low-Acid and Acidified Low-Acid Canned Foods (CAC/RCP 23-1979, Rev. 2-1993): Section 8.2 Record Review and Maintenance;
- Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods (CODEX STAN 1-1985, Rev. 1-1999): Section 4.4 Name and address, Section 4.5 Country of Origin, Section 4.6 Lot Identification;
- Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries of Rejections of Imported Food (CAC/GL 25-1997): paragraphs 11-12 Identification of the Food Concerned and Importation Details.
- Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods (CAC/GL 32-1999)
- the Terms of Reference of the Codex *ad hoc* Intergovernmental Task Force on Animal Feeding²

4. Draft or proposed draft texts include:

- Draft Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods Livestock and Livestock Products, Annex 3 (ALINORM 01/22, Appendix II);
- Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products (ALINORM 01/18, Appendix V, Section 3.7);
- Proposed Draft Revised Code of Practice for the Processing and Handling of Quick-Frozen Foods (CL 2001/01-PFV, Section 3.6);
- Proposed Draft Code of Hygienic Practice for the Primary Production, Harvesting and Packaging of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (ALINORM 01/13A, Appendix II): Sections 5.7 (Documentation and records) and 5.8 (Recall procedures and traceback) – also Annex II;
- Proposed Draft Guidelines for the Utilization and Promotion of Quality Assurance Systems to Meet Requirements in Relation to Food (CX/FICS 01/5, para 32);
- Proposed Draft Code of Practice on Good Animal Feeding (CX/AF 01/5); Sections 4.2. *Labelling* and 4.3. *Traceability and Record Keeping*);
- Proposed Draft Principles for the Risk Analysis of Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology (ALINORM 01/34A, Appendix II): the relevant paragraph in this text is in square brackets.

5. The FAO Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-Based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition (Melbourne, October 1999) accepted the suggestion that traceability was an important control factor in the production of foods.

6. Codex texts do not currently apply traceability to the origin of foods and ingredients with the exception of the Country of Origin provisions of the *General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods* and the *Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods*.

7. Traceability related to product processing history is covered partially by the General Principles of Food Hygiene and in particular the Annex: Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point System and Guidelines for its Application. The Code of Practice for Low-Acid and Acidified Low-Acid Canned Foods also contains extensive requirements relating to traceability in product processing, as does the specific case of organically-produced foods mentioned above.

8. Within established Codex texts, traceability as it relates to the distribution and location of the product after delivery has been expressed partially in the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* and the *General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods*, with references to Lot Identification and the ability to recall product if necessary. At the moment, Codex texts do not require manufacturers or distributors to maintain records of onward distribution, with the exception of the *Code of Practice for Low-Acid and Acidified Low-Acid Canned Food*.

² Procedural Manual, 11th edition, p. 127

RECENT DISCUSSIONS

9. As noted above, several Codex Committees and Task Forces have initiated work on one or other aspects of traceability. Traceability, as a subject in itself, has been discussed in a preliminary way by CCFICS, by the ad hoc Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Animal Feeding and by the *ad hoc* Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology. The nature of the discussions is significantly different in each of these bodies.

10. The Codex Committee on General Principles has also discussed traceability within the context of the discussion which took place at the 9th meeting of CCFICS.³ During this discussion in CCGP all delegations that spoke highlighted the importance of the issue and the importance of a uniform approach to the concept and application of traceability. Individual issues that delegations and observers believed to be important in the development of the topic included:

- the place of traceability in risk management;
- the use of traceability for product integrity, authenticity and identification;
- the use of equivalent measures;
- practicability of traceability, and in particular the feasibility of its application in developing countries;
- consumer confidence and information concerning the nature and origin of products;
- the possibility of using traceability for liability and redress.

11. At a technical level, the ad hoc Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Animal Feeding has included specific reference to traceability in the proposed Draft Code of Practice on Good Animal Feeding, but will discuss the matter at its next session (June 2002) in the light of the discussion in the Executive Committee. The *ad hoc* Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology has discussed traceability in the context of the Proposed Draft Principles for the Risk Analysis of Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology, but has not come to a consensus on the inclusion of a reference to traceability as an element of risk management. In this regard, the Task Force agreed to circulate for comment a discussion paper prepared by France (see Annex A) and a note prepared by the USA (see Annex B).

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

12. Traceability is not an end in itself, but a means to an end such as consumer protection. Within the Codex context, consideration must be given to the reasons for applying traceability for food products and the extent to which traceability is to be required, typically in combination with other measures, as part of a food standard, code of practice, food labelling text or similar document. Such reasons must lie within the overall mandate of the Commission, namely *to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade*.

13. The extent to which traceability may be applied “to protect the health of consumers” may be considered as part of a food safety risk management decision. Such a decision would assume the ability to demonstrate the presence of a food safety risk that could be managed by a system, incorporating traceability, in a manner that would achieve the appropriate level of protection (ALOP) from that risk. Similarly, such a decision would also need to take into account other measures that would achieve the same ALOP that may be less costly or may be more appropriate in a given situation. A decision to apply traceability would need therefore to specify whether it is to be applied throughout the production and distribution chain or only to some part of the chain. Such decisions may need to be specified on a case-by-case basis taking into account the nature of the risk, and the ability to manage the risk by the use of traceability or by other means.

14. The application of traceability “to ensure fair practices in the food trade” is probably most directly linked to the first of the General Principles set down in the *General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods* which reads: “Pre-packaged food shall not be described or presented on any label or in any labelling in

³ ALINORM 01/33A, paras. 12-15

a manner that is false, misleading or is likely to create an erroneous impression regarding its character in any respect". This application is also expressed in the *Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods*, the aims of which include:

- to protect consumers against deception and fraud in the market place and unsubstantiated product claims;
- to protect consumers of organic produce against mis-representation of other agricultural produce as being organic.

15. This application of traceability is closely linked to the concept of identity preservation (IP) and may be used to ensure the validity of other labelling claims as well. Similarly to the use of traceability to protect the health of consumers, a decision to apply traceability to ensure fair practices in the food trade would need to specify whether it is to be applied throughout the production and distribution chain or only to some part of the chain. The use of traceability "to ensure fair practices in the food trade" correlates to the "prevention of deceptive practices" as a legitimate objective described by the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade.

INSPECTION/CERTIFICATION AND TRACEABILITY

16. Wherever possible and appropriate CCFICS has used common definitions of terms in the texts which it has submitted to the Commission for adoption. The term *inspection* is defined as:

the examination of food or systems for control of food, raw materials, processing and distribution, including in-process and finished product testing, in order to verify that they conform to requirements.

17. The term *certification* is defined as:

the procedure by which official certification bodies and officially recognised bodies provide written or equivalent assurance that foods or food control systems conform to requirements. Certification of food may be, as appropriate, based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous on-line inspection, auditing of quality assurance systems, and examination of finished products.

18. **Requirements**, mentioned in each of these definitions, are:

the criteria set down by the competent authorities relating to trade in foodstuffs covering the protection of public health, the protection of consumers and conditions of fair trading.

19. In terms of these definitions, therefore, *traceability* may be considered as a *requirement*. In essence, it may be required that a food should possess the abstract attribute of being traceable, in the same way that food is required to be *wholesome*. Inspection and certification are two of the means that may be used to ensure that a food can be traced.

20. As a practical matter, inspection (including observation, testing, record-keeping and so forth) can be one of the primary tools for verifying that identity is preserved (by means such as product segregation and batch identification) through the various phases of processing and handling of foods. Certification is one means of attesting to interested parties as to the identity and provenance of a food, a function which alternatively might be performed by accurate labelling or the use of product identity marks or codes.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE COMMITTEE

21. In order, therefore, to meet its mandate from the Executive Committee ("CCFICS to consider the modalities for the application of traceability, in particular in reference to the use of official inspection and certification systems to ensure the integrity of traceability") the Committee could consider three issues:

- whether the existing Codex norms originating in CCFICS are adequate in relation to their applicability to traceability; and
- whether any work currently underway needs to be re-oriented; and
- whether any new projects need to be initiated in order to cover the issue of traceability.

22. A preliminary review of texts prepared by CCFICS and approved by the Commission shows that, apart from the Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations and the Guidelines for the Exchange of Information Between Countries on Rejections of Imported Food, these texts tend not to refer to traceability (or elements of a traceability regime) in a specific way. The Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification and the Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems do however apply generally to the meeting of requirements by means of inspection and certification and therefore also to traceability. The latter Guidelines also refer not only to “requirements” but also to “objectives to be addressed through import and export inspection and certification systems”⁴ and such objectives could be taken to include traceability.

23. Work currently underway in CCFICS concerns:

- guidelines for judgment of equivalence of sanitary measures associated with food inspection and certification systems;
- guidelines for judgment of equivalence of technical regulations associated with food inspection and certification systems;
- (revision of) guidelines for the exchange of information in food control emergency situations;
- guidelines for food import control systems;
- guidelines for the official recognition of quality assurance systems to meet requirements in relation to food.

24. In principle each of these items applies to, *inter alia*, traceability although in some instances (eg the guidelines on the judgment of equivalence) the degree of applicability may be rather limited.

25. The question of whether new work should be initiated by CCFICS (with the endorsement of the Commission or the Executive Committee) specifically on the issue of traceability has two parts: whether any Codex norm is necessary in this area (ie in the area of the relationship between traceability and inspection/certification); and whether such a need is or will be met by work already completed or in progress (as described above).

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. The Committee may wish to take the following actions:

- a) note that the Codex Committee on General Principles is to consider when and to what extent traceability should be considered as a risk management option within the Codex Working Principles for Risk Analysis; that the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene and the Codex Committee on Food Labelling are to examine whether and to what extent traceability requirements currently included in their general and specific texts may need to be strengthened; and that the Codex Intergovernmental Task Force on Animal Feeding has included specific reference to traceability in the proposed Draft Code of Practice on Good Animal Feeding for discussion at its next session;
- b) note that inspection and certification may be in some situations the most efficacious means of implementing a requirement for food to be traceable;
- c) decide whether it would be appropriate for the Committee to attempt to codify the circumstances in which traceability should be applied as a requirement;

⁴ See Section 6 – *Inspection and Certification System Infrastructure* in the *Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems*.

- d) note that aspects of traceability are specifically referenced in the *Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations* and in the *Guidelines for the Exchange of Information Between Countries on Rejections of Imported Food*;
- e) note that, apart from these examples, existing and prospective guidance developed within CCFICS applies generally to traceability as it does to other requirements which food must conform to;
- f) decide whether to advise the Executive Committee that the Committee does not propose to initiate further work specifically on this topic (eg in relation to (c) above) unless the Executive Committee or the Commission so direct.