

# 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 6

CX/FICS 03/6  
September 2003

## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Twelfth Session

Brisbane, Australia, 1 – 5 December 2003

### OTHER BUSINESS AND FUTURE WORK

Comments from Australia and the International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO) in response to CL 2002/54-FICS and CL 2003/17-FICS - Part B 2 "Future Work"

#### AUSTRALIA

#### 1. ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION

##### Background

1. CCFICS (2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting) discussed the issues surrounding implementation and principle elements that an electronic documentation system would require. Previous material presented to CCFICS included a paper titled "Principle Elements in an Electronic Document System" (2<sup>nd</sup> meeting), a proposed draft guideline and a SANCERT example (3<sup>rd</sup> meeting). Discussion was suspended at the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting (December 1997) primarily due to concerns that development of guidance material by CCFICS was premature and would somehow see electronic systems mandated.

2. Since 1997 there has been considerable international development in the generation and acceptance of electronic certification attesting to a range of importing country requirements.

##### Objective

3. To prepare guidelines for competent authorities, that elaborate elements within the CCFICS document "Draft guidelines for generic official certificate formats and the production and issuance of certificates" in relation to policy and the mechanisms for production, transfer and acceptance of electronic certificates.

##### Principles

4. The principles in relation to production and issuance of certificates are covered in the existing CCFICS document "*Guidelines for Generic Official Certificate Formats and the Production and Issuance of Certificates* (CAC/GL 38 – 2001).

##### Section 5

Certificates should be required only where declarations are necessary to provide information about product safety or suitability for consumption, or to otherwise facilitate fair trade. Multiple or redundant certificates should be avoided to the extent possible. The rationale and requirements for certification should be communicated in a transparent manner and consistently implemented in a non-discriminatory manner. Certificates should be designed and used in a manner that:

- Meets requirements in respect of food safety, suitability for consumption and the facilitation of fair trade in food;

- Simplifies and expedites the certification process;
- Clarifies the responsibility of all parties;
- Satisfies compulsory trade description requirements;
- Provides for accurate identification of the consignment being certified;
- Minimizes the risk of fraud.

5. The government agency having jurisdiction shall take responsibility for any certificate issued by a certifying body.

6. It is envisaged that the proposed new work would elaborate these principles with respect to the operation of electronic certification systems, covering issues such as security, acknowledgement of certificate acceptance, dealing with temporary system failures, and other matters which may be peculiar to electronic certification. Paragraph 9 contains a preliminary list of principles for electronic certification, and is presented for consideration by CCFICS.

#### **Elements of electronic documentation systems**

7. The elements of an electronic based certification /documentation systems may include:

- An electronic interface between the exporter client and certification authority;
- Communication link with on-site inspection staff for confirmation of data input;
- Links to competent authority of importing country, which may include web-based links rather than costly information technology systems;
- Processing system that produces electronic certificates compliant with internationally recognised message structure standards;
- Electronic transfer of data secured by Secure Shell protocols or recognised equivalent systems;
- Use of interoperable web based technologies, to facilitate access and align with importing country infrastructure, including other competent authorities.

#### **Recommendation**

8. That the Committee note the issues specific to electronic certification and consider the options for further work in this area:

- Developing an annex to the CAC/GL 38 – 2001 that covers the principles specific to electronic certification. The Committee may wish to consider the following (paragraph 9), list of Draft Principles for Electronic Certification as the basis for discussion; or
- Development of separate new work that covers these issues.

#### **Draft Principles for Electronic Certification**

9. Electronic systems should provide an electronic exchange standard for sanitary and phyto-sanitary data of export produce that:

- i. Streamlines clearance processes by providing cost-effective, reliable and flexible solutions
- ii. Meets the access requirements of foreign markets
- iii. Complies with international inter-governmental standards
- iv. Promotes food security
- v. Speeds up border processing
- vi. Protects participating governments and traders against fraud
- vii. Is reliable
- viii. Is flexible and extensible
- ix. Is simple to use and easy to adopt
- x. Incurs low implementation and operation costs
- xi. Assists participation by all countries, particularly developing countries.

## 2. WORK PLANNING

10. It is timely that CCFICS considers determining a prioritisation framework to enable optimal use of Committee resources. The development of such work should take into account the anticipated work of Codex Committee on General Principles in this area<sup>1</sup>.

### External environment

11. The current environment of international food standards impact on CCFICS and may have a bearing on the strategic direction of the Committee. These matters include *inter alia*:

- The effect of the implementation of the WTO agreements on existing texts and possibility of creating need for more guidance material that is within the ambit of CCFICS;
- Review of Codex and the medium term plan;
- Development in other Codex fora, of general principles that bear on the work of CCFICS;
- Referral from other Codex fora;
- Emerging issues affecting the inspection and certification of food in international trade.

### CCFICS objectives

12. The objectives for CCFICS will primarily remain fulfilment of the terms of reference of the Committee<sup>2</sup>. A defined prioritisation framework could be a valuable tool for assessment of proposals of new work, including the revision of existing texts.

### Suggested work planning criteria

13. New work proposals should include the following elements to enable their priority against the work agenda of CCFICS to be determined.

How the proposal links to the Terms of Reference for CCFICS

- Clear description of the objective and outcome for the work proposal, including some benefits analysis particularly for developing countries;
- Consideration of the most appropriate forum to deliver the objective. (Alternative fora may better deliver the objective or particular elements of the objective, for example, another Codex Committee or another international standards setting agency);
- Description of how the proposed work incorporates or elaborates the principles and elements in overarching documents prepared by CCFICS. (CAC/GL 20-1995 and CAC/GL 26-1997);
- Level of support from delegations;
- Most appropriate mechanism to elaborate work, such as appointed *ad hoc* working group (electronic or meeting), plenary meeting or independent expert.

### Recommendation

14. That CCFICS consider whether the development of new work prioritisation framework should be formalised.

15. That the development of criteria for assessment of new work proposal elaborate the points listed above.

16. That should CCFICS agree to development of prioritisation framework, the task should take account of the anticipated Codex Committee on General Principles work on “Criteria for Establishment of Work Priorities”.

---

<sup>1</sup> Para. 163, ALINORM 03/41, CX/GP 03/19/4 (paper not yet available)

<sup>2</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission – Procedural Manual 13<sup>th</sup> Edition page 117-118

**INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSUMER FOOD ORGANIZATIONS (IACFO)**

17. The International Association of Consumer Food Organizations (IACFO) wishes to submit the following comments in response to circular letter CL 2003/17, paragraph two, which requested comments on suggested subjects for future work.

18. IACFO urges the Committee to continue its work on the Judgement of Equivalence of Sanitary Measures Associated with Food Inspection and Certification Systems. We urge the Committee to prepare appendices to the final standard adopted by the Commission in July 2003 that would address documentation requirements, outline the terms for onsite visits by importing country officials, and address the specific types of technical assistance to be provided by importing countries to exporting countries, especially developing countries.

19. The development of these appendices to the final standard would be consistent with the Committee's terms of reference and the Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities, as set out in the Commission's Procedural Manual.