

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

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Agenda Item 5

**CX/FICS 99/5
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**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION
AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS
Seventh Session
Melbourne, Australia, 22 - 26 February 1999**

**Proposed Draft Guidelines and Criteria for Official Certificate Formats and Rules Relating to
the Production and Issuances of Certificates**

Paper prepared by Australia and the United Kingdom

Background

1. At its 22nd Session, the Codex Alimentarius Commission agreed that the Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) should not undertake the elaboration of a generic official certificate *per se*, but requested it to consider a discussion paper addressing general guidelines and criteria for official certificates.
2. The sixth session of CCFICS considered a paper prepared by Australia on this basis. At the suggestion of the Delegation of the United Kingdom, the Committee decided to consider a paper prepared by Australia together with a paper prepared by the United Kingdom on the development of guidelines and criteria for a generic official certificate format
3. The Committee welcomed the proposals put forward in the two papers¹. It stressed that Guidelines should define carefully the responsibilities of the commercial parties and competent authorities involved in the preparation and issuance of certificates. Moreover, it agreed that certification was not always necessary and that there was a continued danger of a proliferation of certificates, adding to the costs to the food trade and to the competent authorities. It was proposed that model certificates could be drafted on the basis of related commodity groupings. The possibility of transmission of certificates or the information contained therein by electronic means or via the Internet was also stressed. One Delegation proposed that the English language, together with other languages as appropriate, should be used for all certificates.
4. In regard to the Discussion Paper on Rules Relating to the Production and Issuance of Certificates, it was agreed that the contents of the papers needed rearrangement in order to combine it with the other document.

¹ CX/FICS 98/6 and CX/FICS 98/5

5. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Executive Committee that work be started on the Guidelines and Criteria for Official Certificate Formats, based on commodity-specific certificates and incorporating Rules Relating to the Production and Issuance of Certificates. Subject to the Executive Committee's approval, the Committee requested the Delegations of Australia and the United Kingdom to jointly prepare a draft for consideration at the Committee's next session.
6. The 45th session of the Executive Committee supported the recommendation of CCFICS to include this topic on its program of new work².
7. The paper *Proposed Draft Guideline and Criteria for a Generic Official Certificate Format* prepared by Australia and the United Kingdom follows at Annex 1.

² ALINORM 99/3 Appendix 3.

PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDELINE AND CRITERIA FOR A GENERIC OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE FORMAT

1. OBJECTIVES

1. This guideline provides information in respect of the management of official certificates that attest to attributes of food presented for international trade. Certificates should contain essential information that meets the objectives of importing countries. The level of information required should be adequate for the purpose and not impose unnecessary burdens on the exporting country or exporter.
2. It does not cover the rationale for the use of certificates nor comment on the system that underpins the presentation of the document.

2. GENERAL FORMAT OF CERTIFICATE

2.1 Standard format

3. Official certificates should contain a declaration by the official, or officially recognised, certification agency and be duly signed and sealed by an officer authorised for this purpose.
4. The official forms should be produced on one sheet of paper or, where more than only one page is required, in such a form that any two or more pages are part of the integrated whole and indivisible (eg. large folded sheet of paper). Where this is not possible, each individual sheet should be separately signed by the certifying officer.
5. Each form should have a unique identification number, a record of which is kept by the issuing authority, and be printed in an unambiguous style in a language, or languages, fully understood by the certifying officers and by the receiving authority.
6. The documentation should carry clear identification of the certifying agency with letterhead or logo.
7. The documentation should carry clear identification of the commodity or consignment.
8. The certificate should be printed with the required number of copies. Each copy should have some identifier that indicates the correct recipient of the particular copy. For example marking with the word “ORIGINAL” or “COPY” as appropriate. Copies may be a printed in a different colour.

2.2 Responsibilities of Certifying Officers

9. Information on the responsibilities of officers and directions for how to complete the forms should be available to all certifying officers. This may be printed on the cover of the book of certificates.

10. The certifying officers should conform to the following:

- have no conflict of interest in the consignment;
- only certify matters within the officer's own knowledge or information ascertained by an authorised colleague;
- only certify in respect of circumstances at the time of signing the document.

2.3 Instructions for completing the form

11. Certificates should always be issued and presented, to the exporter or his/her agent, in the original.

12. A copy of the certificate (clearly marked 'COPY') should be provided to the competent authorities in both the exporting and importing countries, on request.

13. Where, for any good and sufficient reason (such as damage in transit) a duplicate certificate is issued by the certifying officer it must be clearly marked 'DUPLICATE' before being issued.

14. When signing a certificate, the officer must ensure that:-

- the certificate contains no deletions other than those required by the text of the certificate;
- any alterations of the certified information must be initialled and stamped by the certifying officer using the official stamp of the competent authority;
- the certificate bears his/her signature, the name address and official position of the certifying officer in clear lettering and, where appropriate, his/her qualifications;
- wherever possible, he/she should sign, stamp³ and complete any manuscript portions in a colour of ink which does not readily photocopy - ie: a colour other than black;
- the certificate bears the date on which the certificate was signed and issued and, where appropriate, the time for which the certificate will remain valid;
- no portion of the certificate is left blank, so that it could be completed by some person other than the certifying officer.

3. CRITERIA

3.1 Details of the consignment

(NOTE: These details are not specific to food, as they constitute the normal field of information contained in any Bill of Lading for transport vessels carrying product between countries. Including shipping data on the official certification documentation provides a means of verifying details about the product.)

³ This is the official stamp of the competent authority or its delegate.

15. The nature and quantity of the product being certified must be clearly documented. The details should include (at least) the following:

- quantity, in the appropriate units, number and weight (or volume) of packs;
- lot identifier or date coding;
- product destination;
- manufacturer (if appropriate). This may not always be possible if product is a compilation of various suppliers, however the company (or person etc) responsible for collating the products should be included where this is the case; and
- name and contact details of the exporter and broker.

3.2 Statement of origin

165. If the country of origin is not included in consignment details this should be specifically declared on the certificate.

17. Where the importing country requires a statement as to the origin of all ingredients in a product, the certificate should specify the origin of any ingredients sourced outside the exporting country.

3.3 Health attestations

18. The particular health attestations will be determined by the requirements of the importing country or the food export control system operating in the supplying jurisdiction and should be laid out clearly in the text of the certificate. Such attestations may include but are not limited to:

- product conformity with particular standards;
- the status (licensing details) of processing and/or packaging plant in the exporting country;
- reference to any associated bilateral/multilateral agreement.