

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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TO: Codex Contact Points
Interested International Organizations

FROM: Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme
FAO, 00100 Rome, Italy

SUBJECT: **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN LABELLING**

DEADLINE: **28 February 2005**

COMMENTS: To: Mr. Ron Burke, Director
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and Interagency Affairs,
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The 32nd Session of the Committee on Food Labelling recognized that there was no consensus on the need for new work on country of origin labelling and decided to report back to the 27th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission that it had had an extensive discussion but the opinion of the Committee was divided between those delegations and observers who supported new work and those who opposed it, in order to seek guidance from the Commission (ALINORM 04/27/22, paras. 110-116). The 27th Session of the Commission had the following discussion on this question (ALINORM 04/27/41, paras. 165-170).

Many delegations and observers supported new work on country of origin labelling in response to increased consumer demand for such information and pointed out that the current provisions in the *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* might result in misleading labelling and required clarification. These delegations therefore supported the revision of the current provisions, including consideration of ingredients labelling and a clarification of the meaning of “country of origin” for processed foods.

Many other delegations opposed further work on this issue for the following reasons: the current provisions were adequate to provide clear information to consumers; additional information on the origin of ingredients was likely to create confusion for consumers; it would entail huge costs and liability questions for producers and manufacturers; and enforcement of such provisions would create a considerable burden for national authorities, especially in developing countries.

Several delegations and Observers stated that country of origin labelling would not provide any benefit to consumers in terms of food safety since it was the responsibility of food safety authorities to ensure that all food placed on the market were safe. Other delegations and Observers pointed out that such information addressed consumer demand for clear information to make informed choices, and could aid in food control by official authorities, especially as regards traceability/product tracing. Some delegations stressed the importance of country of origin information for importing countries.

Several delegations proposed a compromise solution limiting the scope of new work on country of origin labelling to misleading claims and to unprocessed foods, in view of the difficulties associated with ingredient labelling for processed foods. The Chairperson of the Committee on Labelling, hosted by Canada, proposed to ask some questions to member countries to clarify if and why the current provisions were inadequate for member countries, and whether there was a problem of interpretation of the current requirements.

The Commission considered a proposal to add the following additional question “if these provisions are considered to be inadequate, would additional guidance restricted to prepackaged unprocessed food be the solution”. However, some delegations did not support this proposal, given that the definition of “unprocessed foods” did not exist in Codex as noted by the Delegation of Brazil and would require detailed consideration.

After further discussion, the Commission recognized that no conclusion could be reached at this stage on whether or not to undertake new work on country of origin labelling. The Commission agreed to forward the following questions for consideration by the Committee on Food Labelling:

- a) *whether the current provisions in sections 4.5.1 and 4.5.2 for Country of Origin Labelling contained in the Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods were adequate to address Members’ needs with respect to country of origin labelling*
- b) *whether countries have encountered difficulties with the interpretation of those provisions.*

Governments and international organizations are therefore invited to provide their reply to the questions from the Commission. The question of country of origin labelling and the replies received will be considered by the 33rd Session of the Committee on Food Labelling (Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, 9-13 May 2005).

Governments and international organizations wishing to provide comments should do so in writing, preferably by email, to the above addresses, **before 28 February 2005**