



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAM
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING**

Thirty-ninth Session

Québec City, Canada 9 – 13 May 2011

Proposed Draft Definition of Nutrient Reference Values

(at Step 3)

NOTE: This revision contains the comments received in reply to CL 2010/21-FL that were missing from the originally distributed document.

Governments and international organizations in Observer status with the Codex Alimentarius Commission wishing to submit comments on the on the proposed draft definition (see paragraph 16) are invited to do so **no later than 4 April 2011** to:

Codex Contact Point for Canada, Food, Directorate, Health Canada, 250 Sir Frederick Banting Driveway, Ottawa, ON K1A 0K9, Canada, Fax : +1.613.941.3537, E-mail: codex_canada@hc-sc.gc.ca

with a copy to the

Secretariat, Codex Alimentarius Commission, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy, Fax No + 39.06.5705.4593; E-mail: codex@fao.org

1. The 38th Session (May 2010) of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) agreed to develop a definition for Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs) in response to a request from the Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses. The 33rd Session (July 2010) of the Codex Alimentarius Commission approved new work on the elaboration of a definition.
2. The 38th Session of the CCFL further agreed that comments would be requested through a circular letter on the proposed text provided by the CCNFSDU (CX/CF 10/38/2) and that the Delegation of Canada would provide a proposed draft definition for consideration by the next session based on these comments.
3. The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) is developing general principles for establishing NRVs for labelling purposes. In the course of this work during its 31st session (November 2009), it was noted that, whereas the term “Nutrient Reference Values” is used in the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling, there is no definition for the term. It was agreed that CCFL should be requested to establish a definition since this is under their mandate. This definition would be expected to be included in the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling in section 2 - Definitions and would be applicable to the term when used in those Guidelines as well as in the **General Principles for Establishing Nutrient Reference Values of Vitamins and Minerals for the General Population** (currently at Step 8) (GPs-NRV) and the **Draft General Principles for Establishing Nutrient Reference Values for Nutrients Associated with Risk of Noncommunicable Diseases for the General Population** (currently at Step 3) (GPs-NRV-NCD), which will be appended to the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling.
4. CCNFSDU proposed the following text for consideration by the CCFL in developing a definition for NRV: “*Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling*”. The CCNFSDU also proposed that the CCFL should consider the following additions to the definition:
 - a. “*and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements*” and

b. “and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases”.

5. Circular Letter CL 2010/21-FL was circulated in August 2010 requesting comments on the proposed text provided by the CCNFSDU. In response, 10 comments were received from members and 2 from observer organizations.
6. There was general support for retaining the main statement as proposed by CCNFSDU (see paragraph 4 above). Suggestions for changes mainly revolved around slight differences in wording while one member suggested a more extensive change. This was a suggestion to say that the NRVs serve as a guide to evaluate and plan the food intake of healthy populations, however, this is not the purpose of these NRVs. Two members suggested saying the NRVs are for use in “food labelling” but this seemed broader than necessary. Four small proposed changes are included in the proposal below, i.e. to capitalize “Nutrient Reference Value, include the abbreviation NRV, and add the words “by Codex Alimentarius” after “established”, and remove the words, “and used”.
7. There was some support for staying with a single statement covering both types of NRV without going into the details of the basis for them. Two members suggested not including either basis for setting NRVs in the definition. One of these indicated that the NRVs allow a quick assessment of the contribution of a food to the general daily diet and are not intended to detail the nutrition needs of specific age groups or reflect amounts of nutrients to be consumed for the purpose of reducing the risk of noncommunicable diseases. The other indicated that adding these additional statements would make the definition unnecessarily complicated and potentially restrictive, and that the ongoing work by CCNFSDU on principles for establishing NRVs on each of these bases provides recommendations on how the values should be derived, whether by Codex or by members. One observer organization proposed new wording attempting to encompass both types in a way that wouldn’t require distinguishing the two bases by indicating that the values are based on nutrient requirements for health.
8. Most respondents supported making reference to the basis of the NRVs being scientific data on nutrient requirements.
9. The aspect that received the most comments had to do with including a statement concerning the basis for NRVs-NCD, i.e. risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCD). There was more support expressed for not including it than for including it. The reasons given for not including it varied. Besides what is mentioned above (in paragraph 7) by those not inclined to include either basis, it was also argued: that including reference only to nutrient requirements would be sufficient to allow nutrients that may be deemed essential to be placed on labels to help consumer choice; that the statement could create confusion if the linkage between the nutrient levels and the NCD is not specified; and that the definition should be general and there should be only one definition of NRV and one term, NRV, on the food label, i.e. there should be no reference to NRVs for nutrients associated with risk of diet-related NCDs on the food label. With regard to the latter point, it was also noted that the link for some nutrients with NCDs is associated with their intake levels rather than with the nutrient, *per se*.
10. A member who was in favour of including reference to the NCD basis indicated that there could be more than one NRV for a given nutrient depending on the purpose of the labelling information, for example, there could be an NRV set for potassium based on requirements and a higher NRV-NCD based on reduced risk of an NCD. This member suggested to include a statement to this effect as part of the definition. Another member noted that including reference to the two bases allows for alternative approaches for deriving these values noting the available data and limitations of current scientific knowledge will not support just one approach being used.
11. In addition, an observer organization raised the matter of the scientific basis for the NRV and proposed text that indicates that the scientific data used should be convincing, relevant and recent. However, the GPs-NRV and GPs-NRV-NCD being developed by CCNFSDU recommend that Codex Alimentarius derive NRVs from suitable data sources and describe those sources in terms of daily nutrient intake values or, as a more general term that also includes upper intake levels, daily intake reference values established by FAO or a recognized authoritative scientific body other than

FAO/WHO who are setting these based on scientific data. In so doing, careful thought has been given by CCNFSDU on how to describe the nature of the scientific evidence that should be underpinning the values that will be used as the basis for the NRVs. Thus, it does not appear necessary to put these criteria in the definition of NRV.

12. In deciding how to reconcile the various positions and issues, Canada notes that there is strong support among those who commented to include in the definition a statement concerning the basis related to nutrient requirements. While there is less support for including the basis related to NCDs, Canada notes that CCNFSDU continues to work on Draft General Principles for Establishing Nutrient Reference Values for Nutrients Associated With Risk of Noncommunicable Diseases for the General Population (at Step 3) and future NRVs would then be established on that basis. It would seem that, if one basis is referenced in the definition then the other basis would also have to be.
13. Canada also notes that, even if the definition of NRV does not directly make reference to the different bases, there will still be more than one type of NRV. CCNFSDU is developing both GPs-NRV and GPs-NRV-NCD. The CCFL may need to determine in the future if NRVs will be listed in the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling according to the basis for their derivation¹. Having the definition make reference to both types could pave the way for this indication in the Guidelines.
14. Canada also observes, as noted in paragraph 11, that the CCNFSDU General Principles (GPs) under development recommend that Codex Alimentarius and others derive NRVs from suitable data sources and describe those sources in terms of daily nutrient intake values or, as a more general term that also includes upper intake levels, daily intake reference values established by FAO or a recognized authoritative scientific body other than FAO/WHO who are setting these based on scientific data. This raises the question as to whether the definition for NRV should in fact refer to the basis as being “scientific data” or as being “daily nutrient intake values” or “daily intake reference values”. Use of one of these latter terms would link conceptually to the GPs and the further guidance provided there as to how to determine suitable data sources. To ensure understanding of the term, a footnote would need to accompany it. This is a new option, quite different from the ones discussed by members, but Canada would like to propose it as part of a separate alternative text for consideration (see Option 2, paragraph 16).
15. Canada therefore proposes two slightly different texts as drafts for the Committee’s consideration. Both would retain both bases for NRVs, linked with the main statement by the word, “includes” to reduce potential restrictiveness. Several changes to the wording are proposed based on comments received and to improve clarity. Option 1 indicates that it is “scientific data on the levels of nutrients” related to requirements or risk of NCDs that form the basis of the NRVs, whereas in Option 2 it is “daily intake reference values”. The short form being used by CCNFSDU for NRVs associated with NCDs, i.e. NRV-NCD, is identified. Another change is to include “reduction of” risk of NCDs as proposed by three members which more correctly captures the link between the NRV being established on that basis and the risk. Splitting the definition into two sentences, as suggested by a few members, may make the text more readable and assist in the discussion of the proposal.
16. The following 2 draft texts for the definition of NRV are proposed for consideration by the Committee. The only difference between the two draft definitions is the replacement of “based on scientific data on levels of nutrients” with “based on dietary intake reference values”.

Option 1: “Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs) are a set of numerical values established by Codex Alimentarius and used for purposes of nutrition labelling. These include two types of values, those based on scientific data on levels of nutrients associated with nutrient requirements (NRVs) and

¹ Indeed, CCNFSDU, at its 32nd session, made a referral to inform CCFL that as a part of the work to update the NRVs for vitamins and minerals and develop NRVs for nutrients associated with risk of noncommunicable diseases, the text of section 3.4.4 and perhaps other sections of the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling needs to be revised to reflect the ongoing work of the CCNFSDU relating to the NRVs for vitamins and minerals and NRVs-NCD, and asking if CCFL has any comments with regard to the revision of the Guidelines for use by CCNFSDU in developing proposed text. (REP11/NFSDU Paragraph 114).

*those based on scientific data on levels of nutrients associated with **reduction in the** risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NRVs-NCD).*

*Option 2: "Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs) are a set of numerical values established by Codex Alimentarius ~~and used~~ for purposes of nutrition labelling. **These include two types of values, those based on daily intake reference values¹ associated with nutrient requirements (NRVs) and those based on daily intake reference values associated with reduction in the** risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NRVs-NCD)."*

¹ Daily intake reference values here means nutrient intake reference values from FAO/WHO or other suitable data sources.

ANNEX: REPLIES TO CL 2010/21-FL FROM:

AUSTRALIA
BRAZIL
COLOMBIA
COSTA RICA
EUROPEAN UNION
MALAYSIA
MEXICO
NEW ZEALAND
PERU
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
ICBA
IDF

AUSTRALIA

Australia supports the establishment of a definition for “nutrient reference values” for purposes of nutrition labelling, however we would like to suggest alternative wording to the proposed definition.

Nutrient reference values (NRVs) are a set of daily nutrient intake numerical-values for use in food labelling established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling. These NRVs and are based on scientifically established micronutrient requirements or nutrient intakes associated with reduction of risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases. scientific data on nutrient requirements.

Rationale:

The first sentence clarifies the nature and purpose of the definition. The second sentence allows for alternative approaches for deriving these values noting the available data and limitations of current scientific knowledge will not support just one approach being used.

BRAZIL

Brazil supports the proposed definition for NRVs forwarded by CCFNSDU with the extension of the definition to include the basis on which NRVs are determined:

“Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases”.

COLOMBIA

Colombia has the pleasure of presenting the following national position in reply to the request of Circular Letter CL 2010/21-FL, August 2010, in relation to the definition proposal for nutrient reference values (NRVs) for use in Codex Nutritional Labelling guidelines:

Taking into account that NRVs are values that allow a general and fast assessment about how does the nutritional input of a portion of a specific food behave regarding a general daily diet based on 2000 calories, without detailing the nutritional needs of specific age groups nor reflecting the amount of nutrients to be consumed by specific population groups for the purpose of lowering the risk of acquiring non communicable chronic diseases; we support the following text as the definition of NRVs:

“NUTRIENT REFERENCE VALUES ARE A SET OF ESTABLISHED NUMERICAL VALUES THAT ARE USED FOR NUTRITION LABELLING PURPOSES”.

COSTA RICA

Costa Rica welcomes defining the NRVs and supports the definition proposed by the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, with the following modification:

“Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling. They are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases”.

EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union (EU) welcomes the opportunity to respond to CL 2010/21-FL regarding the definition of nutrient reference values (NRVs) for use with respect to the Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling CAC/GL 2-1985.

The European Union (EU) notes the discussion that took place during the 31st session of the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) and the decision of the 38th session of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling to seek approval of new work on the development of a definition for "Nutrient Reference Values" for inclusion in the Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling. The EU can agree to the proposal to include a definition in the Guidelines.

The EU considers that the following short definition that was proposed by the CCNFSDU is sufficient: *"Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling"*. This definition clearly indicates what nutrient reference values consist of and their main purpose.

Taking into consideration the definition of "nutrition labelling" in the Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling, which covers not only the nutrition declaration but also supplementary nutrition information, the EU considers that the reference to "nutrition labelling" would include the reference to the nutrient reference values for protein and vitamins and minerals in the criteria for nutrition claims in the Codex Guideline for Use of Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23-1997).

The EU does not consider that it is necessary to extend the definition with the statements *"and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements"* and *"and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases"* to further explain basic principles that might underlie the identification of the nutrient reference values themselves.

The EU considers that the extension of the definition would make it unnecessarily complicated and potentially restrictive. The ongoing work on the principles for establishing NRVs for labelling purposes with respect to vitamins and minerals and nutrients related to the risk of noncommunicable diseases provides recommendations on the how the values should be derived. These recommendations are to be taken into account when such work is undertaken within the Codex Alimentarius process and they provide a framework that member countries can take into account if they derive specific values for their own population or population groups.

MALAYSIA

Proposed definition by CCNFSDU;

"Nutrient Reference Values are set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labeling"

CCNFSDU also proposed an extension of the said definition to include the basis on which NRVs are determined as follows;

"and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements"

"and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases".

Malaysia supports the definition proposed by CCNFSDU as well as the proposed first extension referring to the use of nutrient requirements as the basis. We are of the view that this proposed definition is broad enough to cover vitamins and minerals as well as any other nutrients that may be deemed essential to be placed on labels to help in consumer choice.

We do not see the need to include specific reference to vitamins or minerals or nutrients associated with diet-related noncommunicable diseases in the definition.

MEXICO

The definition of NRVs must be general and not exclusively associated with NRVs linked to the risk of non-communicable diseases, as they are not necessary only associated with those diseases. Therefore, Mexico suggests the following definition:

"Nutrient reference values are a set of established numerical values that are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements and serve as a guide to evaluate and plan the food intake of healthy populations, and are used for nutrition labelling purposes."

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand welcomes the opportunity to respond to CL 2010/21-FL regarding the definition of nutrient reference values (NRVs) for use with respect to the Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling CAC/ GL 2-1985.

New Zealand supports the inclusion of a definition of NRVs in the Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling. New Zealand supports the proposed wording of the draft core definition “*Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling.*”

New Zealand further supports the extension of this core definition by adding the words “*and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements.*”

New Zealand recognises that the further extension of the definition to NCDs with the addition of the phrase “*and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases*” potentially poses problems. Inherent in NRVs for “diet-related noncommunicable diseases” is the concept of risk reduction, whereas NRVs per se relate to nutrient requirements estimated to meet the needs of 98 percent of the apparently healthy individuals in a specific life stage and sex group. For certain nutrients, such as potassium for example, there might be two values: one value for the requirements of the general population; and another, different value in respect of risk reduction of noncommunicable disease(s). Accordingly, the definition will need to be able to consider both meeting the general nutrient requirements and reducing the risk of NCDs.

For protein, vitamins and minerals NRVs form the basis on which nutrient content claims can be founded. Therefore the way that NRVs are defined will have consequential effects.

New Zealand notes that in determining the definition it is important to consider that the purpose of nutrition labelling is helpfully to inform the consumer. NRVs on a food label can assist consumers to estimate the relative contribution of individual products to overall healthy dietary intake and compare the composition between products.

We support the definition addressing both the requirement-based NRVs and the disease reduction NRVs, recognising that individual nutrients may have different NRVs for different purposes. New Zealand believes there is sufficient scope in the General Principles on NRVs and NRVs-NCD currently being drafted by CCNFSDU to allow governments to apply the appropriate NRVs depending on their national circumstances. We propose the following definition:

Nutrient reference values (NRVs) are a set of numerical values established by Codex for the purpose of food labelling. They are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements and/or nutrient levels associated with a reduced risk of diet-related noncommunicable disease. Some nutrients may have more than one NRV depending on the purpose of the food label information.

PERU

Paragraphs 2 and 4 – We request that the last sentence be eliminated as follows: ““Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements ~~and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases~~”.

Justification – The National Committee agrees with the basis suggested for discussion but recommends eliminating the sentence “~~and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related non-communicable diseases~~” as it could create confusion if the linkage between the nutrient levels and the non communicable diseases is not specified.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA (USA)

The United States is pleased to provide comments on a proposed definition for the term “nutrient reference values” in response to CL 2010/21-FL, August 2010.

The United States offers for consideration the following edits to the draft definition proposed by the CCNFSDU:

“Nutrient **Reference Values (NRVs)** are a set of numerical values that are established **by Codex** ~~and used~~ for purposes of nutrition labelling, and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements and/or nutrient levels associated with **reduction of** risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases.

Rationale:

The United States suggests:

- Capitalizing “Nutrient Reference Values” since the term is intended to refer to a specific set of values for nutrition labelling purposes that are established by Codex and not to any other nutrient reference value, which may be established by governments and/or recognized authoritative scientific bodies for nutrition labelling or for other purposes;
- Clarifying in the definition that “Nutrient Reference Values” are established by Codex;
- Indicating how “Nutrient Reference Values” should be abbreviated (i.e., “NRVs”);
- Including the text proposed by the CCNFSDU that briefly describes the basis for the Nutrient Reference Values and considering a minor edit to this text to refer to nutrient levels associated with the *reduction of risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases*, which may better reflect a purpose of these NRVs, in addition to their use in meeting nutrient requirements.

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF BEVERAGES ASSOCIATIONS (ICBA)

The International Council of Beverages Associations (ICBA) is an international nongovernmental organization that represents the interests of the worldwide nonalcoholic beverage industry. The members of ICBA operate in more than 200 countries and produce, distribute, and sell a variety of nonalcoholic beverages, such as sparkling and still beverages such as soft drinks, juice-containing beverages, bottled waters, and ready-to-drink coffees and teas.

ICBA is pleased to provide the following comments in response to the Circular Letter 2010/21-FL, August 2010.

ICBA supports the definition in the CL for NRVs with the modifications shown below:

Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling, ~~and are~~ , **with such values** based on **convincing, relevant and recent** scientific data on nutrient requirements **for health**. ~~and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases.”~~

Rationale:

- **There should be a single, inclusive definition for Nutrient Reference Values used for the purpose of Codex Alimentarius guidelines on nutrition labelling.** As the work of the CCNFSDU has progressed related to principles for establishing NRVs for vitamins and minerals and NRVs for nutrients associated with the risk of noncommunicable diseases, the aim has been to align, as much as possible, the text and organization of the two sets of principles. The definition proposed above would apply broadly to overall health, whether reference is to a nutrient that is considered to be essential to health, or to a nutrient that should be limited in the diet.
- **Establishment of NRVs should be guided by convincing, relevant and recent scientific data.** ICBA supports the use of available FAO/WHO scientific data as a primary source for selection of suitable data sources to establish NRVs. ICBA also supports use of scientific data from relevant and recent independent review of the science by competent authoritative scientific bodies with experience in setting reference values for vitamins and minerals.

INTERNATIONAL DAIRY FEDERATION (IDF)

The International Dairy Federation (IDF) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the definition of Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs).

IDF agrees to the proposed definition “Nutrient reference values are a set of numerical values established and used for purposes of nutrition labelling” with the CCNFSDU addition to extend this definition to include the basis on which NRVs are determined by adding: “and are based on scientific data on nutrient requirements”.

However, IDF opposes to add the CCNFSDU proposed text “and/or nutrient levels associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases” to this definition.

The definition of Nutrient Reference Value should be a general definition. Adding this part relates to only a few selected nutrients, not to most of the nutrients.

IDF is in favor of having one definition of NRV whether it is an NRV for vitamins or minerals or an NRV for another nutrient.

IDF agrees to use only one term, “NRVs”, on the food label, while recognizing the value in retaining the term “NRVs for nutrients associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable diseases” for use in the general principles for deriving these NRVs. IDF is of the opinion that the association of certain nutrients with increased or decreased risk of noncommunicable diseases is linked to their intake levels rather than to the nutrient per se.

Another reason why IDF opposes to having ‘NRVs for nutrients associated with risk of diet-related noncommunicable disease’ on the food label is that this statement is much too complex for consumers to comprehend and too long to put in a nutrition fact table, especially for countries that need to write the information on the label in more than one language.