

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
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Agenda Item 8(a)

CX/LAC 04/14/8

## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

*14<sup>th</sup> Session*

*Buenos Aires, Argentina, 29 November - 3 December 2004*

### STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE COORDINATION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (CCLAC)

#### STATUS REPORT (Prepared by Argentina)

#### BACKGROUND

1. At the 12<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCLAC, the Chilean delegation submitted a strategic plan setting out the objectives, short- and medium-term actions and possible thematic areas of regional interest that could be examined at future sessions of the Committee<sup>1</sup>. The initiative was supported by several delegations.
2. At the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCLAC, the Strategic Plan, which included the modifications suggested by different Members, was unanimously approved and attached to the Report of that Session<sup>2</sup>.
3. At the 26<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the delegation of the Dominican Republic, as Coordinator of the CCLAC, presented the report of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean reported that the Committee had held a number of regional workshops that had resulted in the approval of a strategic plan and the establishment of a website for the Region<sup>3</sup>.
4. At the same Commission's Session, Argentina was appointed as Coordinator of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, under which it is responsible for implementing all the actions foreseen in the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC.
5. Therefore, Argentina would like to inform all CCLAC Members of the tasks carried out so far in order for them to evaluate the ongoing actions in detail and consider them as the basis of future directions or corrections.

<sup>1</sup> ALINORM 01/36 para.81.

<sup>2</sup> ALINORM 03/36, Appendix II.

<sup>3</sup> ALINORM 03/41, para. 11.

## **SITUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

6. As the CCLAC Coordinator, Argentina has implemented several initiatives intended to execute the actions and activities specified in the CCLAC Strategic Plan for the achievement of its objectives.

7. However, it should be noted that in the Plan interactive actions among the parties have been proposed in order to deliver the desired results, thereby, for their full realization, it is necessary that CCLAC Members engage in them.

8. The CCLAC Coordination urges CCLAC governments to take full part in those activities, which have been analyzed, agreed and approved by all CCLAC Members.

## **REVISION OF ACTIONS BY OBJECTIVE**

### **1. COMMUNICATION**

**“To foster effective communication between the CCLAC Members, with other regions and Codex Members, the Codex Secretariat and relevant organizations.”**

#### **Translation**

9. Argentina has frequently held that one of the problems that prevent Members from participating actively in the Codex Alimentarius work is the language barrier. The most frequent languages among CCLAC Members are Spanish and English, except for Brazil and Haiti where Portuguese and French, respectively, are spoken. To make up for these differences in part, the CCLAC Coordination has decided to employ a translator so as to send CCLAC Members all its messages and reports in Spanish and English.

10. In the last 8 months, all messages and reports distributed among CCLAC Members have been translated into both languages.

11. The Coordination has also sought to send CCLAC Members unofficial versions in Spanish of the documents developed in the context of certain Codex working groups (e.g. documents on traceability corresponding to the Fribourg Working Group and the final document of the Group, and the documents and final report of the Working Group on Labeling that met in Calgary.)

12. As far as possible, the Coordination has also sought to distribute all messages and reports from other CCLAC Members in both languages.

#### **Use of computer resources**

13. In order to realize whether the lack of communication is due to the countries' deficient computer capacity, the Coordination has developed a computer resource survey that was first distributed informally in November 2003. That survey was also intended for the evaluation of the CCLAC Members' possibility to make use of other communication means such as on-line chats, etc. and to assess their capacities in accordance with the purposes proposed in the actions under Objective 3 of the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC. So far, the survey has been answered by Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Grenada, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

14. The survey will be circulated as a CX/LAC 04/14/8-Add.1 document, and CCLAC Members are urged to answer it to facilitate the thorough analysis of their capacities, leading to reflect the existing situation in the Region and promote other actions.

#### **CCLAC Web Page**

15. At the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCLAC, the INPPAZ agreed to create a web page for the Committee within its institutional web site.

16. Several Members have claimed that access to the page is difficult, thereby they seldom use it. The Committee should analyze which suggestions could be submit before the INPPAZ so that the page facilitates the fulfillment of the proposed objectives.

### **Virtual chat rooms**

17. The CCLAC Coordination has developed an informal virtual chat room to which access will be available soon, in order to chat on line before the Codex Committees' meetings of interest to the Members of the Region.

18. That room will have information on all the documents to be addressed in the foreseen Committee meeting, the (unofficial) preliminary positions of those countries that have sent them to the CCLAC Coordination, notices regarding the date and time of future virtual chats, a time conversion system for each country to estimate the time difference, and any other information generated by the Coordination.

19. As far as possible, the contents of the page will be both in Spanish and English. Those countries that can translate their own opinion papers are urged to provide Spanish as well as an English version in order for the paper to be better understood by all CCLAC Members.

20. Access to the page will be codified and may be available to other participants only if CCLAC Members agree so.

### **Updated directory of National Codex Contact Points**

21. As foreseen in action 4 of this objective, and considering that sometimes the Codex Contact Points in some Member Countries are not involved in all Codex tasks, Argentina has added new addresses to the ones existing in the Codex official list to ensure a broader dissemination of the Committee tasks.

22. However, we believe that it would be important that the Committee reconsiders this issue and that each country provides the CCLAC Coordination with a more extensive list of addresses, taking into account, for example, which representatives from that country are the ones who attends the Codex meetings more frequently, in order to ensure a broader communication among Members.

## **2. EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS**

**“To achieve the active and effective participation of all countries of the Region in the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies in particular in the CCLAC.”**

23. As already mentioned, the CCLAC Coordination has a translator that facilitates the communication process among Members and the unofficial translation of certain documents when, on the Codex official web site, there are no versions available in the other Committee's language. In this way, it is possible to analyze certain documents as soon as possible so that there is enough time to comment on them.

24. To promote the involvement and coordination among CCLAC Members, the Coordination fosters the exchange of information among countries before Codex sessions. Also, it promotes the organization of CCLAC informal meetings prior to the beginning of the sessions of certain Committees and the Commission. Thus, Members may share their concerns and views in such a way that makes it possible to move towards an agreed direction. In this sense, many meetings have been held so far before the sessions of different Codex Committees, including the Commission session. These meetings are supplemented by others that are held during the Codex sessions, according to the needs expressed by Members.

25. Further, the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC states that, in order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to create working groups to study certain strategic issues. While those groups have not been formally created, the truth is that, before adopting the national position regarding some documents, comments are distributed.

26. The establishment of regional working groups to address Codex issues requires the active participation of its Members. Like an exercise, this Coordination suggests that the issues currently under discussion in the horizontal Codex Committees, concerning all countries, either developing or least-developed, importing or exporting, should be analyzed and prioritized, and, if there is willingness in this regard, the respective regional working groups should be created.

### 3. STRENGTHENING OF CAPACITIES

**“To promote the development and strengthening of the capacities of the National Codex Committees and/or Codex Contact Points in CCLAC Member Countries.”**

27. The achievement of this objective depends on the identification of the needs existing in the countries of the Region and the measures to be adopted so as to succeed in fulfilling it. If those needs are not expressed, it is impossible for the Coordination to suggest actions.

28. Nevertheless, the Coordination has implemented certain activities that will facilitate the exchange of experiences within the CCLAC.

- a. In May 2004, a CCLAC Technical Seminar was held in Mexico City - an event that was promoted by the CCLAC Coordination and the Regional Representation, and sponsored by the United States. Among the training activities, lectures by regional experts were organized regarding, *inter alia*, the different WTO Agreements and their relationship with Codex Alimentarius, the state of certain issues to be addressed in the context of Codex, a follow-up of the course of the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC, and the problems countries face in getting more involved in these activities.
- b. The Government of Australia also sponsored the Seminar allowing to extend its length in order to organize it together with the Seminar on Traceability/Product Tracing, which was supposed to be held within the territory of developing countries, according to the minutes of the last CCFICS's Session<sup>4</sup>. As a result, the CCLAC countries developed a series of principles on traceability that, in their opinion, should guide the CCFICS future work.
- c. Today, the Coordination seeks cooperation from other organizations with training programs on Codex-related issues for those who work on the Codex Alimentarius documents.

### 4. USE OF TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC CAPACITIES

**“To take advantage of the technical and scientific capacities existing in CCLAC Member Countries.”**

29. CCLAC Members have often stated that they have experts in the different issues addressed in the context of the Codex Alimentarius. Accordingly, in the countries of the Region, there are research institutions generating scientific data that may be used by CCLAC countries.

30. While the selection of the technical and scientific experts and institutions that will be included in the list will depend on each country's discretion, perhaps the Committee should develop a set of guidelines for the selection of those professionals.

31. However, the Coordinating Committee is suggested to reconsider the other actions proposed to fulfill this objective, as its achievement could be complex.

### 5. CONTINUITY OF CODEX TASKS

**“To ensure the continuity, development and sustainability of the committee's tasks.”**

<sup>4</sup> ALINORM 04/27/30, para. 67.

## **Biennial Plan**

32. This Coordination has considered item 1 of this objective, concerning the development of a “Biennial Operational Plan”; however, it is necessary that the Committee provides us with further guidelines to draft the Plan as, in our opinion, the “Strategic Plan for the CCLAC” has detailed the actions to be taken. In addition, it should be considered that there are certain proposed actions that can only be implemented if there is further communication among the Committee Members.

## **Follow-up and regular evaluation of the Strategic Plan Actions**

33. The Strategic Plan for the CCLAC states that follow-up activities and regular evaluations shall be conducted regarding the actions in the CCLAC Strategic Plan.

34. While it is true that the CCLAC Coordination keeps record of the activities and actions that have been carried out, as well as the degree of response of each CCLAC Member, we believe that part of the follow-up activities and the evaluations should not be conducted by the Coordination because it should also be evaluated how the Coordination carries on the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC and meets the concerns of CCLAC Members.

35. Therefore, perhaps the Committee should discuss whether it is necessary to establish a simple procedure to conduct the regular evaluations and in charge of whom this task would be. Also, it should be considered the possibility of creating a consultative group consisting of a representative from each CCLAC Region in order to carry out the evaluation together with the regional representative and the regional Coordination.

## **Mechanism for transferring information during the coordination transition**

36. The CCLAC Coordination is the managing body of the Committee and, as such, is responsible for executing certain actions of the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC. Measures taken by the Coordination are not necessarily Codex documents and, as a result, it is important to keep record of any action taken.

37. The Coordination believes that all the substantial information on the actions taken and other relevant issues of interest should be transferred in CD format to the next CCLAC Coordinator. At present, there is a record of any issue the Coordination considers to be relevant, but the Committee could list all data it considers to be appropriate to be collected in order for them to be part of the CCLAC acquires.

## **6. TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL COOPERATION**

**“To attain technical cooperation and funding mechanism to allow CCLAC to develop and sustain its activities.”**

38. At the next meeting, the CCLAC Coordination will submit a non-exhaustive, guiding report of international organizations with financial support and cooperation programs concerning Codex-related issues, with special focus on least-developed and developing countries.

39. According to that guiding list, the Committee will be able to evaluate the possible actions in order to develop proposals intended for increasing the technical or scientific capacities, or any other matter it considers to be a priority.

40. The Strategic Plan for the CCLAC states that proposals for the creation of a Trust Fund should be analyzed and followed up.

41. FAO/WHO have set out the criteria for the classification of countries that would be considered for their financing by the Fund.

42. The Trust Fund became effective in March, when the minimum required amount of US\$500,000 was established.

43. Several Members in the Region have put forward observations to the criteria established for the allocation of funds, which have been compiled in the Report of the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of CCLAC<sup>5</sup>; the Coordination repeated the comments in that sense.

44. Since the date when FAO/WHO announced the launch of the Fund, the CCLAC Coordination has required its Members to inform whether they have required funds and for what meetings so as to conduct a thorough follow-up of the applications and the subsequent selection that FAO/WHO would make. Some countries in the Region have already sent this information, but that is not enough to perform the corresponding verifications.

45. Moreover, at the 54<sup>th</sup> Session of the Executive Committee<sup>6</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission<sup>7</sup>, the CCLAC Coordination required FAO/WHO to submit a report on the countries that had benefited from their granting of funds.

46. Should the Committee find it appropriate to conduct some other kind of follow-up activity, a few clear guidelines should be established concerning how to provide the regional Coordination and the regional representative with information.

## 7. IDENTIFICATION AND PRIORITIZATION OF REGIONAL, RULE-RELATED NEEDS

**“To identify and prioritize the needs of the Region on food safety and other themes.”**

47. The CCLAC Coordination has developed a sample survey that may be useful to guide CCLAC Members in their evaluation of the national rule-related needs at the regional level.

48. Members are strongly recommended to answer it so as to be able to carry out the systematization of the information provided so that, in accordance with the results, the Committee may analyze it and order the applications according to priorities.

## CONCLUSIONS

49. Since its inception, the Codex Alimentarius has guided the governments of Member Countries in the adaptation of their rules concerning food safety, on a sound, technical and scientific basis.

50. Since the 1994 GATT Uruguay Round, the creation of the World Trade Organization and the approval of the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) have boosted the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme when they established that the Codex Alimentarius shall be the international reference body regarding food safety, like in the case of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, although that is not explicitly indicated.

51. This new reality increasingly needs full and active participation of all FAO/WHO Members in the Codex Alimentarius negotiations.

52. The Codex's main objective is that its standards may be used as the basis to protect consumers' health and ensure fair trade practices, reflecting a safe balance among the different situations in all the world's regions.

53. That balance among all the regions of Codex Alimentarius will only be achieved if each Codex Member contributes its knowledge to the elaboration of standards.

<sup>5</sup> ALINORM 03/36, paras. 9 - 14.

<sup>6</sup> ALINORM 04/27/4, paras. 94 - 103

<sup>7</sup> ALINORM 04/27/41, párrs. 188 - 196.

54. In this sense, the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC has been proposed by the CCLAC Members as an instrument that allows strengthening the Committee's work by means of specific actions. However, for its full realization, the participation of all is necessary as it is the only way for future rules to have provisions that include the views of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

55. Therefore, this Coordination thanks for the support of those who, as far as possible, have made efforts to implement the Strategic Plan for the CCLAC and urges Members to double their efforts through the work of their Codex Contact Points and National Commissions, to take active part in the context of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean.