

# codex alimentarius commission E



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
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Agenda Item 5

CX/NASWP 08/10/7

September 2008

## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

Tenth session

Nuku'alofa, Tonga, 28-31 October 2008

### DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STANDARD FOR KAVA

(prepared by an electronic group led by Tonga with the Assistance of Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and a group meeting led by Tonga with the assistance of Cook Islands, Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu)

Governments and international organizations in Observer status with the Codex Alimentarius Commission wishing to submit comments on the following subject matter are invited to do so **no later than 30 September 2008** to: Dr Viliami T. Manu, Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forests and Fisheries, PO Box 14, Nuku'alofa, Tonga (Fax: +676 24271; Email: [mafsoils@kalianet.to](mailto:mafsoils@kalianet.to), preferably), with a copy to the Secretary, 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](mailto:codex@fao.org) - preferably).

### Background

1. At its 9<sup>th</sup> session, held in Samoa from 10-13 October 2006, the Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP) was presented proposals by the delegations of Vanuatu and Fiji regarding the development of an international standard for kava beverages and of a regional standard for dried kava products respectively.<sup>1</sup>
2. The Coordinating Committee noted that the two proposals presented many areas of commonalities and some differences and that some additional work was still needed in order to allow the Coordinating Committee to take a decision with regard to new work in this area. In particular it was indicated that: all data and information needed to be referenced; different varieties of kava needed to be identified; and more scientific evidence needed to be presented in order to substantiate statements on the safety of kava products. With regard to this latter point, it was noted that WHO would soon release a report on kava products.
3. The Coordinating Committee agreed on Objective 6 of the Strategic Plan to add to its terms of reference, an electronic Working Group to develop a comprehensive discussion paper to justify the need to develop a standard for kava, which would take into account the above points, for consideration at its next session in 2008.<sup>2</sup>

### Rationale for development of a standard for kava

4. Kava (*Piper myhesticum*) is an important agricultural commodity for Pacific Island Countries, forming an integral part of cultural, economic and social life. It has been domesticated for around 3000 years<sup>3</sup>, and is being traded within and outside of the region in important quantities and value.

<sup>1</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Session of CCNASWP, CRD 6 and CRD 11

<sup>2</sup> FAO/WHO: ALINORM 07/30/32, para 82-83

<sup>3</sup> SPC (2001): Pacific kava: a producer's guide, p.5

5. The kava drink, which has been consumed in Pacific Island Countries for centuries without any reported ill-effects on the liver<sup>4</sup>, is made from a water extract of the root and/or rhizome of *Piper methysticum*. A recent WHO risk assessment concluded that “clinical trial of kava have not revealed hepatotoxicity as a problem<sup>5</sup> suggesting that “water extracts are devoid of toxic effects”<sup>6</sup> and recommending that “products should be developed from water-based suspensions of kava”<sup>7</sup>. The safety of water based kava drinks is supported by long-term ethno-pharmacological observations<sup>8</sup>.

6. The said WHO risk assessment recommended that “adequate quality control measures standardized across the producing countries with agreed standard operating procedures should be instituted for growth, harvesting and processing of the kava root or rhizome”.<sup>9</sup>

7. Pacific producing countries are currently at various stages of establishing national level legislation<sup>10</sup> on kava to ensure fair trade in high quality kava products and to protect the health of consumers. In view of harmonizing these national standards, the development of a codex standard for kava has been proposed by member countries to regulate the use of varieties and parts of the plant which have been identified as a safe food for human consumption.

### **Recommendation on proposed work**

8. It is recommended to request the Codex Alimentarius Commission to initiate work to develop a Codex standard for kava.

9. The 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific is invited to consider the document provided in the attachment and to forward the request for new work to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for its consideration.

### **Request for Comments**

10. Governments and international organizations in Observer status with the Codex Alimentarius Commission are invited to submit comments on this discussion paper, as directed above, for further consideration by the 10<sup>th</sup> Session of the CCNASWP.

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<sup>4</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, p.4

<sup>5</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, p. 62

<sup>6</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, p. 59

<sup>7</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, p. 62

<sup>8</sup> Loew & Gaus (2002) in:WHO (2007):, p.11

<sup>9</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, p.63

<sup>10</sup> Kava Act 2002, Vanuatu

## PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

### Proposal to develop a Codex Standard for Kava

#### 1. The Purpose and Scope of the Standard:

The purpose of this document is to develop a world-wide Codex standard for kava products, intended for human consumption. This proposal is intended to cover kava products whether processed, semi-processed or raw intended as a food for human consumption in accordance with the codex definition<sup>11</sup>.

#### Product Definition

Kava is the name used in the Pacific Island Countries to describe a local traditional drink which has been used for cultural / ceremonial / social purposes for centuries. Other names for kava include 'ava (Samoa), awa (Hawaii), sakau (Pohnpei, FSM) and yaqona (Fiji). The word kava is used to refer both to the plant and the beverage produced from it.<sup>12</sup> The plant from which it is derived is botanically known as *Piper methysticum* (G Forst), a Pacific plant species of the pepper family.<sup>13</sup> The kava drink is made from a water extract of only the root and/or rhizome of *Piper methysticum*.

The varieties to which this standard refers to are as follows (local vernacular names):

(Note: see Pacific Elixir, Vincent Lebot and information from participants for data)

Vanuatu Kava Noble Varieties<sup>10</sup> (Other names): *Melomelo*, *Asiyai (Biyaj)*, *Palimet (Miela, Olitao)*, *Kelai*, *Ge wiswisket (Ge gusug)*, *Borogoru*, *Silese*, *Melmel (Borogu, Sese)*, *Urukara (Bir Sul, Bir Kar, Palarasul, Palasa, Poivota)*, *Pia (Ahouia, Leay, Amon)*, *Puariki (Pualiu)*, *Naga miwok (Ge vemea)*

Fiji Kava varieties: *Matakaro*, *Damu*, *Loa kasa balavu*, *Qila leka*, *Gona vula*, *Dokobana vula*, *Qila balavu*, *Dokobana loa*, *Vau leka*, *Matakaro balavu*, *Vula kasa balavu*, *Gona Damu*, *Loa kasa leka*, *Kabra*, *Loa*

Samoa Kava varieties: *Ava Lea*, *Ava Laau*, *Ava Loa*, *Ava Tonga*, *Ava Talo*

Tonga Kava varieties: *Lekakula*, *Lekakula 'akau*, *Lekahina*, *Lekahina 'akau*, *kava Tea*, *kava Kula*, *kava Fulufulu*

Solomon Islands Kava varieties:

FSM Kava varieties:

Kiribati Kava varieties:

PNG Kava varieties:

Kava products intended for food use in this standard are classified as follows:

- Raw/fresh (including frozen)
- Dried (in form of chips or roots)
- Powdered
- Water extract

#### Safety of kava products

A recent WHO risk assessment of kava products has found that “kava has had at least a 1500-year history of relatively safe use, with liver side effects never having arisen in the ethnopharmacological data”<sup>14</sup> and concludes that “clinical trials of kava have not revealed hepatotoxicity as a problem”<sup>15</sup>. This has been confirmed by further studies evaluating the toxicology of kava drink.<sup>16</sup> Based on available scientific information it can be inferred that kava as a traditional beverage is safe for human consumption.

<sup>11</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission (FAO/WHO): Procedural Manual, 17<sup>th</sup> Edition, Rome 2007, p.41

<sup>12</sup> Piscopo G. in: Pacific Health Research Council: Kava and Pacific Health, Suva, Fiji, 2002, p.1

<sup>13</sup> Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Pacific kava: a producer's guide. Suva, Fiji Islands, 2001, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, Geneva 2007, p. 11

<sup>15</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, Geneva 2007, p. 62

<sup>16</sup> National Botanical Research Institute. Toxicological Evaluations of Kava Drink., 2008, p.4

## 2. Its Relevance and Timeliness:

### (i) Kava Production

Kava (*Piper methysticum*) plant, a member of the pepper family *Piperaceae* has been cultivated in the Pacific Region (including Fiji, FSM, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) for many years. Kava is a major source of income for thousands of small farm holders in these islands.

#### Annual Production (Volume/Value MT and/or \$ for past 10 years)

Vanuatu:

Fiji

FSM

Papua New Guinea

Samoa

Tonga:

#### Kava Trade (Export)

With the increasing migration of Pacific Islanders to New Zealand, Australia and the United States, export of kava has increased over the past 30 years, making it a major export commodity and have contribute significantly to the local island economies and more so generate income to thousands of small farm holders. Significant volumes were exported to Germany until 1998, mainly as raw material of kava roots, stems, and leaves for pharmaceuticals products. The International Kava Executive Council (IKEC) has established that kava trade between PIC and Europe is valued at US\$ 200 Million.<sup>17</sup> Vanuatu is exporting approximately US\$2 million worth of kava products to New Caledonia (part of France / EU) annually<sup>18</sup>.

The export of kava is estimated as follows.

**Table 1. Export countries of the pacific with the export values, volumes and importing countries**

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
<i>Export Value (US\$ Thousands)</i>											
<i>Vanuatu</i>	1,118	9,737	4,156	5,241	5,515	4,770	2,500	3,564	5,066	7,643	
<i>Fiji</i>	3,366	34,649	6,017	5,974	5,369	1,907	1,597	2,231			
<i>Tonga</i>	611	1,333	294	222	194	333	328	528	235	538	
<i>Samoa</i>	714	1,975	575	322	101	7	10	11	0	0	
	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	
<i>Export Volume (metric tons)</i>											
<i>Vanuatu</i>	105	794	334	869	935	1,225	491	822	663	574	
<i>Fiji</i>											
<i>Tonga</i>	129	147	39	22	21	29	27	43	19	65	
<i>Samoa</i>											
<i>Solomons</i>										0.8	
<i>Is</i>											
<b>Importing Countries</b>	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, Germany, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, Germany, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, USA, China	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, USA, China	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, USA, China	Fiji, New Caledonia, Zealand, Australia, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Australia, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Australia, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, USA	Fiji, New Caledonia, New Zealand, USA

## 3. The Main Aspects to be covered:

If the CCNASWP should decide to recommend to the Codex Alimentarius Commission to consider and approve this proposal for new work, a CCNASWP Codex Standard for Kava will be drafted in accordance with the Codex uniform layout for food products. The proposed standard will cover kava varieties, plant parts, kava products in the form of frozen fresh, dried (in form of chips or roots), powdered and water extract, process, quality, safety, labeling in order to provide certainty and assurance to consumers.

<sup>17</sup> International Kava Executive Council, South Pacific

<sup>18</sup> Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce, Department of Quarantine and Livestock in Vanuatu.

#### **4. An Assessment against the *Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities*:**

##### **a. Volume, Value and Pattern of Trade of Kava from the Pacific Countries**

With the increasing migration overseas of Pacific Islanders to Australia, New Zealand and the United States, export of kava products has increased to New Zealand, Australia and the United States has increased in the past 30 years to ensure that their traditional drink is readily available in their new country of residence. Traditionally, man is the main consumer of kava, but socially, women also partake in drinking kava too. Hence, kava has become one of the major export commodities and foreign exchange earnings for the PICs.

Since the export of kava is important to the economic development of the PICs, a major income to thousands of small farm holders, and the fact that there are known kava varieties that are not safe for direct consumption. From Table 1, there is a significant volume and pattern of trade between countries.

##### **b. Diversity of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade.**

- i. Several Pacific Island countries are developing national standards for kava. For instance Vanuatu has recently (April 2008) enacted the Kava Act (2002-amended 2008), while Samoa, Tonga and Fiji are undergoing a similar process. The Pacific Island kava producing countries have committed to establish uniform legislations/standards at national level<sup>19</sup> to facilitate trade and avoid trade impediments between countries. This is in line with the recommendation by WHO to put in place “adequate quality control measures standardized across the producing countries with agreed standard operating procedures, should be instituted for growth, harvesting and processing of the kava root”.<sup>20</sup>
- ii. Regional market potential – a significant amount of kava is being traded within the countries of the region (see above). All kava being imported in developed countries, such as Japan, NZ, Canada, China, Europe and USA is sourced exclusively from the Pacific Island Countries.
- iii. Impediments to trade are the ban of pharmaceuticals processed kava products in 1998 which discontinued the export of kava roots, stems and leaves as raw materials to Germany. In addition is Australia’s regulated import and finally the total restriction of the import of kava products for human consumption in 2006, also impede the export of kava.
- iv. Kava is highly amenable to standardization, because the part of the plant used for food purposes is uniform throughout all countries. The varieties in the proposed standard are those that have been traditionally consumed in the Pacific for centuries and can be identified by standard taxonomical means.
- v. The proposed standard will ensure consumer health protection by identifying suitable varieties of kava, parts of the plant and the process of preparation that over centuries have not shown any undesirable health effects. This will draw upon scientific evidence as presented by a recent scientific risk assessment by WHO. The standard is expected to enhance trade opportunities for the kava producing/exporting countries by providing assurance to importing countries that they will receive safe, high quality kava products. The codex standard will promote harmonization of national standards and thereby contribute to the facilitation of international trade in kava products.

#### **5. Relevance to the Codex Strategic Objectives:**

The proposed standard meets the criteria outlined in Goals 1, 2 and 5 of the Codex Strategic Plan.<sup>21</sup>

*Goal 1:* It will contribute goal 1 by providing a sound regulatory framework harmonized across countries of the region. As mentioned earlier, Pacific producing countries are currently at various stages of establishing national level legislation on kava to ensure fair trade in high quality kava products and to protect the health of consumers. In view of harmonizing these national standards, the development of a codex standard for kava has been proposed by member countries to regulate the use of varieties and parts of the plant.

<sup>19</sup> International Kava Executive Council (2008)

<sup>20</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, Geneva 2007, p.63

<sup>21</sup> Codex Alimentarius Commission Strategic Plan 2008-2013

*Goal 2:* It will promote wide and consistent application of scientific principles and risk analysis, including promoting the collection of data from developing countries and from all regions of the world so that the risk analysis is based on global conditions and requirements. The standard will be based upon findings of the recent WHO Risk assessment for kava products<sup>22</sup>.

*Goal 5:* It will promote maximum and effective participation of members – Pacific Island Countries are already collaborating on a regional basis through the International Kava Executive Council (IKEC) and electronic/physical working groups and this will be continued and further intensified in the development of the proposed standard.

#### **6. Information on the Relation between the Proposal and Other Existing Codex Documents:**

This proposal is an initiative of PICs to promote safe production of kava, as there is currently no such existing standard within codex. It will refer as much as possible to other general codex standards (e.g. hygiene, labeling, food additive and contaminants, etc).

#### **7. Identification of Any Requirement for and Availability of Expert Scientific Advice:**

Scientific advice is required on the following:

- i. Determination of the kavalactone content (range) in kava varieties, which are known to be safe to human consumption;
- ii. Analysis of the nutrient content in kava products, which are covered in the standard.
- iii. Definition of agreed methods of analysis and sampling.

#### **8. Identification of Any Need for Technical Input to the Standard From External Bodies so That This Can Be Planned For:**

Technical assistance by WHO and/or FAO to substantiate scientific advice in Section 7 above, as appropriate.

There may be a need to conduct research (taxonomic key, DNA fingerprint, chemical composition) on varieties present in PIC producing countries and how these relate to each other (chemotype, etc) for traceability purposes. This should build on research done by Vincent Lebot et al.

#### **9. The Proposed Time-line for Completion the New Work, Including the Start Date, the Proposed Date for Adoption at Step 5, and the Proposed Date for Adoption by the Commission”**

Start Date: 2009

Proposed Date for Adoption at Step 5: 2011

Proposed Date for Adoption by the Commission: 2013

#### **References**

Codex Alimentarius Commission (FAO/WHO): 9<sup>th</sup> Session of CCNASWP, CRD 6 (Kava Standard, submitted by Vanuatu), Apia, Samoa, 2006

Codex Alimentarius Commission (FAO/WHO): 9<sup>th</sup> Session of CCNASWP, CRD 11 (Proposal for Dried Kava Products, submitted by Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga), Apia, Samoa, 2006

Codex Alimentarius Commission (FAO/WHO): 30<sup>th</sup> Session of CAC, ALINORM 07/30/32, Rome, Italy, 2007

Codex Alimentarius Commission (FAO/WHO): Procedural Manual, 17th Edition. Rome, Italy 2007

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<sup>22</sup> WHO (2007): Assessment of the risk of hepatotoxicity with kava products, Geneva 2007