



## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

39<sup>th</sup> Session, FAO Headquarters,

Rome, Italy, 27 June – 1 July 2016

## MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMISSION BY CODEX COMMITTEES

### MATTERS FOR ACTION

#### Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP)<sup>1</sup>

#### Report and analysis of responses to CL 2016/6-MMP: Draft General Standard for Processed Cheese

1. [CL 2016/6-MMP](#) invited comments on the conclusions and recommendations in regard to the Draft Standard for Processed Cheese as presented in Appendix 1 of the Circular Letter.
2. The recommendations were that CAC:
  - **Note** the analysis and conclusions presented in this report;
  - **Note** that the comments submitted in response to [CL 2015/34-MMP](#) highlight the continuing differences among members on the core issues relating to scope, product composition, food additives (stabilizers and thickeners) and provisions relating to labelling;
  - **Note** that these differences are the very same issues that have previously impeded advancement of the standard; and
  - **Consider** the next steps in relation to this work taking into account the analysis and conclusions presented in this report and the responses to this Circular Letter (CL 2016/6-MMP).
3. Responses were received from 11 member states, 1 member organization and 1 observer organization<sup>2</sup>. The comments in English, French and Spanish are available as follows: [English](#), [French](#), [Spanish](#).
4. A number of respondents commented on the lack of consensus on major issues in the standard as noted in the recommendations above.
5. Two countries (Canada and USA) recommended that work should be discontinued. They noted that no problems with trade or consumer confusion have been documented, that “processed cheese” is not amenable to standardization due to the diversity of products, and that existing Codex standards and guidelines address the provision of information about ingredients, additives, food composition and nutritional and compositional claims, and also address potential food safety concerns. They considered that an extension of the deadline is unlikely to resolve key areas of disagreement.
6. On the other hand, four countries (Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Libya and Uruguay) supported continuing development of a standard. These countries considered a standard was needed to provide clarity on product composition (ensuring cheese content) and to avoid confusion about products containing non-milk ingredients.
7. The EUMS and Switzerland considered that due consideration should be given to the identified critical issues if further progress in the Step process is to be achieved. Japan stated that it would not object to continuing work if that were proposed.

<sup>1</sup> CCMMP is working by correspondence. This report has been prepared by New Zealand, host country of CCMMP.

<sup>2</sup> Canada, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Egypt, European Union, Japan, Libya, New Zealand, Switzerland, United States of America, Uruguay, IDF.

8. One country (USA) considered that if work continues that the standard should revert to step 3; another (Japan) considered that further discussion should be based on the draft developed by the pWG; while another (Uruguay) suggested that IDF should adjust the draft standard taking into account the comments expressed.
9. Two countries (Egypt and USA) and IDF considered that a physical meeting of CCMMP would be needed to resolve the issues.
10. One country (Colombia) requested several corrections to the report. One country (Chile) had no comments.

### Discussion and recommendation

11. From the responses it is clear that there remain significant differences of view among members on the draft standard and on whether to proceed on this subject.
12. Since work on a standard for processed cheese was initiated some 22 years ago there have been many sessions of CCMMP where this topic was discussed but there was little progress at these sessions. The latest work was initiated by CAC in 2014 following two surveys and an electronic working group, and has involved two meetings of physical working groups. These physical meetings (either at committee or working group level) have not resulted in forging consensus on the core issues noted in this report.
13. The latest effort aimed at developing an international standard for processed cheese was based on a narrower scope covering 3 product categories according to raw material content. It was hoped that this would help the process of finding agreement on the critical issues of cheese content, product designation and the use of stabilisers and thickeners. It is worth noting that the successive work on processed cheese including the renewed attempts initiated by CAC have explored all possible options for the development of an international standard.
14. In this situation some countries consider work should be discontinued, but on the other hand a number of countries are calling for continued effort to develop an international standard for processed cheese in order to provide clarity in regard to cheese content and non-dairy ingredients.
15. Against this background the key questions before the Commission are:
- (i) Is “processed cheese” a product that is amenable to standardisation?
  - (ii) What would be the rationale and justification for continuing work taking into account—
    - difficulties on securing consensus on core issues;
    - lack of evidence of trade problems;
    - absence of any food safety issues relating to this product;
    - the Commission’s broader commitment to give priority to food safety related work;
    - the Commission’s recognition<sup>3</sup> of the need to make a “final effort” to determine if the development of international standard(s) for processed cheese would be feasible; and
    - the resources required for any further physical working group or committee meetings?
  - (iii) If there were to be no international standard, what are the alternative options open to members to deal with the diverse national preferences with regard to product composition and use of stabilisers and thickeners, bearing in mind the wide range of products in trade?
16. It is **recommended** that the CAC make a clear decision on the future of this work taking into account the responses to the questions listed above.

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<sup>3</sup> REP13/CAC, paragraph 145.