



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

Fifteenth Session

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 16-20 September 2019

OPENING REMARK

(Delivered by Mr. Moses Amos, Director General of the Ministry of
Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity)

Firstly, it is with great sadness to hear of the passing of the prime minister of Tonga, the late Honorable Akilisi Pohiva. Similarly, the regional Codex family has over the years lost some key figures also who were champions and pioneers of the Codex work in our region. We remember Ms Ulea Petelo from Samoa who passed away 2 months ago, from Vanuatu, late Mr. Akuma Malas, Mr. Bae-George Swua, and Ms Jean Melve. Please stand to join me for a minute's silence to remember our fallen colleagues.

It gives me great pleasure to join you all this morning for the opening of the fifteenth session of the CCNASWP which we are hosting in Vanuatu this week. The Codex Alimentarius or the 'Food Code' is a set of standards developed by FAO and WHO to help nations protect their consumer health and ensure fair practices in trade. I must commend the FAO and WHO for seeing the need to protect consumer health and to set up the Codex Alimentarius. Codex is indisputably the reference point for all food safety-related standards development because of the rigorous and transparent process it has adopted to develop standards.

Yet the organization has had to deal with many modern-day challenges.

The more food we move between our borders the more we expose our people to new strains of food-borne organisms which they have never been exposed to previously. New and novel foods are constantly being developed using modern science and technology and these are added onto our market shelves. Veterinary drugs, pesticides, food additives and contaminants remain current on Codex's agenda. Climate-induced disasters and other natural disasters present their own set of challenges to food security and food safety.

Our region, comprising four of the most developed and some of the least developed nations, has the job of unpacking these challenges and offering the best and appropriate advice to our national food regulators to develop policies which best suit our situations. Thank you for the work of Codex, which makes our work easier to use Codex standards and texts as a reference point to develop national policies.

In many of our smaller economies, competing national priorities have placed food security, food safety, and certainly the work of Codex, at the lower end of the list thus compromising the health of our citizens. Take for example, a survey of member participation in electronic working groups by region, from the Codex Strategic Plan for 2014 – 2019, which shows our region has the lowest participation rate in these forums at 3%. On the same note, I am comforted to see that the new plan, the Codex Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025, which has specific objectives to help improve national Codex structures and explore ways to help members participate actively in the work of Codex. I call on member countries present at this regional meeting to ensure we identify activities which will help our governments to see the importance of food security, food and nutrition safety and to help improve our individual nations' participation in Codex work, and to add these into the implementation plan of new strategy.

It remains a cause for concern that no member of the CCNASWP region has benefitted from the Codex Trust Fund 2. The call is now open, so please member countries eligible for this assistance, submit your requests to the Trust Fund secretariat.

I note from your agenda there are a whole range of food-related issues that you will be discussing. Our region has wide and varied issues, but I know we can agree that climate change and other natural disasters cannot simply be brushed aside – they do impact on food and nutrition security and negatively impact on human lives. I urge your meeting to discuss ways which we can collectively employ to address them.

Kava and noni hold very special places in our culture and recently our economy. The Government of Vanuatu has been keenly following the development of draft standards for these two commodities. I must stress that these will be the first regional standards the sub-region of the South West Pacific has requested work on their

developments, and so far, both have taken over ten (10) years in their formulation. I am confident that this meeting will take great strides to agree and to clean the draft texts further. The Government of Vanuatu is lending its support to the work on these standards and urges this meeting to endorse their further progress through the Codex process and for adoption as planned, if not earlier.

It is often said that all work is not an enjoyable life, so please do take some time out to enjoy some of the leisure activities Port Vila and Efate have to offer. On that note, I wish you all success in your deliberations. I now have the honour and pleasure in declaring that the Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific meeting, from 16 to 20 September 2019, here in Port Vila is now open.

Tankio Tumas.