CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.codexalimentarius.org

Agenda Item 6 **NFSDU/40 CRD 11**

Original language only

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION AND FOODS FOR SPECIAL DIETARY USES

Fortieth Session

Berlin, Germany
26 – 30 November 2018

PROPOSED DRAFT DEFINITION FOR BIOFORTIFICATION

Comments of NHF

NHF – National Health Federation

The National Health Federation (NHF), a non-profit consumer organization, respectfully submits the following comments:

1. The Definition Must Not Include GM Foods

The key question here is whether the definition of Biofortification should be broad enough to include genetically modified (GM) (recombinant-DNA) technology within it. Those pushing for a definition for "Biofortification," particularly the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) say that Biofortification itself as a concept is neutral and that it would be up to each country to decide for itself whether Biofortification would include recombinant-DNA technology or not. To them, Biofortification is simply the process by which the nutritional quality of food crops is improved through plant breeding with the aim of making the nutrients bioavailable after digestion. To most of us, that means "conventional" plant breeding. However, some would like to convert Biofortification into a Trojan horse that will allow GM foods to slip into those countries that currently ban such foods. This approach is completely unacceptable.

In a prior CCNFSDU meeting, the former Chairwoman started off the discussion by giving her incorrect personal opinion that the definition should be as broad as possible and that recombinant technology should be included. Her statement, though, directly contradicted Australia's admission at the 2015 meeting that if the Committee were to refer to the original 2012 document on the scope of Biofortification, we would see that Biofortification only refers to conventional breeding and so we should clearly exclude GM techniques. At the 2016 CCNFSDU meeting, however, Australia was silent on the issue. NHF agrees with Australia's 2015 position on this issue.

The EU has validly objected that the very name "Biofortification" would cause confusion in many European countries due to the widespread use of the word "bio" as synonymous with "organic." Other countries within the EU have been very vocal and support the EU's position here, arguing that the definition needs to be restrictive, not broad. Once again, the NHF agrees with the EU position here. The term "Biofortification" – at least within European countries – risks consumer confusion as to whether they are purchasing organic products or something else entirely. This confusion cannot be allowed.

2. Biodiversity, Not Monoculture

Two years ago, the delegation of Ireland very wisely warned this Committee against the risks of monoculture, stating that what was needed here was biodiversity. NHF most definitely agrees with the Irish position, which position is derived from Ireland's very real famine because of a failed monoculture potato crop in the mid-19th Century.

3. Methods of Production Must Not Be Determined By National Authorities

Allowing GM techniques within the definition of Biofortification through the fiction that "National Authorities may decide" would create a Trojan horse for the introduction of GM foods into markets previously excluding them. In these days, with ubiquitous international trade, agreeing that the "Methods of Production" can encompass within the ambit of the term "Biofortification" is unworkable as a practical matter.

This approach just screams for widespread leakage of GM-based biofortified foods into GM-excluded trade zones as a one-size-fits-all term would confuse shippers, customs agents, and other involved in the food trade. Consumers and traders would have to be constantly checking on the sources of their "biofortified"

foods and would have to have an excellent memory so that they could remember whether their particular "biofortified" food might contain GM ingredients or not, or have been produced through GE techniques.

Letting National Authorities determine whether GM foods are included within the definition is intellectual laziness at best and simply a **backdoor way** of including GM foods within the Biofortification definition at worst. Either way, this approach must be rejected.

4. The Root Problem of Poor Soils Must Be Addressed

In a more logical, upstream and direct approach (versus trusting that mal- or undernourished populations will actually eat the biofortified foods), NHF maintains that the root problem be addressed and rectified, that is, our soils need feeding and rebuilding in order to provide increased nutritional status of ***all*** crops grown from them. This can and has been achieved with, among other things, simple remedies such as mulching (even with basic woodchips), proper compost/vegetable kitchen waste, and non-tillage farming techniques that prevent topsoil erosion. (*See, e.g.,* David R. Montgomery's well-researched book, *Dirt – The Erosion of Civilizations*.)

If this is not feasible, then supplying micronutrients by nutritional supplementation would directly address the deficiencies or potential deficiencies without relying on populations to consume the fortified food. Therapeutic status of nutritional supplements is determined in this Committee and instead of continually dumbing down nutrient levels to match Codex's woefully inadequate recommended NRVs, Codex would be wise to conserve resources by simply assuring adequacy in the levels of nutritional supplements and UNICEF would be wise to provide micro and macronutrients directly to these malnourished child populations. Nutritional supplements are more direct, cheaper, and more bioavailable as digestion is impaired in malnourished populations.

It is a very sad state of affairs where we have come to the point in our history where we must manipulate our natural foods to provide better nutrition all because we have engaged in very poor agricultural practices that have seen a 50% decline in the vitamins and minerals in our foods over the last 50 years. NHF mentioned this problem as long ago as at the 2005 CCNFSDU meeting.

5. The eWG's Recommendation Will Result in Marketing Deception

In keeping with Codex's stated goal of providing safe, good food for the World, consumers most certainly deserve the right to know what they are eating in order to support an informed choice.

To that end, most consumers want GM foods labelled. Consumer polls across the World have shown this to be true. In the United States alone, some 90% of consumers want such labelling and yet here, this proposed definition will disguise GM foods under the term "Biofortification."

If Codex is to allow "any method of production" and "any source" to be part of the Biofortification definition, then Codex will be engaging in ***marketing deception*** of the worst sort. That is **dishonest**, it is **disgraceful**, and for all of those sincerely concerned with the credibility and transparency of Codex, those delegates should absolutely and positively ***oppose*** this definition.

6. Conclusion

For all of the foregoing reasons, ***none*** of the recommendations of the electronic Working Group chaired by Zimbabwe and South Africa should be accepted by this Committee. This Committee will not remedy poor nutrition by engaging in ***deceptive marketing*** practices and sleight of hand with this definition. NHF urges this Committee to have a clear and non-misleading definition as was originally envisioned at the 2015 meeting, where the Australian delegation correctly stated that the original 2012 document on the scope of Biofortification excluded GM techniques.

NHF respectfully submits that if there is to be a clear, non-misleading term of art or definition for Biofortification, then it must be uniform worldwide, and that definition most definitely may not allow for GM methods of production.