



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**  
**FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST**

**Tenth Session**

**Rome, Italy, 11 - 15 November 2019**

**USE OF CODEX STANDARDS IN THE REGION**

(Prepared by the Codex Secretariat)

## 1. BACKGROUND

1.1. In the context of the revitalization of FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees (RCCs) in 2016, the Codex Secretariat introduced a new survey-based system to continuously collect data on use of Codex standards<sup>1</sup> for all six RCCs with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the relevance of Codex work.

1.2. While the first survey round started in July 2016 and focused on the use of Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides in food and feed, three general subject standards and the General Principles of Food Hygiene, the second in 2019 focused on a different set of Codex standards, namely:

- (i) MRLs for veterinary drugs in foods;
- (ii) Two Codex texts on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) i.e. Guidelines for Risk Analysis of Foodborne AMR and the Code of Practice to Minimize and Contain AMR; and
- (iii) The Regional Code of Practice for Street-Vended Foods.

1.3. In addition, members were asked about difficulties related to the general use of Codex standards and were informed that other specific standards would be covered in future rounds to build up, over time, a representative data set on the use of Codex texts worldwide.

1.4. The term “use” was employed very broadly to include not only the incorporation of Codex standards into national legislation, but also other types of use such as in support of training or extension programmes.

1.5. The survey was conducted online using the software SurveyMonkey which allowed for easier data analysis and representation. A separate translation into Arabic was also made available and members were given a period of one month to provide answers.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION SURVEY RESULTS

2.1. The survey on the use of Codex standards obtained a response rate of approximately 60 percent (10 out of a possible 17 member countries) in the Near East region. **Table 1** highlights all respondents in the region in bold and marks low and lower middle income countries (according to the World Bank) with an asterisk<sup>2</sup>.

2.2. The response rate dropped by four countries compared to the previous survey round. Nine Members from the CCNE region responded to both the survey conducted in 2016 and the survey in 2019, while five members (marked in Table 1 with an x) that responded in 2016 did not react to the survey disseminated in 2019.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document Codex standards refers to all Codex products including standards, guidelines, codes of practice, Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) etc.

<sup>2</sup> Developing countries are defined as low- and lower middle-income countries according to the World Bank List of Economies (June 2019).

**Table 1: Overview of respondents in CCASIA to the 2019 survey on use of Codex standards (in bold)**

<b>Algeria</b>	<b>Kuwait</b>	Sudan <sup>x</sup>
<b>Bahrain</b>	Lebanon <sup>x</sup>	<b>Syrian Arab Republic*</b>
<b>Egypt*</b>	<b>Libya</b>	Tunisia* <sup>x</sup>
<b>Iran (Islamic Republic of)</b>	Oman	<b>United Arab Emirates</b>
<b>Iraq</b>	Qatar <sup>x</sup>	<b>Yemen *</b>
Jordan	Saudi Arabia <sup>x</sup>	

\*Low and lower middle income countries (World Bank list of economies June 2019)  
<sup>x</sup> Countries that responded to 2016 survey but not to 2019 survey

### 2.3 The following is a summary of the survey results:<sup>3</sup>

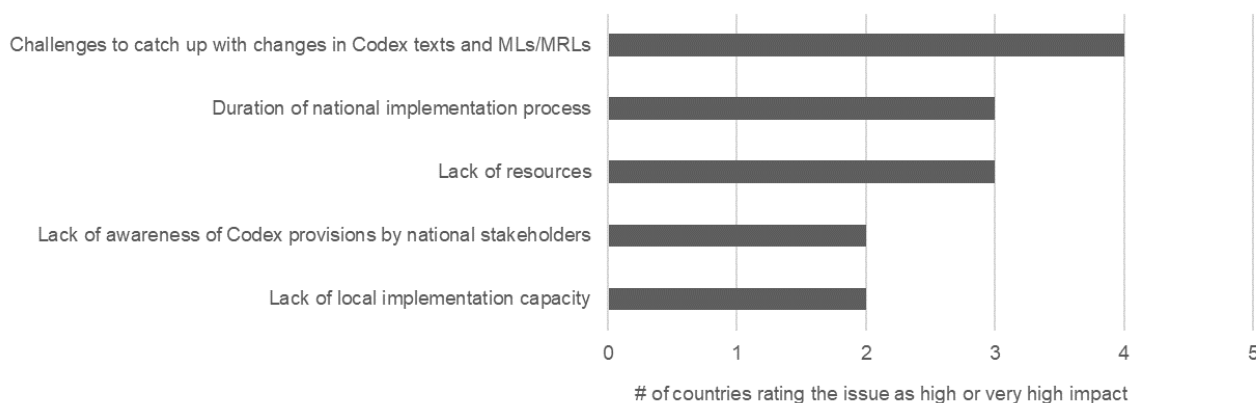
- (i) *Alignment of MRLs for veterinary drugs in food*<sup>4</sup>: Four countries (40%) stated that their MRLs for veterinary drugs in food sold nationally had been fully aligned with Codex MRLs, while another four countries (40%) reported that they had partially aligned with Codex MRLs. These Members reported different reasons for deviations such as national regulations based on multilateral agreements that would not align with Codex MRLs or having national guidelines with limits differing from Codex. Two countries (20 %) stated that they had not at all aligned with Codex MRLs for veterinary drugs due to different limits set by the EU, prohibition of growth promoters in the country or the lack of national guidelines and testing capabilities.
- (ii) *Use of the Guidelines for Risk Analysis of Foodborne Antimicrobial Resistance (CXG 77-2011)*: Four of the respondents (40%) indicated that the guidelines were either incorporated directly into national legislation/standards or followed indirectly as they are aligned with guidance by other standard setting bodies such as the Arabian Gulf Standards (GSO) or the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE). Half of the respondents (50%) stated that they would not yet make use of the guidelines, mainly due to inexistence of national AMR surveillance plans, which were however under development, or overall capacity in this area. One country (10%) was not aware of the level of use.
- (iii) *Use of the Code of Practice to Minimize and Contain Antimicrobial Resistance (CXC 61-2005)*: According to the Member responses, the AMR Code of Practice is used by three countries (30%). Four Members (40%) stated they had not adopted it due to lack of training on the topic or ongoing work on national legislation and policy documents in the area. The remaining respondents (30%) stated they did not know if the code of practice was utilized in their country.
- (iv) *Use of Regional Code of Practice for Street-Vended foods (CXP 71R 2013)*: Only three countries in the region (30%) are using the regional code of practice e.g. as part of national legislation and as guidance during surveillance procedures of street vendors. Half of the respondents indicated that they did not use the Code (5 countries) stating they found that the *Codex General Principles on Food Hygiene (CXC 1-1969)* were already sufficiently covered the issue or that street-vended food was not regulated.
- (v) *Difficulties with regards to the use of Codex provisions*: The issues most frequently rated as having a high or very high negative impact on the use of Codex standards in the region were: difficulties in keeping pace with changes in standards (in particular MLs and MRLs); the duration of national implementation processes and a lack of resources.

2.4 **Figure 1** sums up further difficulties affecting the use of Codex standards that were faced by more than one country in the region. In addition, a couple countries noted that there was a challenge with language with a proposition to establish a committee or team to translate texts into Arabic. Additionally, two other countries noted the inability to attend technical committee meetings e..g. due to visa issues.

<sup>3</sup> The full survey results can be accessed in original language under this link:

[http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-734-10%252FWorking%2Bdocuments%252Fne10\\_6e\\_SURVEYRESULTS.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?lnk=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-734-10%252FWorking%2Bdocuments%252Fne10_6e_SURVEYRESULTS.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> As of June 2019, Codex has 632 MRLs for veterinary drugs in foods covering 66 veterinary drugs.

**Figure 1: Examples of difficulties with the use of Codex standards in the CCNE region**

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 Overall, the survey on use of Codex standards obtained a completion rate of 77 percent of the CCNE region which will assist in establishing a baseline on the use of individual Codex standards in the region. Around 40 percent of Members from CCNE showed continuity in providing responses to surveys of the Codex Secretariat on the subject of use of standards.

3.2 There is a high level of alignment (complete and partial) with Codex MRLs for veterinary drugs in food in the CCNE region (similar to Codex MRLs for pesticides that were surveyed in 2016). The Codex Guidelines on AMR and the AMR Code of Practice have still not been fully used as national action plans on AMR are under development in many of the responding countries. 40 percent of respondents replied as not knowing whether or not the Code of Practice was in use which could be an indication that greater awareness is needed. The regional Code of Practice on street-vended foods shows a rather low level of use, which suggests that the General Principles in Food Hygiene are considered adequate/sufficient by some countries in the region or that this sector is poorly regulated by others in the region.

3.3 For many Members from the CCNE region, difficulties regarding the use of Codex standards relate to challenges in catching up with Codex standard revisions (mainly as regards MLs and MRLs).

### 4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1 Codex Members from the CCNE region are requested to take note of the results of the survey and use them in the engagement of relevant stakeholders to seek support for food safety work and raise awareness of the importance of Codex standards in their respective countries.

4.2 CCNE is further requested to provide inputs on the following questions to guide future action by the Codex Secretariat in this area:

- *Next survey:* Would you like to see a continuation of the survey? If so, which areas of Codex work would you like to see covered in future surveys?<sup>5</sup>
- *Evaluation of Codex standards:* How feasible do you consider responding to annual surveys on use of Codex standards? Which actions should be taken to increase survey response rates? Are there any national or regional efforts ongoing to assess the level of use of Codex standards?

<sup>5</sup> Note: At CCNE9 Members identified commodity standards of the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables, which may still be valid.