

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 2

CX/NASWP 23/16/2

January 2023

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

Sixteenth Session

Nadi, Fiji

30 January - 3 February 2023

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR IMPROVING FOOD SAFETY – SEEDING CHANGE IN CODEX

1. Shifting of mindsets is an approach increasingly used in business organizations to foster change. A growth rather than a fixed mindset is a cultural attribute that enables any organization to thrive on challenge, embrace continuous learning, and use short-term failure as a way to move forward.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented marked challenges to our food safety work and driven us to rethink food safety systems at both the national and international levels. The complex mosaic of social and economic dynamics in different countries resulted in the implementation of different public health and food supply interventions and while vigorous debate continues on the merits of different national approaches, an overarching consequence has been significant disruption to the global movement of people and goods over the last three years.
3. While specific national provisions to assure food safety have waned, testing of the growth mindset of national governments has been particularly apparent in areas of:
 - Food security and disruption of the international food supply
 - Food safety preparedness and response
 - Application of the “One Health” concept in relation to food safety.
4. Implementing innovative food control provisions as a result of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic will be an on-going challenge to competent authorities around the world.
5. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic to date is echoing strongly throughout Codex and is seeding important changes. Despite the constraints of a rules-bound and multifaceted organization that operates on a global scale, expressions of a growth mindset in Codex that are holding us in good stead in times of COVID-19 are:
 - Putting a new spotlight on WTO SPS (and TBT) principles and the necessity of a risk-based approach for food safety
 - Developing new procedures in an era of global digital communication
 - Early exploration of an international approach to food safety preparedness and response.
6. Conversely, there are areas where moving from the more fixed mindset of the past to a growth mindset of the future presents different challenges for Codex. Thus the new Codex strategy for delivery in 2025 might well explore:
 - Achieving more clarity on decision-making frameworks for *non-food safety* provisions e. g. food quality
 - Revisiting and clarifying the (current) mandate of Codex on issues that are now at the forefront of international thinking on the global food supply e. g. food sustainability, food security, environmental protection
 - Solutions for dealing with philosophical and procedural roadblocks resulting from different national legislations e. g. adoption of proposed standards for hormone growth promoters

- Re-evaluation of legacy processes that now limit the overall efficiency of Codex e. g. scheduling of controversial agenda items in meetings, scope and level of detail in meeting reports
7. Against a global backdrop of different national food control legislation, capability and capacity, change in Codex must necessarily be gradual and incremental so as to carry all parties along with it. Notwithstanding this, a vibrant growth mindset that is fertilized by the recent experience of the COVID-19 pandemic will enable Codex to be far better prepared for the future.