

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda item 4

CX/FICS 18/24/4 Add.2
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION
AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS
Twenty-Fourth Session
Brisbane, Australia 22 - 26 October 2018
PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDANCE ON USE OF SYSTEMS EQUIVALENCE
(Comments from European Union, Malaysia, African Union)

EUROPEAN UNION

Mixed Competence
European Union Vote

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) would like to thank New Zealand, the United States and Chile for leading the work on systems equivalence and support the continuation of this work. The EUMS would like make the following comments on the draft text.

General comments

While progress has been made with the draft document, it still needs further work to achieve the objective of providing practical and clear guidance to Codex members on how to apply systems equivalence. It is also unclear how it fits with the existing Codex guidance on equivalence (CAC/GL 34-1999 and CAC/GL 53-2003).

Specific comments

Section 2 Scope/Purpose

The square brackets should be removed in paragraph 8 as the assessment and recognition of systems equivalence is not necessarily a reciprocal process.

Section 3 - Definitions

It is not appropriate to define a National Food Control System in this document. If there were a need for such definition then it should be in the *Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems* (CAC/GL 82-2013). It could be clarified in the pre-amble or scope that NFCS refers to the system as described in CAC/GL 82-2013.

There is some ambiguity between the definitions for “equivalence” and “system equivalence” because inspection and certification systems mentioned in the definition for equivalence are part of NFCS mentioned in the definition of system equivalence.

The term “decision criteria” could be renamed as “assessment criteria” as it better reflects what the criteria are about. In addition, the definition should be modified as follows:

“those ~~factors~~ **criteria** used to determine whether the exporting country’s NFCS or relevant part is capable of reliably **delivering outcomes that meet** ~~meeting~~ the objectives of the importing country’s NFCS or the relevant part for the products under consideration”

Rationale:

This would be in line with the wording of paragraph 21 and would bring clarity as “outcomes” are well explained in the *Principles and Guidelines for Monitoring the Performance of National Food Control Systems* (CAC/GL 91-2017) while “objectives” are not explained in concrete terms.

Section 4 - Principles

There is no need for specific principles in this document as its purpose is to provide practical guidance for countries on how to consider system equivalence. Moreover, as currently written, the principles are in the form of recommendations and repeat what is recommended later in the document.

Section 5 - Process steps

Step 3 “description of the importing country’s NFCS objectives” should precede step 2 “the decision criteria for comparison”.

There is no need for a separate step 6 “decision process”. It overlaps step 5 “assessment”. Therefore, steps 5 and 6 could be combined under the title “assessment process”.

5.1 Step 1: Initial discussions and decision to commence

Paragraphs 11 and 12 could be deleted as they repeat what is said in paragraph 10 under Step 1 and in paragraphs 13 and 14.

The last sentence of paragraph 13 should be deleted as it repeats what is said in paragraphs 15-17.

5.2 Step 2: The decision criteria for comparison

The assessment criteria of the FAO/WHO Food Control System Assessment Tool provides well-structured and comprehensive criteria for evaluating food control systems. While the FAO/WHO Tool is primarily meant for self-assessments, with appropriate adaptations its assessment criteria would give a good basis to assess equivalence on systems basis. It could serve as a starting point for developing a questionnaire which could be introduced as an annex to the guidance document.

5.3 Step 3: Description of importing country NFCS objectives

Paragraph 29 puts overly heavy burden on the importing country for providing information, evidence and justification for the elements of its NFCS.

MALAYSIA

Malaysia would like to thank New Zealand as chair, Chile and USA as co-chair of EWG for their work in preparing Draft Guidelines on Recognition and Maintenance of Equivalence of National Food Control Systems (NFCS). Malaysia finds this document provides better guidance for country to enter into equivalence process hence facilitate trade between countries.

In general we would like to propose to include a para at the Step 1 during initial discussion that stated the two countries should mutually agree to enter into an equivalence process prior to exporting country sending formal request to the importing country.

AFRICAN UNION

Position

African Union supports the proposed recommendations as listed below:

- Retention of full references to other existing CCFICS text in the draft instead of use of footnotes.
- Non elaborated examples should be retained within the text otherwise should be included as appendices.
- Consider the development of new work to merge and rewrite the new and existing equivalence guidance as per option B;

Rationale

- The retention of full references in the draft will enhance readability of document
- Provision of examples will contribute to improved understanding of the provisions of the document.
- A merger of existing guidance documents on equivalence and the proposed draft on system equivalence will provide a more user-friendly one stop document to address issues pertinent to equivalence in NFCS.

Appendix 1- Draft Guidelines on Recognition and maintenance of Equivalence of National Food Control Systems (NFCS)

Issue

Inconsistent use of Competent Authority and Country Authority in the entire document

Position

African Union recommends the use of the term “Competent Authority”

Rationale

“Competent Authority” is the defined Codex terminology used for bodies with jurisdiction.

Issue

Section 2, Para 6 and 8 and Section 5, para 10: These sections are silent on “decision making”.

Position

African Union recommends the inclusion of “decision” in both cases in between assessment and recognition.

Rationale

Scope and process steps are incomplete without the decision making step.

Issue

Section 5, para 36

The section does not consider remote assessment as one of the methods for assessment

Position

African Union recommends inclusion of “Remote Assessment” as one of the methods of assessment.

Rationale

Remote assessment could equally be effective as in country visit and is also a cost effective alternative.

General Comment

African Union supports the advancement of the new work on systems equivalence to the next step.