

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

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ALINORM 81/4

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION
Fourteenth Session, Geneva, 29 June-10 July 1981

REPORT OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SESSION OF THE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION
Geneva, WHO, 25-26 July 1981

INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Committee held its Twenty-Eighth Session at WHO Headquarters, Geneva, on 25 and 26 June 1981. The Executive Committee was presided over by the Chairman of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Professor Dr D. Eckert (Federal Republic of Germany) and in the presence of two Vice-Chairmen of the Commission, Mr E.F. Kimbrell (USA) and Mr D.A. Akoh (Nigeria). Apologies for absence were received from Dr E.R. Mendez (Mexico). The following representatives from the geographic locations mentioned were present: for Africa, Mr N.M. Masai, from Kenya; for Asia, Mr Dong-bai Lee, from the Republic of Korea; for Europe, Dr A.N. Zaitsev, from the USSR; for Latin America, Ing. J. Piazzzi, from Argentina; for North America, Dr J.E. McGowan, from Canada; for the South-West Pacific, Ms S.P. Cottrell, from New Zealand. The Coordinator for Latin America, Dr A.M. Dovat (Uruguay) was present. Apologies for absence were received from the Coordinators for Asia, Dr D.S. Chadha (India), for Africa, Dr T. N'Doye (Senegal), and for Europe, Dr H. Woidich (Austria).

ADOPTION OF AGENDA

2. The Committee adopted the Provisional Agenda.

CODE OF MARKETING OF BREASTMILK SUBSTITUTES AND RELATED PRODUCTS

3. Dr D. Tejada-de-Rivero, ADG, WHO, informed the Committee that since its last session, the draft International Code had been submitted to the WHO Executive Board at its Sixty-seventh Session in January 1981 in conformity with the Assembly's request made in May 1980. The Board had recommended unanimously to the Health Assembly that the Code be adopted in the form of a recommendation, its Resolution (EB67.R12) to this effect containing the draft of a further Resolution (WHA34.22) by which the Assembly subsequently approved the Code in the form of a Recommendation at the close of its deliberations in May 1981. Copies of Resolution WHA34.22, together with the Code which appeared in the Annex thereto, were being made available to Members of the Executive Committee.

4. Dr Tejada drew the Committee's attention to operative paragraph 4 of this Resolution, whereby the Assembly "REQUESTS the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission to give full consideration, within the framework of its operational mandate, to action it might take to improve the quality standards of infant foods, and to support and promote the implementation of the International Code". It was the Assembly's position that the Codex Alimentarius Commission should continue its collaboration with WHO in promoting the achievement of the aim of the Code, which is the provision of safe and adequate nutrition for infants. In addition to fostering increased acceptance and application of existing standards, there were a number

of areas where action by the Codex would be most welcome.

5. The first of these concerned labelling. In the view of WHO, it was important that the labelling provisions (Section 10) of the Recommended International Standards for Foods for Infants and Children (CAC/RS 72/74-1976) be reviewed in the light of Article 9 on the same subject of the International Code. This would be particularly relevant with respect to "pictures or text which may idealize the use of infant formula" and paragraph 10.10, Optional Labelling, in the Codex standard.

6. A second point, not directly related to the Code itself, concerned the suggestion that had been made in the past concerning the promotion of standardized measurements for the preparation of infant formula, whether in powdered or liquid form. The purpose of such common units of measurement would no doubt be to facilitate the correct use of these products for those infants and young children who needed them, and to reduce the danger of "underfeeding". The opinion of the Codex Alimentarius Commission on the utility of such an exercise and the anticipated variables involved would be welcomed.

7. A further point concerned the "nutritional value and safety of products specifically intended for infant and young child feeding". Members of the Executive Committee had received copies of World Health Assembly Resolution WHA34.23 which bears this title. Standards concerning the composition of infant formula had already been elaborated and included, for example, date marking and storage instructions (paragraph 10.8) in the Recommended International Standards for Foods for Infants and Children. However, relatively little was known of the specific tolerances of these products to the effects of storage and distribution that occur over time and under different climatic conditions, particularly in arid and tropical regions. It would be particularly useful if the Codex Alimentarius Commission could review Resolution WHA34.23 and make specific suggestions on ways it would be prepared to cooperate with WHO for the successful carrying out of studies to assess changes in nutritional value and safety.

8. Dr Tejada concluded by thanking the Members of the Executive Committee for having given him the opportunity of addressing them, and of bringing them up-to-date on the adoption of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes, and of requesting their continued close collaboration with WHO in achieving objectives which reflected the two bodies' concern for the health and welfare of infants and young children.

9. The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to Dr Tejada-de-Rivero for his report on developments leading up to the adoption by the WHO Assembly of the Code and for having drawn attention to those aspects of the Code on which the technical expertise of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was being sought. The Chairman of the Executive Committee referred to the recently published Codex Code of Ethics for International Trade in Food and to the fact that there was a reference therein to the above-mentioned Marketing Code. This was a matter which the Secretariat should look into and report on to the Executive Committee.

REPORT ON FINANCIAL SITUATION OF THE JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME FOR 1980/81 AND 1982/83

10. The Executive Committee had before it document ALINORM 81/5 on the above subject. The document was introduced by the Secretariat. Concerning the question of the deficit of \$ 250,000 which had arisen in 1979 in meeting the needs of the programme concerning documentation, the Executive Committee was pleased to note that FAO had been able within the Organization as a whole to absorb the deficit and this had now been eliminated insofar as 1980/81 was concerned.

11. Regarding the current biennium 1980/81 the Executive Committee noted that as a result of measures taken to effect certain economies concerning documentation and publications, it would be possible for the Programme to break even in the biennium.

12. The Executive Committee recalled the discussion at its 27th Session on the budget proposals for 1982/83 and in particular its recommendations contained in paragraph 101 of ALINORM 81/3. The Executive Committee was pleased to note that the Directors-General of FAO and WHO had made provision for the current level of the Programme's budget to be maintained in 1982/83. The World Health Assembly had already approved the WHO share of the budget of the Programme and the FAO contribution was subject to approval by the FAO Conference in November 1981. The matter of cost-sharing between the agencies was still pending and it would be a matter for consideration by the Directors-General themselves. It was expected that they would also review the longer-term requirements of the Programme beyond 1983 in order to ensure a proper basis for planning the Programme and to enable host governments also to plan their involvement in the hosting and servicing of the Commission's subsidiary bodies.

13. The Executive Committee noted with satisfaction that the problem of the deficit relating to documentation had been satisfactorily resolved. The Executive Committee also noted with appreciation that the question of cost-sharing arrangements in relation to the joint budget of the Programme would be dealt with in due course as the Directors-General thought fit. The Executive Committee noted with satisfaction the action which had been taken by the Directors-General for 1982/83 and expressed its support for an examination of the Programme's longer-term requirements at the highest levels in FAO and WHO.

REPORT ON PROPOSED MEASURES TO EFFECT ECONOMIES IN DOCUMENTATION COSTS

14. As requested by the Executive Committee at its 27th Session, the Secretariat had prepared a series of proposals to effect economies in documentation (CX/EXEC 81/28/2). These measures were in the main intended to improve the distribution of Codex documents and publications to member governments by concentrating the distribution to the Ministries with major technical interest and utilizing to a much greater extent the National Codex Contact Points to ensure national distribution. It was estimated that it might be possible to effect savings of the order of 20% by revision of the distribution arrangements in consultation with individual member governments. The Secretariat also had introduced an internal system of rationing regarding the length and number of documents for each of the subsidiary bodies. The main measures would be to ensure more concise working documents and reports in order to effect economies in translation and printing costs. These would not, however, affect in any way the work programmes of the subsidiary bodies nor the availability of documents, reports and final publications in the three working languages - English, French and Spanish. As a result of the foregoing measures it was expected that the Programme would be able to fully meet the documentation and publication requirements of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies through to the end of 1983. It was further hoped by the introduction of loose-leaf systems for publications such as Codex Standards and the Procedural Manual, to eliminate the backlog of publications arising from the 13th Session of the Commission before the end of 1981. The Secretariat would consult with individual member governments concerning the proposed changes in distribution and seek from them their requirements.

15. The Executive Committee endorsed the proposals contained in the Document and emphasized the value of the Codex documentation and in particular the final publications to all member governments as well as other recipients such as training, technical and research institutions. The Executive Committee was of the opinion that FAO and WHO should examine the question of Codex publications and their wider distribution to member governments as part of the review of projected needs of the Programme up until the end of the 1980s. The Executive Committee further emphasized the need to involve National Codex Contact Points as fully as possible in the distribution arrangements and to ensure that the list of national Codex contact points was kept up-to-date regularly. The Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a progress report on this matter for consideration at the next session.

PROPOSED REVISED PROCEDURE FOR THE ELABORATION OF CODEX STANDARDS

16. The Executive Committee had before it the Report of the 6th Session of the Codex Committee on General Principles, ALINORM 81/33 which contained the proposals of the Committee to expedite the Elaboration of Codex standards as had been requested by the FAO Conference.

The Executive Committee noted that the proposed revised procedures were very similar to those which had been examined at its 27th Session and recommended that the procedures should be adopted by the Commission and published as soon as possible in the 5th Edition of the Procedural Manual.

ARRANGEMENTS TO AVOID DUPLICATION OF EFFORT BETWEEN CODEX WORK AND THE WORK OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

17. The Executive Committee had before it document CX/EXEC 81/28/3 on the above topic and noted that it would also be placed before the 14th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission as a Conference Room Document. The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation of the efforts which had been made by the Secretariat to avoid overlapping of work with other organizations.

18. The Executive Committee took note of the information contained in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the document relating to obligations falling on member countries in connexion with notifications of acceptances of Codex standards and notifications under the GATT Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. The Executive Committee expressed the wish that this information be made known to governments by means of a Circular Letter issued by both the GATT and Codex secretariats.

19. Concerning the work of the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the Executive Committee noted with regret that it had not been possible for the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce of the UN/ECE to accept the detailed proposals for rationalizing the work as between Codex and UN/ECE, as set forth in paragraph 14 of the paper. The Executive Committee considered the proposals essential for preventing duplication and hoped that the Working Party would consider the matter favourably at its next session. In the meantime, the Working Party would inform the Codex Alimentarius Commission of any plans it had for new work.

20. Concerning ISO, the Executive Committee took note of the standing arrangements for regular consultations between the Codex and ISO secretariat on matters of mutual interest. The Executive Committee noted with appreciation the steps being taken within the Coordinating Committees for Latin America and Europe to bring certain regional standards as far as possible into harmony with Codex standards.

21. The Executive Committee also expressed its agreement with the proposed consultations between the secretariats of the EEC and Codex to find ways and means to expedite the possible notification by the EEC concerning its position on Codex standards.

22. The Executive Committee noted that some member countries had expressed an interest in the development of international standards for certain kinds of fresh fruit and vegetables of particular interest to developing countries wishing to expand their exports of these products. The Executive Committee considered that it would be useful to have a paper prepared on this subject for the 15th Session of the Commission and requested the Secretariat to prepare such a paper having particular regard to products of concern to developing countries. The paper would also be expected to take particular note of situations where international standards already exist for some of these products.

23. The Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to undertake the compilation of a list of international bodies developing composition standards for foods and other related food matters of trade significance to assist the Commission in its task of coordination and avoidance of duplication generally. The Executive Committee requested that if possible this paper be prepared for its next session.

NUTRITION AND THE WORK OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

24. The Executive Committee had before it the consultant's report on the above-mentioned subject (ALINORM 81/7). The Committee was of the opinion that the paper constituted an

excellent basis for a full discussion by the Commission of this important subject. The Executive Committee noted that the consultant was of the opinion that the Commission and its subsidiary bodies had given due attention to the nutritional aspects of their activities and that no radical changes were called for. The consultant had made a series of recommendations in paragraphs 36 to 50 concerning future activities. The Representative for Asia drew the Committee's attention to the particular importance of the second sentence of paragraph 38 which was a matter of great interest to the developing countries and would call for full discussion. Regarding the question raised by the consultant in respect of the "general standard" in paragraphs 46 - 48 the Committee considered that the matter of a general standard should not be revived as much had been achieved in this area by the work of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling and the FAO/WHO Model Food Law. The Executive Committee agreed to recommend to the Commission that the matter of the general standard continue to be left in abeyance. The Executive Committee expressed its full agreement with the consultant's conclusions in paragraph 52 regarding the value and limitations of food standards and considered that these were placed in their proper context regarding nutrition. The Executive Committee concluded by expressing its appreciation of Dr Allen's report which should lead to fruitful discussion within the Commission.

REVIEW OF CURRENT WORK PROGRAMME OF THE COMMISSION AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND DIRECTION OF FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND PROVISIONAL TIMETABLE OF CODEX SESSIONS 1982/83

25. The Executive Committee had before it document ALINORM 81/8 and Addendum and expressed its general agreement with the analysis of the work of the Commission's subsidiary bodies which had been made by the Secretariat. Mr E. Kimbrell, Vice-Chairman, expressed concern that the period elapsing between sessions of the Commission had now been extended to two years and expressed the view that efforts should be made to reduce this period to 18 months as had been recent practice. The Chairman of the Executive Committee associated himself with this view. In response the Secretariat pointed to general financial restraints that made it difficult to provide for two sessions of the Commission in any given biennium.

26. The Representative of the Region of North America referred to the timetable of Codex sessions for 1982/83 (ALINORM 81/8 Add.) in which one session of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling had been scheduled for May 1982 and another before the 15th Session of the Commission in March 1983. Since few matters requiring endorsement would be coming before the 1983 session of the Committee on Food Labelling this could be handled by the Commission at its 15th Session and the 17th Session of the Committee on Food Labelling could meet in November 1983. The Representative of the Region of the South West Pacific drew attention to a certain overlapping between the dates scheduled for the Codex Committee on Food Additives and the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables in 1982 and stated that this could cause representational difficulties for New Zealand and Australia.

27. The Executive Committee was pleased to be informed that the Government of Sri Lanka had offered to chair and host the next session of the Coordinating Committee for Asia in January/February 1982. The Coordinator for Latin America, Mr Dovat, indicated that the next session of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America would probably be confirmed by the Government of Uruguay for 9 - 15 November 1982 in Montevideo.

HOSTING OF CODEX SESSIONS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

28. The Executive Committee noted the response of the various host governments contained in ALINORM 81/3 and ALINORM 81/9. Some host governments saw major difficulties in transferring Codex sessions to other locations. Other host countries indicated willingness in principle to contemplate an arrangement of this kind subject to various conditions being fulfilled. The Executive Committee noted that a major point which had been raised was whether the moving of a session to a different location would in fact result in a greater attendance of developing countries - e.g. would a session held in Africa result in a greater attendance of delegations from Asian and Latin American countries. The Executive Committee thought that this was a point that should be brought specifically to the attention of the Commission, recognizing that it was important to look carefully at this matter to see if there really would be an advantage to be gained.

29. The Chairman of the Commission suggested that the Coordinating Committees for the various regions might be able to play a useful role in examining standards under elaboration by the various commodity committees. The Coordinator for Latin America supported the suggestion of the Chairman, pointing out that it was in conformity with one of the recommendations of the Second Session of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America held in Montevideo, when it was requested that there be a strengthening of the activities of the Regional Coordinating Committees which would result in increased participation by the countries of the region and sub-regions in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. This position was shared by the Representative of the region of Latin America. The Executive Committee considered that this was a matter which merited being examined further and would be helpful for the discussion of the Commission on this topic.

OTHER BUSINESS

Irradiated Food

30. The Secretariat drew the attention of the Executive Committee to the fact that this item had been discussed at its last session (see para 103 of ALINORM 81/3). At that time the Executive Committee had decided not to supervise or guide further activities in the area of food irradiation after the termination of the International Project on Food Irradiation at the end of 1981. This view had been conveyed by the Secretariat to the manager of the International Project. In the meantime, in early June 1981, the Board of Management of the International Project met and decided not to continue the International Project as it had achieved the primary objective for which it had been set up in 1970. This was to clear the wholesomeness aspects of irradiated food, which was done by the 1980 Joint FAO/IAEA/WHO Expert Committee on Irradiated Foods which recommended the acceptance of food irradiated up to an overall average dose of 10 kGy. On the other hand, the Board of Management expressed the view that there was an urgent need to continue close international cooperation in order to achieve, inter alia, the following objectives:

- (i) furtherance of international trade in irradiated foods
- (ii) legislative requirements regarding the importation and marketing of irradiated foods and regarding the recognition and inspection of licensed irradiation facilities
- (iii) consumer acceptance trials and marketing tests
- (iv) information service
- (v) training courses
- (vi) focal point with appropriate expertise

31. In order to meet the perceived need for international cooperation, it was felt necessary to set up some form of International Food Irradiation Board or Programme under the aegis of FAO, IAEA and WHO. It was hoped that such a Board or Programme might be constituted on the basis of Memoranda of Understanding by interested governments.

32. The Executive Committee noted these thoughts with interest and expressed the hope that it would be possible to achieve some useful form of international cooperation in the field of food irradiation, as the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme would be benefiting from this. However, it also expressed the view that it was not within the scope of the Codex Alimentarius Commission to sponsor such an international Board or Programme, but the Commission and its subsidiary bodies would appreciate the scientific expertise which would emanate from such a cooperative venture.