



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

Tenth Session

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CODEx WORK RELEVANT TO THE REGION

(Prepared by the Codex Secretariat)

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1. At the ninth session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE9), the following matters of relevance to the region were presented based on their identification through a questionnaire¹:

- (i) *Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF)*: Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Mycotoxin Contamination in Cereals;
- (ii) *Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR)*: establishment of Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for pesticides on products of interest to the region, e.g. grain products;
- (iii) *Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU)*: work on requirements for nutrient reference values (NRV-R) and infant formula;
- (iv) *Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV)*: work on dried fruits, such as dates and derived products;
- (v) *Strategic Plan 2014-2019 Goal 3*: the need for effective participation from more countries from the region in the work of Codex.

1.2. In preparation of CCNE10, FAO/WHO collected a list of emerging issues identified by nine out of 17 Members from the region (i.e. 53%) in a dedicated survey². The most frequently mentioned emerging issue, “chemical food contamination”, is also subject of the keynote speech for CCNE10³.

1.3. With regards to effective participation (Goal 3 of the Strategic Plan 2014-2019), the Codex Secretariat analysed attendance at physical meetings and registration data on the platform for Electronic Working Groups (EWGs) for the Members from the region which is contained in CX/NE 19/10/9.

1.4. The purpose of this paper is firstly to consolidate the information from the CCNE9 questionnaire on work relevant to the region, the CCNE10 survey on emerging issues and participation data analysed by the Codex Secretariat. Secondly, the paper seeks to highlight relevant Codex work areas in which Members from the region face certain challenges in order to guide discussions and identify possible solutions.

2. WORK ITEMS OF RELEVANCE TO THE REGION

Contaminants in Food

2.1. Contaminants in food (specifically cereals) have been identified as a key work item in the 2017 questionnaire on Codex work relevant to the region. In the 2019 survey on emerging issues prepared by FAO/WHO, six countries from the Near East confirmed that food contamination in general continues to constitute a highly relevant food safety issue. In particular, mycotoxins and contamination through heavy metals remain a concern for both consumers and food safety experts in the region. The keynote address to CCNE10 also focusses on the issue of chemicals in food and asks the question “when do we need to be worried and what do we need to know?”.

¹ See CX/NE 17/09/07. 6 out of 17 Members (i.e. 35%) responded to the questionnaire.

² See CX/NE 19/10/3

³ See CX/NE 19/10/2

2.2. CCCF is the Committee that deals with Codex standard setting related to contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed. The Committee is hosted by The Netherlands and since 2012 has alternated its meeting venue every second year with co-hosts outside of The Netherlands⁴.

2.3. CCCF has developed *inter alia* a *Code of Practice (COP) for the Prevention and Reduction of Mycotoxin Contamination in Cereals* (CXC 51 -2003) which was adopted in 2003 and last changed in 2017. This COP specifically addresses the prevention and reduction of contamination of the following mycotoxins in its annexes: Zearaleone; Fumonisin; Ochratoxin; Trichothecenes; Aflatoxin; and Ergot Alkaloids. Furthermore, CCCF13 established an Electronic Working Group (EWG) to prepare maximum levels for total aflatoxins in certain cereals and cereals-based products including foods for infants and young children.

2.4. Irrespective of the meeting location, participation by Members from the region in meetings of CCCF has been low over the years (see Table 1). Also the registration of Members from NE in EWGs established by CCCF is low⁵.

Table 1: Participation of Members from CCNE in meetings of CCCF, 2016-2019

Session	CCCF10 (2016)	CCCF11 (2017)	CCCF12 (2018)	CCCF13 (2019)
Venue	Netherlands	Brazil	Netherlands	Indonesia
Total number of delegations	55	49	59	46
Number of delegations from NE	4	0	4	3

2.5. As contaminants in food have repeatedly been highlighted as relevant to the region, the low participation in the work of CCCF suggests that Members in the region face certain challenges in engaging in Codex work.

Pesticide Residues

2.6. MRLs for pesticides on products of interest to the region, e.g. grain products, have been highlighted in the 2017 questionnaire and were also mentioned in the 2019 survey on emerging issues among food contamination concerns. Respondents noted that they faced issues related to high levels of pesticides in both imported and domestically produced foods and required better monitoring systems.

2.7. CCPR is the Codex Committee that deals with the establishment of standards, i.e. mainly MRLs, related to pesticide residues in food and certain animal feeding stuffs⁶. The Committee is hosted by China and, similarly to CCCF, shows low participation from the region looking at physical attendance (see Table 2) as well as registration in EWGs (see CX/NE 19/10/9).

Table 2: Participation of Members from CCNE in meetings of CCPR, 2016-2019

Session	CCPR48 (2016)	CCPR49 (2017)	CCPR50 (2018)	CCPR51 (2019)
Venue	China	China	China	China
Total number of delegations	51	53	53	46
Number of delegations from NE	4	4	3	2

Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses

2.8. In 2017, Members from the region identified work on requirements for nutrient reference values (NRV-R) and infant formula as relevant work items within Codex. CCNFSDU being the responsible Committee for this work is hosted by Germany and occasionally meets in co-host countries.

⁴ 2013: Moscow/Russian Federation; 2015: New Delhi/India; 2017: Rio de Janeiro/Brazil; 2019: Yogyakarta/Indonesia.

⁵ See CX/NE 19/10/9 Appendix II

⁶ Where it is justified for reasons of protection of human health

2.9. Participation of Near East Members in physical meetings of CCFSDU (see Table 3) is slightly higher than that of CCCF and CCPR, but still low considering the overall relevance of the Committee's work to the region. The same holds true for registrations in EWGs established by CCFSDU.

Table 3: Participation of Members from CCNE in meetings of CCFSDU, 2015-2018

Session	CCFSDU37 (2015)	CCFSDU38 (2016)	CCFSDU39 (2017)	CCFSDU40 (2018)
Venue	Germany	Germany	Germany	Germany
Total number of delegations	67	57	66	75
Number of delegations from NE	6	3	6	5

2.10. The outcome of the work of an EWG on NRV-R for older infants and young children will be shared at the 41st Session of CCFSDU (November 2019). As regards, infant formula, no work on the *Standard for Infant Formula and Formulas for Special Medical Purposes Intended for Infants* (CXS 72-1981) is currently taking place, while a review of the *Standard for Follow-up Formula* (CXS 156-1987) for older infants and young children is ongoing and part of the agenda for CCFSDU41.

Dried Fruits

2.11. At CCNE9 Members underlined the importance of the work of CCPFV for the region, highlighting the need to start work on dried fruits, such as dates and derived products.

2.12. Since 2016, CCPFV which is hosted by the United States of America, is working by correspondence. CAC42 (2019) agreed that CCPFV would continue its work by correspondence, but assess whether a physical meeting in 2020 would be appropriate.⁷

2.13. The Committee is currently developing a "General Standard for Dried Fruits" (Step 4) which would include annexes for dried persimmons, raisins, dates, dried apricots and possibly dried longans. The responsible EWG is chaired by Thailand and co-chaired by the Republic of Korea. None of the Members from the Near East region participated in the work of this EWG.

2.14. Furthermore, a Codex Standard for Dates (CXS 143-1985), covering also dried or hydrated dates, was adopted in 1985 and not changed since then. The Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) at its 22st Session (October 2019) agreed to establish an EWG, chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia, to revise a proposed draft Standard for fresh Dates. In that context, the CCFFV also agreed to request CCPF to provide clarification on whether CXS 143-1985 had covered all stages of fresh dates with different level of moisture content⁸.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1. Members from the region show very low levels of participation in Codex work that has been identified as relevant by them irrespective of whether the work takes place in physical sessions or remotely via EWGs or committees working by correspondence.

3.2. Challenges preventing Members from stronger engagement have not been clearly identified. Challenges may related to a lack awareness of the work undertaken by the Committee, insufficient national coordination, resource constraints or yet other issues.

4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1. CCNE is requested to:

- (i) review the work items of relevance outlined in this paper;
- (ii) inform FAO/WHO and the Codex Secretariat about challenges preventing Members from stronger engagement in work identified as relevant; and
- (iii) coordinate their efforts in contributing to ongoing and future Codex work of relevance to them.

⁷ REP19/CAC para. 108.

⁸ See REP20/FFV, para. 60ff