



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE**

30th Session, 3 – 7 October 2016

Astana, Kazakhstan

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL CODEX PROCESS

1. In numerous cases the Codex standards and guidelines constitute the basis for national legislation on food safety and food quality. Moreover, they are applied under the WTO framework as a basis for settling disputes between members of the WTO. This means that the Codex standards are highly important for protecting consumers and trade in food.
2. In view of the impact of the Codex standards, it is of fundamental importance to ensure that the Codex standards are established in a prudent manner. This requires a transparent process and the involvement of the relevant stakeholders, such as consumer representatives, manufacturers, interest groups, academia and other national and international authorities. Not least because experience shows that national parliaments generally are not involved in establishing the Codex standards.
3. The Codex standards and guidelines are developed by various Codex committees and ultimately adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Observer organisations are welcome to attend meetings. They include organisations representing various stakeholders, such as the industry and consumers. The Codex documents can also be freely accessed by the public on the Codex Alimentarius website. The formal Codex process therefore is transparent and generally stakeholders are represented, as observers or otherwise, and depending on whether they are able to actually physically attend the meetings. As might be expected they can, however, always submit written comments.
4. The manner in which countries adopt a national position on the Codex standards, which are being developed by the Codex committees, varies widely in practice. In some cases this may be at a purely technical level, while in other cases a more comprehensive and transparent process may be called for. Many countries hold preliminary consultations on the Codex standards, to which they also invite stakeholders. Occasionally, national parliaments may even be involved.
5. A large number of countries have in fact created an opportunity for stakeholders to view and contribute to the national discussion on the future Codex standards. In some cases, however, stakeholders were found to show limited interest in the Codex process. Despite the government's good intentions, these stakeholders are reluctant to assume an active role.
6. This discussion paper is intended to share knowledge and experiences of stakeholder involvement in the national Codex process. The questions that will be discussed are as follows:
 - Do you find transparency and stakeholder involvement relevant in adopting a national position on future Codex standards?
 - In what way is transparency currently ensured?
 - In what way are stakeholders actively involved in the process of adopting a national position at present?
 - Do you find transparency and stakeholder involvement adequate in ensuring an effective decision-making process? If not, what possible improvements do you believe should be made?
 - In your opinion, do stakeholders demonstrate a sufficient level of involvement in the Codex process? If not, how do you believe their involvement can be increased?