



## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

40<sup>th</sup> Session

CICG, Geneva, Switzerland

17 - 22 July 2017

*Comments of Costa Rica*

## Proposal for the Establishment of the World Food Safety Day

### 1- Introduction

Everyone is entitled to the food they eat to be safe, that is, they do not cause them harm to health when they are ingested because of physical contaminants (metals, stones, etc.), microbiological (bacteria, viruses, parasites) or harmful chemicals. Food may be contaminated at any time during production, distribution and preparation as a result of the use of contaminated water for preparation, poor hygiene during handling or improper conditions during processing and storage. Other factors that may intervene are the low level of literacy coupled with the lack of training of populations and food handlers, as well as insufficient food safety regulation or lack of implementation.

In such a diverse world with different legal, political and administrative systems that recognizes the importance of actively and effectively participating in the creation of international food standards, several countries have seen the need to promote a proposal to proclaim a World Food Safety Day on a permanent basis within the framework of the United Nations, as agreed at the 39th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) held from 27 June to 1 July 2016 in Rome, Italy.

In this regard, the Joint FAO / WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission which was established in 1963, is an intergovernmental body to prepare international food standards and other relevant recommendations to promote food quality and safety. It is one of the international reference entities of the Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), both of the World Trade Organization (WTO). These agreements cite guidance and recommendations to facilitate international trade in food.

Currently, Codex is made up of 187 Member Countries and 1 Member Organization (EU), representing 99% of the world's population; being consolidated as one of the most successful programs of the specialized organisms of the United Nations, contributing to international harmonization on the issue of food quality and safety.

### 2- Current Situation of Food Safety

At present, more than 200 foodborne diseases caused by 31 pollutants (bacteria, viruses, parasites, toxins and chemicals) have been identified, whose manifestations range from gastrointestinal symptoms such as diarrhea to long-term chronic diseases such as cancer. These diseases are a major cause of morbidity and mortality, constituting one of the greatest dangers to health worldwide and becoming a significant impediment to socioeconomic development in the countries.

In this sense, globalization plays a crucial role, given the increase in international trade and the greater concentration and integration of markets, which make the food chain longer, making it difficult to investigate outbreaks of foodborne diseases and withdrawals of the products in cases of emergency.

In addition, current projections indicate a 31% increase in world population between 1996 and 2020, with almost 98% of that increase occurring in developing countries<sup>1</sup>. It is also predicted that in the period 1995-2020 the urban population of these countries will double. Therefore, it will become increasingly difficult to resolve safety issues on an individual country basis.

Outbreaks of severe foodborne illness have been recorded in the last ten years on all continents, often amplified by this globalization of trade. This situation makes it increasingly evident that there is a need for an international collaborative effort to strengthen systems that ensure food safety in all countries in an integrated and preventive manner.

The *WHO Estimates of the Global Burden of Foodborne Diseases* report published in 2015 provides comprehensive estimates of global and regional burden of disease. This report shows that every year up to 600 million people worldwide (i.e. 1 in 10) become ill after consuming contaminated food and 420 000 die for the same cause. Children under 5 years old are at particularly high risk: about 125 000 die annually from foodborne illness.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the incidence of food contamination and the diseases transmitted by them have important effects that go beyond the direct impact on public health: impact on food exports, has a negative effect on tourism (important source of income for many countries), affects the image of producers and economic development in both developed and developing countries.

The economic consequences of this situation can reach large proportions, taking into account the value of crops and animal products deteriorated or destroyed as a result of contamination, medical costs and loss of productivity or income as a result of morbidity, disability or premature death in addition to the burden of public health systems. The latest estimates by the US Department of Agriculture suggest that foodborne illnesses cost about \$ 15.5 billion each year in that country.<sup>3</sup>

It is for the foregoing that the need to address this situation prevails by promoting integral actions and implementing effective and efficient safety control systems throughout the food chain, from primary production to the consumer. This can be achieved through national mechanisms and initiatives involving governments and all stakeholders (the food industry, trade, academy, consumers) by developing technical standards and regulations, food safety assurance programs, surveillance programs and the establishment of national safety policies, which play a key role in the health of the population, the development of the food industry and the world food trade.

In order to promote these systems, it is necessary to increase access to information through awareness-raising campaigns of sectors, with the purpose of educate consumers about the relevance of proper preparation and handling of food and to develop skills in staff responsible for food control, both for government authorities and industry. The existence of a global food safety day represents an important and solid basis for achieving these objectives.

### **3- Benefits of Establishing World Food Safety Day**

With the establishment of a World Food Safety Day, it is expected:

- That the world community become aware of the current problems and the importance of taking the necessary measures and controls to avoid contamination of food. In such a way that governments, industry, academy and non-governmental organizations, develop activities, trainings and global campaigns on fundamental food safety issues, aimed at the productive sectors and consumers.
- Provide an incentive for large industries, small food producing enterprises and other sectors involved to have the opportunity to make a special effort to promote good practices and actions aimed at achieving a permanent global effect on reducing the incidence of foodborne diseases.
- Disseminate and make visible the work of the Codex Alimentarius on food safety.

### **4- Implemented Actions**

In order to promote the proclamation of a World Food Safety Day, numerous initiatives have taken place, among which the following stand out:

- FAO and WHO have dedicated efforts to provide guidance and support to individual countries to develop and improve their national food safety systems and formulate a national policy in this area.

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<sup>1</sup>Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).The Importance of Food Quality and Safety for Developing Countries. Committee on World Food Security, Twenty-fifth Session, Rome, 31 May - 3 June 1999.

<sup>2</sup>WHO estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases: foodborne disease burden epidemiology reference group 2007- 2015

<sup>3</sup>Hoffmann, Sandra; Tobenna D. Anekwe.Making Sense of Recent Cost-of-Foodborne-Illness Estimates, EIB-118, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2013.

- Each year WHO chooses as a topic a priority area among the global public health problems in commemoration of World Health Day. In that sense, the World Health Day campaign of 2015 devoted its efforts to promoting measures to improve food safety throughout the food chain, to alert governments, producers, distributors and the general population about the importance of food safety and what each can do to ensure that the food they eat is safe.
- An interregional meeting was held in Washington DC, USA, on September 24-25, 2015, in which 11 countries and two organizations participated: Benin, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Thailand, Tanzania, US, African Union and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). The objective of this meeting was to seek options to improve Codex management to efficiently and effectively address the food safety issues faced by countries and other emerging issues. In this discussion emerges the initiative to promote the establishment of a World Food Safety Day. As part of the agreements of this meeting, in February 2016, a number of countries signed a letter to Mrs. Awilo Ochieng Pernet, President of the CAC and Mr. Tom Heilandt, Secretary of the CAC requesting support for the initiation and implementation of an awareness campaign on the importance of the Codex Alimentarius to promote the establishment of a World Food Safety Day.
- In December 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and Environment (RIVM) organized the Symposium of the Reference Group on the Epidemiology of Morbidity Burden of Food Transmission (FERG) in Amsterdam, which aimed to present and discuss estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases to reduce their incidence. On this occasion, Ms. Awilo Ochieng Pernet made the forum aware of the need to establish a "World Food Safety Day" in order to raise the profile of food safety.
- In March 2016, a meeting was held in Atlanta, USA. More than 50 participants, specialists from the Codex Coordinating Committees for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC) and Africa (CCAFRICA), met to discuss issues of interest. At that meeting, Costa Rica discussed the issue of visibility of Codex at the international level, emphasizing the importance of projecting the image of Codex in the FAO/WHO Permanent Councils and incorporating the Codex topic into the annual meetings of these organizations; emphasizing that it is of great interest to promote the permanent establishment of the World Food Safety Day in order to make Codex work in this area visible in different countries.
- At the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission held in 2016 (REP16 /CAC), Costa Rica, in follow-up to these initiatives, requested the incorporation of the proclamation of a "World Food Safety Day" on a permanent basis as a point on the agenda, to raise awareness of the importance of food safety in the world and as part of measures to increase the visibility of Codex. In this context, the CAC discussed the issue and agreed as follows:

*"The Commission welcomed and supported the proposal for the establishment of a World Food Safety Day on a permanent basis as suggested by the Chairperson of the Commission, Mrs Awilo Ochieng Pernet, in December 2015 and re-proposed by Costa Rica at the current Session. The Commission noted that the establishment of such a day would require the proposal by Codex Members for the decision of the FAO Conference and WHA as well as a decision at UN headquarter level with an estimated timeframe of three years".*
- In May 2017, the delegation of Costa Rica made an intervention at the World Health Assembly 2017, to make known to the plenary the proposal for the proclamation of World Food Safety Day, and at the same time make a call to the Countries to support this initiative.
- Finally, in July 2017, with the support of the President of the CAC, Ms. Awilo Ochieng Pernet and the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Costa Rica to the United Nations Agencies in Rome, the inclusion of this declaration for endorsement at the 40<sup>th</sup> FAO Conference, in item 18 of the agenda on "international days and years", was achieved. This ministerial conference unanimously approved the proclamation of the World Food Safety Day (June 7 of each year).

## 5- Next Steps

With a view to achieving the proposed objective, Costa Rica urges all Codex members to continue to support this statement at the next WHO Assembly in 2018 for adoption and then to be presented to the General Assembly of the United Nations.

## ANNEX

July 2017

C 2017/LIM/22 Rev.1



联合国  
粮食及  
农业组织

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

Organisation des Nations  
Unies pour l'alimentation  
et l'agriculture

Продовольственная и  
сельскохозяйственная организация  
Объединенных Наций

Organización de las  
Naciones Unidas para la  
Alimentación y la Agricultura

منظمة  
الأمم المتحدة  
للزراعة

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## CONFERENCE

### Fortieth Session

Rome, 3-8 July 2017

### Observance of a World Food Safety Day (Draft Resolution)

#### Executive Summary

The Government of the Republic of Costa Rica, at the 70<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly, held in Geneva (22-31 May 2017), referring to a decision of the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius* Commission (July 2016) to propose the establishment of a World Food Safety Day, highlighted the importance of ensuring food safety.

*Extracts from the Report of the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO Headquarters, Rome, 27 June - 1 July 2016*

259. The Commission discussed two proposals from Costa Rica aimed at promoting the work of Codex:

- The establishment of a recurrent "World Food Safety Day"; [...]

263. The Commission welcomed and supported the proposal for the establishment of a World Food Safety Day on a permanent basis as suggested by the Chairperson of the Commission, Mrs Awilo Ochieng Pernet, in December 2015 and re-proposed by Costa Rica at the current Session. The Commission noted that the establishment of such a day would require the proposal by Codex Members for the decision of the FAO Conference and WHA, as well as a decision at UN headquarter level with an estimated timeframe of three years.

#### Suggested action by the Conference

The Conference may wish to approve the draft resolution in Annex and to request the Director-General to transmit it to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider, at its next session, declaring 7 June as World Food Safety Day.

*Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:*

Mr Tom Heilandt  
Secretary

FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission  
Tel +39 06570 54384

## Annex

**Resolution ..../2017**  
**Observance of World Food Safety Day**

**The Conference,**

**Noting** that there is no food security without food safety and that in a world where the food supply chain has become global, any food safety incident has global negative effects on public health, trade and the economy;

**Noting** that improving food safety contributes positively to trade, employment and poverty alleviation;

**Recalling** the leading role of the FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius* Commission in setting international food standards to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade and the leading role of FAO and WHO in providing capacity building to countries to implement food safety systems;

**Recalling** the Rome Declaration on Nutrition of the Second International Conference on Nutrition (November 2014) which reaffirmed that improvements in diet and nutrition require relevant legislative frameworks for food safety and quality, including for the proper use of agrochemicals, by promoting participation in the activities of the FAO/WHO *Codex Alimentarius* Commission for the development of international standards for food safety and quality;

**Taking into account** the WHO report on estimates of the global burden of foodborne diseases by the Foodborne diseases burden epidemiology reference group (FERG) 2007-2015, which found that the global burden of foodborne diseases is considerable, and affects individuals of all ages, particularly children under five years of age and persons living in low-income regions of the world;

**Noting** the need for countries to be pro-active, to remain vigilant and regularly update technical capacities in national food safety control systems, as well as to be kept informed, to identify new challenges that will impact on food safety, including technological advances in analysis and detection, the impact of food adulteration and the consequences of climate change;

**Cognizant** of the urgent need to raise awareness at all levels and to promote and facilitate actions for global food safety, bearing in mind that “ending hunger and ensuring access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round” is the first target of Sustainable Development Goal 2;

**Mindful** that the observance of a World Food Safety Day by the international community and supported by FAO and WHO would contribute significantly to raising awareness at all levels on the importance of food safety and promote global efforts and collective actions to improve public health and promote fair practices in food trade

**Stressing** that additional costs of activities arising from the implementation of the World Food Safety Day be met through voluntary contributions, including from the private sector;

**Invites** FAO Members to liaise with delegates to the relevant governing bodies of WHO so that a resolution supporting establishment of a World Food Safety Day can be passed;

**Requests** the Director-General following the passing of a relevant resolution in the appropriate WHO governing body to liaise with the Director General of WHO in transmitting this Resolution to the Secretary-General of the United Nations with a view to having the General Assembly of the United Nations consider, at its next session, declaring 7 June each year as World Food Safety Day.

(Adopted on ... 2017)