

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.codexalimentarius.org

Agenda Item 7

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION 74th Session

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Horizontal agenda for 2018/2019 round of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees

BACKGROUND

1. FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs) exercise a general coordinating role for the region which make them the regional forum to promote and monitor use of Codex standards; exchange information on regulatory initiatives and problems arising from food control; define the problems and needs of the region concerning food standards and food control and how such problems could be addressed through Codex, FAO and WHO.
2. RCCs also contribute to Codex governance through the participation of Regional Coordinators in the Executive Committee (CCEXEC); coordinate regional standard-setting work; draw the attention of the Commission to any aspects of Codex work of particular significance to the region; and perform any other function as may be entrusted to them by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). Therefore, RCCs are unique in nature in the Codex system.
3. CAC38 (2015) welcomed the revitalization of RCCs as a useful process to make RCCs more strategic, forward thinking fora on food quality and safety issues related to regions, and endorsed the recommendations of CCEXEC70 (2015) which included the alignment of the agendas of RCCs. A generic agenda would contribute in making the work of RCCs more homogeneous and comparable and there should be some flexibility to allow inclusion of specific items of interest to the region.
4. The generic agenda included the following common items in support of the revitalization of RCCs as improved food quality and safety fora: (i) keynote address on priority issues for the region; (ii) identification of needs and priorities for food quality and safety in regions (critical and emerging issues); (iii) a platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety; (iv) monitoring the use of Codex standards in countries of the region; (v) regional strategic planning and the next Codex strategic planning exercise; and (vi) Codex work relevant to the region.
5. The conclusions and recommendations arising from the 2016-2017 round of RCCs on the above items were summarized by the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO, and presented to CCEXEC73 (2017) for consideration.
6. CCEXEC73 (2017) welcomed the progress in the revitalization process of RCCs; encouraged FAO, WHO, and the Codex Secretariat to continue the revitalization process throughout the next cycle of RCC meetings; and recommended that CCEXEC74 discuss the horizontal agenda items for the next cycle of RCC sessions. In this regard, CCEXEC Members noted that a common horizontal agenda for all RCCs could highlight differences and similarities among regions and facilitate Codex, FAO and WHO analysis and responsive actions in terms of capacity and standards development.¹

PROPOSED HORIZONTAL AGENDA FOR RCCs

7. The conclusions and recommendations arising from RCCs on the discussion of the common agenda items as described in paragraph 4 supported their continuation for the next cycle of RCCs while recognizing there remains scope for improvement to continue raising the profile of RCCs as the regional fora to address food quality and safety issues of high interest to regions. Continual improvement and revitalization of RCCs should also aid to raise awareness on the importance of Codex and political buy-in to food quality and safety (including nutrition) matters.

¹ REP17/EXEC2 para 92-96

8. The following is a proposal for the common horizontal agenda for all RCCs.

I. Keynote address - discussion on regional issue of priority and common challenge

9. The inclusion of a keynote address is a key activity within the revitalization process. It aims to stimulate discussion and information sharing among members on a topic highly relevant to the region in order to raise the profile of RCCs as a regional fora to discuss food quality, safety and nutrition issues of interest or concern to the region and to increase awareness and high level political buy-in on Codex work.

10. RCCs welcomed the introduction of this item, and supported its inclusion as a standing item on the agenda of the next Round of RCCs.

11. New topics for the next round of keynote addresses should be selected and may include a topic which arose from any previous discussion on critical and emerging issues. Regional Coordinators should consult with Members of their region, FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat for the selection of the new topic.

12. In some instances, there may be a value in follow-up on the conclusions and recommendations of the previous keynote address. This could be carried out through the discussion on needs and priorities for food quality, safety and nutrition in regions or by providing inputs for the new Codex Strategic Plan.

II. Identification of needs and priorities in regions - critical and emerging food quality and safety issues

13. In order to identify critical and emerging issues in regions, a set of questions on needs and priorities for regions was developed by FAO and WHO in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat and sent to the Codex Contact Points (CCPs) of all Members of each region. A summary and analysis of the information collected was prepared by FAO and WHO to assist RCCs in the process of prioritization. The outcome of the discussion on this item is directly useful to countries and may also inform the planning and implementation of FAO and WHO capacity development programs as well as improve the timeliness of CAC responses to members' needs through its normative work.

14. RCCs generally supported maintaining this item on the agenda of RCCs as an important step in the revitalization process of RCCs and noted the importance of continuing to use the information collected and refining the analysis and consideration of issues.

15. The rate of replies to the questionnaire varied amongst RCCs. The FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA) and the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and South West Pacific (CCNASWP) show a high level of response while for the remaining RCCs the percentage of replies was at or below with an average completion rate of responses of 52%.

16. FAO and WHO are ready to engage with Regional Coordinators on planning this item to increase the rate of responses thus to ensure that critical and emerging issues of most relevance to the region are addressed. This would create a more accurate picture of the needs and priorities of regions on critical and emerging issues and help identify suitable actions to address them in Codex, FAO, WHO and/or other mechanisms at national and regional level. This would also allow for a global overview of the commonalities and differences on these issues across different Codex regions.

17. FAO and WHO support the continuation of the discussion on critical and emerging issues at the next round of RCCs and are committed to continuing to work with Members in this regard.

III. Online Platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety

18. An online platform was developed by FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat. The primary use and purpose of the platform is to facilitate information exchange between member countries, in addition to allowing for analysis of information. The prototype is based on a set of questions on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety that were chosen based on the premise that countries would see a value in sharing and using such information. Members of each region were requested to provide inputs through their CCPs.

19. The prototype was available in early 2016 and countries had just started to populate the platform when the RCCs began. Discussion at RCCs focused on assessing whether the prototype itself and the information collected through the questions were fit for purpose, and useful to countries, including the workload involved in providing such information on a regular basis. This feedback would assist FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat in determining the further improvements and development of the platform.
20. RCCs confirmed the prototype is fit for purpose and identified areas for improvements to facilitate information exchange between Member countries. The success of this exercise will depend on countries actively uploading and updating the information on the platform. The low rate of replies (less than 50% across RCCs, with an average completion rate of 23%) was mainly due to the availability of the platform (see paragraph 19) and time needed to get used to the new system as well as other issues identified by RCCs. The rate of replies should increase following the proposals for improvements and further development of the platform.
21. The prototype will be improved and further developed based on proposals made by RCCs. FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat will assess the proposals made by RCCs and determine how they can be taken up at different phases i.e. in the short, medium and long-term running of the platform.
22. Depending on the availability of data and information submitted to the platform, FAO and WHO will provide an analysis of the information submitted. Countries should continue to populate their county pages, including checking the information on food safety legislation extracted from FAO's FAOLEX, and provide comments for further improvements and developments of the platform.

IV. Use of Codex standards in the region: relevance of existing standards and need for new standards

23. As an initial step towards a more systematic approach to the questions on the use of Codex standards and to enhance data collection system, the Codex Secretariat, in cooperation with FAO and WHO, developed a survey for distribution to all RCCs. The survey was conducted online using the SurveyMonkey software which allows for easier data storage, analysis, comparison and representation.
24. The primary objective of the survey was to measure the level of adoption of Codex standards by Members. The survey did not perform an in-depth analysis on the rationale or difficulties experienced by Codex Members in the uptake of Codex standards into their technical regulations nor on how such difficulties could be addressed by Codex, FAO and/or WHO.
25. RCCs generally agreed with the approach, format and usability of the survey noting that the high rate of replies (more than 50%, with an average completion rate of 67%) could be considered as representative of regions. RCCs noted the survey was easy to complete and well explained and that the results and analysis should be published online. There were several suggestions on areas of work that should be covered by the next survey, including the possibility to have a regional comparison on use of Codex standards presented in a consolidated way.
26. Although the survey had a high rate of responses that was considered representative of regions, future surveys could still address the same group of standards while focusing more on the difficulties of their implementation. Tailor-made surveys may be needed for "numerical" standards such as ML and MRLs and "text" standards such as hygiene and labelling provisions. Surveys could also explore how Codex, FAO and WHO can best address the problems associated with the uptake and enforcement of Codex standards.
27. The above can be complemented with the suggestions made by RCCs on new areas of work for the next survey that should represent a good compromise amongst the different proposals offered by RCCs including the outcome of the discussion on the keynote address and critical and emerging issues. The new sets of standards to be analyzed will continue the approach of the first survey and address widely known and representative standards for their respective categories (i.e. general subject and numerical standards dealing with quality, safety and nutrition issues).
28. The Codex Secretariat, with the assistance of FAO and WHO, will develop the new survey(s) for consideration by the next round of RCCs taking into account the conclusions and recommendations of RCCs on this item and the considerations made in paragraphs 26 and 27.

V. Completion of regional strategic planning and inputs for the next Codex strategic planning exercise

29. This item aims to have RCCs focusing on the implementation of the global strategic plan rather than their own regional strategic plan, on the understanding that RCCs are consulted when the global strategic plan is drawn up so that issues of regional interest can be reflected in it. Where regional strategic plans still exist, they should be consistent with and complementary to the global strategic plan and should have the same timeframe.
30. CCEURO, CCASIA and CCNASWAP agreed that regional strategic plans were no longer necessary as RCCs support and contribute to the implementation of the global strategic plan and decided on their discontinuation. The remaining RCCs agreed that regional strategic plans should be consistent and complementary with the global strategic plan until their completion in 2019.
31. Regional Coordinators should closely monitor the implementation of their regional strategic plans with a view to their completion by the next round of RCCs. The main focus of RCCs will then be the contribution to and implementation (monitoring) of the global Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 as it relates to their work.

VI. Codex work relevant to the region

32. This item was agreed as a horizontal item for the last round of RCCs and has been a standing item on the agenda of several RCCs. Codex work of concern to regions would enable RCCs to discuss ongoing work in Codex that is of interest or concern to regions in order to identify common views and develop synergies for a more effective participation in the work of CAC and its subsidiary bodies.
33. Regional Coordinators should coordinate with countries of their regions to identify matters of interest or concerns that are being discussed in CAC and its subsidiary bodies for consideration at the next round of RCCs.

Conclusion

34. RCCs unanimously support the revitalization process through the continuous implementation of horizontal items in particular the keynote address, identification of critical and emerging issues and use of Codex standards. FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat are willing to continue to assist RCCs and the Regional Coordinators in this process.

Recommendations

35. CCEXEC is invited to:
 - Endorse the generic agenda (Appendix), which will be used as a basis for the agendas on the next round (2018-2019) of the RCCs meetings;
 - Support the continuation of the standing items and to provide any suggestions to guide the evolution of the discussion at the next Round of the RCCs;
 - Note that Regional Coordinators in consultation with Members of the Region, FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat will make recommendations on topics for the keynote address on regional issues of priority taking into account identified critical and emerging issues;
 - Note that FAO and WHO, in collaboration with Regional Coordinators and the Codex Secretariat, will continue to work on critical and emerging issues relevant to regions for consideration at the next round of RCCs;
 - Note that FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, will further improve and develop the online platform for information sharing on food control systems;
 - Note that the Codex Secretariat will continue to assess the use of Codex standards for consideration at the next round of RCCs;
 - Note that Regional Coordinators, in consultation with Members of the regions, will identify Codex work relevant to the region for consideration at the next round of RCCs;
 - Encourage Members to actively participate in future surveys conducted in conjunction with RCC meetings including the population of the online platform on food control systems with relevant data and information;
 - Request RCCs to provide inputs for the next Codex strategic planning exercise and complete their regional strategic plans.

Appendix I

Generic Provisional Agenda of RCCs

Item	Subject Matter
1	Adoption of the Agenda
2	Keynote address and discussion on regional issue of priority and common challenge
3 (a)	Food safety and quality situation in the countries of the region: current and emerging issues in the region
3 (b)	Online platform for information sharing on food safety control systems
4	Use of Codex standards in the region: relevance of existing standards and need for new standards
5	Matters Arising from the Codex Alimentarius Commission and other Codex Committees
6 (a)	Monitoring of the implementation of the Global Codex Strategic Plan ²
6 (b)	Monitoring of the implementation of the Regional Codex Strategic Plan ³
7	Codex work relevant to the region
8	Items related to the development or revision of specific regional standards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposed draft ... - ...
9	Nomination of the Coordinator
10	Future work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... • ...
11	Other business
12	Date and Place of Next Session
13	Adoption of the Report

*This Agenda may require a full week meeting

² For the first round of RCCs this will relate to provision of inputs to the development of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025

³ Where necessary and should aim at completion of the regional strategic plan(s)