

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 7

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEx COMMITTEE ON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

20th Session

Kampala, Uganda, 2 – 6 October, 2017

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR FRESH DATES

(Prepared by the Electronic Working Group chaired by India)

Codex Members and Observers wishing to submit comments at Step 3 on this draft should do so as instructed in CL 2017/16-FFV available at the Codex webpage/Circular letters 2017: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/circular-letters/en/>. Comments will only be accepted through the online commenting system within the deadline indicated in the CL.

BACKGROUND

1. At the 19th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV), held in Ixtapa Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, Mexico, from 5 to 9 October 2015, India introduced a new work proposal on a Standard for Fresh Dates and Committee agreed to establish an Electronic Working Group (EWG) on fresh dates, led by India¹.
2. The 39th Session of Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) agreed to initiate new work on Standard for Fresh Dates and further mentioned to define the scope and other technical issues encouraging countries concerned to actively participate in the development of the standard².
3. Eight members nominated to participate in the work of this EWG. The list of participants in the EWG is attached at Appendix II. The EWG began its work by circulating the first draft of the proposed Standard for Fresh dates on 25th November, 2016. The 2nd revised draft was circulated on 9th May, 2017.
4. The draft has been revised and finalized in the light of comments received from the two rounds of consultation and it is now presented for comments by the Codex members and observers.

Discussion in the Working Group

5. Based on the comments/suggestions received from EWG members, the main amendments pertaining to minimum requirements, classification and quality tolerances have been made to the draft presented to CCFFV20.
6. The main modification and discussion points were:
 - i) Two members proposed changes to the scope. However, the scope is aligned with the Proposed Draft Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. Furthermore the section defines the nature, purpose and range of application of the standard, and seems to be essential. Hence it is proposed not to change this section.
 - ii) One member proposed to include different characters of date varieties like Barhee, Mazafati, Shahani, Kabkab, Khasi, Khasoei, and etc. However, draft is for fresh dates which are not a variety but a physiological stage of date fruit. Further, definition of the produce includes all commercial varieties and these stages would be applicable for all the varieties. It is also noted that draft standard does not include characters of any variety except moisture content.

¹ REP16/FFV, paras 84-90

² REP16/CAC, para 96

- iii) Provisions concerning minimum requirements have been revised as per the draft Standard Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, which seems appropriate and accordingly incorporated.
- iv) A few members expressed the view to also include, under minimum requirements for each class of fruits, a maximum quantum (%) of fruits with skin defects.
- v) Some members had concerns with regard to minimum weight of dates. It was highlighted that some varieties of dates have minimum weight less than as proposed in the draft standard. Accordingly provisions concerning sizing have been revised so as to include light weight varieties also.
- vi) It is proposed that all the quality tolerances are presented in tabular form to make it more simple and concise which would replace the earlier text for quality tolerances.
- vii) One member was of the view to exclude Tamar stage from the draft standard, as it is a semi dry stage. It was noted that the draft is for fresh dates which is a stage of the physiological development. Tamar stage is also one of the stages which are consumed as fresh. Hence, it is proposed not to exclude Tamar stage because of having low moisture content only

Recommendation

7. CCFFV is invited to
 - i) note the report of the EWG; and
 - ii) consider the proposed draft standards for fresh date (Appendix I).

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR FRESH DATES
(For comments at Step 3 through <https://ocs.codexalimentarius.org/>)

1. SCOPE

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements for fresh dates at the export-control stage after preparation and packaging. However, if applied at stages following packaging, products may show in relation to the requirements of the standard:

- a slight lack of freshness and turgidity;
- for fresh dates graded in classes other than the “Extra” Class, a slight deterioration due to their development and their tendency to perish.

The holder/seller of products may not display such products or offer them for sale, or deliver or market them in any manner other than in conformity with this standard. The holder/seller shall be responsible for observing such conformity.

2. DEFINITION OF PRODUCE

This Standard applies to commercial varieties of Dates (*Phoenix dactylifera* L. from Arecaceae family), to be supplied fresh and whole to the consumer in pitted or unpitted form after preparation and packaging. Other forms such as pieces or mashed dates or dried or dates intended for industrial purposes are excluded.

3. PROVISIONS CONCERNING QUALITY**3.1 Minimum Requirements**

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, the dates must be:

- Intact;
- Sound;
- fresh in appearance; dates affected by leaving the pit visible so that the appearance of the fruit is noticeably affected is excluded;
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter;
- free from living pests, insect eggs and mites;
- free from pest damage, including the presence of dead insects, their debris or excreta;
- free from mould filaments;
- free of fermentation;
- free of unripe fruit, i.e. fruit light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture;
- free of unpollinated fruit, as indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and naturally absence of pit;
- free of blemished fruit; i. e. fruit scarred, discoloured or sunburnt, or having blacknose (noticeable darkening of the head, generally accompanied by severe checking or cracking of the flesh) or side-spot (a very dark patch extending into the flesh) or similar abnormalities affecting an area of not more than 7 mm of total surface area of the fruit;
- free of external moisture;
- free of abnormal smell and/or taste.

3.1.1 The development and condition of the dates must be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transportation and handling; and
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

3.1.2 Maturity Requirements

Dates fruits must be sufficiently developed and have reached an appropriate degree of development and ripeness. Dates shall have a moisture content not exceeding 65%, in accordance with criteria to the variety and stage of harvest/or commercial type and the area in which they are grown. Moisture content range from 45-65% for khalal¹ stage (partially ripe); 30-45% for rutab² stage (fully ripe) and less than 26-30% for tamar³ stage (semi-dry).

3.2 Classification

Dates are classified in three classes defined below:

3.2.1 "Extra" Class

Dates in this class must be of superior quality. They must be well developed and have the characteristics of the variety and /or commercial type. They must be free from defects, with the exception of very slight superficial defects, provided these do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package.

3.2.2 Class I

Dates in this class must be of good quality. They must have the characteristics of the variety and /or commercial type.

The following slight defects, however, may be allowed, provided these do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package:

- slight defects in shape and colour;
- slight skin defects such as scratches, and blemishes not exceeding 5% of the total surface area of an individual fruit for maximum 5% of the fruits.

The defects must not, in any case, affect the flesh of the produce.

3.2.3 Class II

This class includes dates which do not qualify for inclusion in the higher classes, but satisfy the minimum requirements specified in Section 2.1 above.

The following defects, however, may be allowed, provided the dates retain their essential characteristics as regards the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package:

- defects in shape and colour;
- skin defects such as scratches, scars, scrapes, bruises and blemishes shall not exceed 10% of the total surface area of an individual fruit for maximum 10% of the fruits.

The defects must not, in any case, affect the flesh of the produce.

4. PROVISIONS CONCERNING SIZING

Dates may be sized by count or weight of the fruit or in accordance with trading practices. When sized in accordance with existing trade practice, the package must be labelled with the count or size and method used.

A. When sized by count, size is determined by the number of individual dates per package.

(a) Unpitted dates

Size	Number of dates per 500 g
Small	>100
Medium	80 - 100
Large	<80

¹ khalal (partially ripe) stage of date fruits which are consumed fresh.

² rutab (fully ripe) stage of date fruits which are consumed fresh.

³ Tamar (Semi dry) stage of date fruits which are consumed fresh.

(b) Pitted dates

Size	Number of dates per 500 g
Small	>110
Medium	90 - 110
Large	< 90

B. When sized by weight, size is determined based on the individual weight of each date. The following table is guide and may be used on an optional basis.

a) When sized by weight

Unpitted date	Pitted date
2.5-7.75 gm	< 4.00 gm

Pits (stones): Not more than two pits or 4 pieces of pit per 100 dates (in pitted dates)

b) When graded:

Grade	Designation	Weight of individual fruit in the package	Description
A	Jumbo	> 20 g	No blemishes, skin separation or dryness
B	Large	15-20g	No blemishes, skin separation, or dryness
C	Extra fancy	10-15g	Minor blemishes, packed all sizes together
D	Fancy	5-10g	Some dryness and skin separation, packed all sizes together
E	Small	< 5g	Some dryness and skin separation, packed all sizes together

5. PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES

Tolerances in respect of quality and size shall be allowed in each package for produce not satisfying the minimum requirements of the class indicated.

5.1 Quality Tolerances

Defects Allowed	Extra Class	Class I	Class II
Total Tolerance	5	10	15
Of which no more than			
- Soil	0.25	1	1
- undeveloped	1	2	4
- Damage by pest	3	8	12
- Blemished/discolored	3	5	7
- Sour/decayed/moldy	0	1	1
- Live insects	0	0	0
Off size	5	5	5
Other Varieties	2	2	2
Loose dates among stems or clusters	10	10	10

6. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PRESENTATION

6.1 Uniformity

The contents of each package must be uniform and contain only dates of the same origin, variety or commercial type, quality and size (if sized). The visible part of the contents of the package must be representative of the entire contents. Dates must be presented in bags or solid containers. All sales packages within each package must be of the same weight.

Dates may be presented:

- in clusters (consisting mainly of the rachis and the stems to which the fruit is attached naturally)
- in stems (stems which are separated from the rachis and to which the fruit is attached naturally)
- separated in individual fruit, arranged in layers, or loose in the package.

Stems presented in clusters or separated from the rachis must be at least 10 cm in length and carry an average of four –six fruits per 10 cm of length.

Where the dates are presented in stems or clusters, there may be a maximum of 10 percent of loose dates.

The ends of the stems must be cleanly cut.

6.2 Packaging

Dates must be packed in such a way so as to protect the produce properly. The materials used inside the package must be of food grade quality, clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or stamps bearing trade specifications is allowed, provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Dates shall be packed in each container in compliance with the *Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CAC/RCP 44-1995).

6.2.1 Description of Containers

The containers shall meet the quality, hygiene, ventilations and resistance characteristics to ensure suitable handling, shipping and preserving of the dates. Containers must be free of all foreign matter and smell.

7. PROVISIONS CONCERNING MARKING OR LABELLING

7.1 CONSUMER PACKAGES

In addition to the requirements of the *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* (CODEX STAN 1-1985), the following specific provisions apply:

7.1.1 Nature of Produce

Each package shall be labelled as to the name of the produce “Dates” and may be labelled as to name of the variety and/or commercial type.

7.2 Non-Retail Containers

Each package must bear the following particulars, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside, either printed on the package itself or on a label secured to the fastening (if the labels are placed inside the packages (string bag), this should be done in such a way that the indications concerning marking are readable from the outside); or in the documents accompanying the shipment and attached in a visible position inside the transport vehicle.

7.2.1 Identification

Name and address of exporter, packer and/or dispatcher. Identification code (optional)⁴

7.2.2 Nature of Produce

Name of the produce “Dates” if the contents are not visible from the outside.

Name of the variety and/or commercial type (optional).

“Pitted”, where appropriate.

7.2.3 Origin of Produce

Country of origin and, optionally, district where grown or national, regional or local place name.

7.2.4 Commercial Identification

⁴ The national legislation of a number of countries requires the explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/ or dispatcher (or equivalent abbreviation)” has to be indicated in close connection with the code mark.

- Class
- Size (if sized)
- Crop year (optional)

7.2.5 Official Inspection Mark (optional)

8. CONTAMINANTS

- 8.1 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum residue limits for pesticides established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission and where there is no relevant Codex MRLs recognition of destination country MRLs is an alternative.
- 8.2 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum levels of the *General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed* (CODEX STAN 193-1995).

9. HYGIENE

- 9.1 It is recommended that the produce covered by the provisions of this Standard be prepared and handled in accordance with the appropriate sections of the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* (CAC/RCP 1-1969), *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CAC/RCP 53-2003), and other relevant Codex texts such as Codes of Hygienic Practice and Codes of Practice.
- 9.2 The produce should comply with any microbiological criteria established in accordance with the *Principles for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria for Foods* (CAC/GL 21-1997).

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