



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

Twenty-second Session

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR FRESH DATES

Prepared by the Electronic Working Group chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia

Codex members and observers wishing to submit comments at Step 3 on this draft should do so as instructed in CL 2021/86-FFV available on the Codex webpage/Circular letters 2021:
<http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/circular-letters/en/>

Background

1. India introduced a new work proposal on a Codex Standard for Fresh Dates at the 19th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV, 2015). CCFFV19 agreed to establish an EWG on Fresh Dates, led by India¹.
2. The 39th Session of Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC39, 2016) agreed to initiate new work on Codex 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. CCFFV20 (2017) discussed the agenda and established an EWG chaired by India, and co-Chaired by Saudi Arabia. The agenda was discussed under Agenda item 6³ at CCFFV21 (2019), presented by India.
4. India also presented the comparison between the *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) and the proposed draft standard, and concluded that there was no overlap and contradiction between products covered by the two standards. Saudi Arabia, co-Chair of the EWG made a short presentation and explained the developmental stages of fresh dates and elaborated that the proposed standard was intended for fresh dates, which might be early harvested in partially ripened stage (i.e. khalal or baser and rutab), or late harvested in fully ripened stage (tamer stage). It was further explained that tamer stage could be separated into tamer soft stage and tamer dry stage and the proposed standard would only cover tamer soft stage.

Discussion at CCFFV21

5. CCFFV21 held a general discussion focusing on how to best differentiate products to be covered by the proposed draft with those already covered by CXS 143-1985; and how to ensure that there would be no overlap between the two standards. Some delegations were of the view that: (i) the language used in CXS 143-1985, to define the product (i.e. dates “may” be dried or hydrated to adjust moisture content) could imply that unprocessed dates with low moisture were also covered under this standard; and that there was no clear distinction between fresh dates and dried dates; (ii) the moisture content of 10-25% at tamer stage as proposed in the draft standard was lower than moisture content for cane sugar varieties of dates (26%, maximum) as stated in CXS 143-1985; thus the fresh dates at tamer stage could fall within the scope of CXS 143-1985; (iii) in some national requirements, dates at tamer stage were categorized as dried dates; (iv) based on different climate situation and harvesting time, characteristics of each cultivar of fresh dates could vary significantly. This situation, however, had not been reflected in the proposed scope.

6. Other delegations pointed out that: (i) CXS 143-1985 covered processed dates in pitted or un-pitted styles

¹REP16/FFV, paras 84-90

²REP16/CAC, para 96

³CX/FFV 19/21/7

and permits optional ingredients such as glucose syrups, sugar flour, vegetable oils, while the proposed standard could cover fresh dates without any treatment and in un-pitted style; and (ii) the fact that dates were classified as either fresh dates and/or dried dates was well supported by scientific studies; and that fresh dates and dried dates could be easily distinguished using scientific methods e.g. moisture determination, brix determination, etc.

7. India as the EWG Chair further explained that as per the existing standard CXS 143-1985, dates with high moisture content were considered raw materials for further adjustment to the desired moisture level, and they were intended for the development of various products through processing, such as dehydration, treatment with ingredients and additives. It was also proposed, that a definition for what is generally known as fresh dates could be developed, and such a definition would characterize the different stages of maturity indices (characteristics) and the cut-off point for the dried product. The use of efficiently scientific methods to support this definition was also emphasized. Delegations indicated that there were remarkable trade volumes of fresh dates in the international market and emphasized the necessity to speed up the development of a standard for this produce. They also expressed the need to replace the terms used in the proposed standard with simple and understandable terms such as colour, ripeness/sweetness; etc.

8. In view of divergent views on this subject, it was proposed to request CCPFV clarify the scope of CXS 143-1985.

Conclusion of CCFFV21

9. CCFFV21: (i) noted that the scope of the standard needed clarification and the proposed draft standard was not ready for advancement in the Step process; (ii) agreed to return the proposed draft Standard (CCFFV21/CRD14) to Step 2; and (iii) agreed to establish an EWG, chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia, working in English, to consider the comments received and the discussions at CCFFV21 and to revise the proposed draft Standard for further consideration by CCFFV22. The report of the EWG should be made available to the Codex Secretariat at least three months before CCFFV22. CCFFV21 further agreed to inform CCPFV, that it was in the process of developing a standard for fresh dates; and to request CCPFV to provide clarification on whether CXS 143-1985 had covered all stages of fresh dates with different level of moisture content i.e. for khalal stage not exceeding 85%, rutab stage not exceeding 45% and tamer stage not exceeding 25%, which dates were freshly harvested and consumed without any processing, addition of ingredients and food additives.

Views of the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV)

10. The Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV) in its twenty-ninth session held from January to July 2020 by correspondence, had discussed the above said issue as referred by CCFFV21.

11. CCPFV29 was appreciative of the information provided by CCFFV regarding CCFFV's proposed draft standards for Fresh Dates and the need to ensure clear differentiation between the products that would be covered by such a standard and those covered under the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985). CCPFV29 noted that the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) covered dates prepared from sound fruit of the date tree (*Phoenix dactylifera L.*), which was harvested at the appropriate stage of maturity and may be dried or hydrated to adjust moisture content. CCPFV29 also noted that the *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) covers the product packed ready for direct consumption that meets the criteria in the standard, including the maximum moisture allowances in the standard. CCPFV29 further noted that there are some dates which are covered by the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) which have not undergone any hydration or drying.

12. In order to ensure a clear differentiation between the products covered under the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) and the proposed draft standard for Fresh Dates, CCPFV29 recommended that the proposed draft standard for Fresh Dates include those unprocessed, fresh dates which have moisture levels greater than the levels specified in the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985). The existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985) would continue to cover those dates with moisture levels at or below the maximum allowances in the existing *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985). CCPFV29 noted that, in some cases, these will be dates to which no processes, such as drying or hydrating, have been applied.

Points of discussion for EWG members

13. EWG members were requested to consider the above mentioned status of the draft standard and provide information on the following points:

- (i) Do we need to revise the scope of the draft? No/Yes and justify the same. (Para 54 of REP20/FFV)
- (ii) Do we require definition for what is generally known as fresh dates? No/Yes and justify the same. (Para 57 of REP20/FFV)

- (iii) Do we need to remove dates having moisture content at or below the maximum allowance in the existing *Standard for dates* (CXS 143-1985)? No /Yes and justify the same. (Paras 11 and 12 of REP20/PFV)
- (iv) Provide comments with rationale on the proposed draft standard as annexed.

Participation and Methodology

14. A draft proposal was prepared by India and posted on EWG online forum for comments. One round of consultation was done to prepare the proposed revised draft. The EWG began its work by circulating the first consultative draft to EWG members for inviting comments specifically on the above mentioned points at para. 13 keeping in view the discussions held in the CCFFV21.
15. In response, one member has provided its comments (Algeria).

Discussions and Conclusion

16. One member (Algeria) did not agree to revise the scope of the draft but agreed that the characteristics or limits of different stages with regard to the definition of fresh dates are well defined in the draft. However, there was a suggestion to propose a definition for what is generally considered as a "fresh fruit" clarifying whether the fruit is recently or freshly harvested or containing a high amount of water.
17. One member (Algeria) mentioned that the existing *Standard for dates* (CXS 143-1985) had not cover all stages of fresh dates with different level of moisture content (i.e. for khalal stage not exceeding 85%, rutab stage not exceeding 45% and tamer stage not exceeding 25%), which dates were freshly harvested and consumed without any processing, addition of ingredients and food additives. Also, the existing *Standard for dates* (CXS 143-1985) did not distinguish between dry and soft dates as regards classification on the basis of the weight of the dates, which will penalize dry dates since, as is well known, they contain less water and are lighter and will therefore be classified in the "small size" class. However, there was a suggestion that dates having moisture content at or below the maximum allowance in the existing *Standard for dates* (CXS 143-1985) may be removed for avoiding any overlap with the existing standard.
18. Looking at less participation as comments have been received from only one member country, the provision of moisture content for tamer stage has been kept in square bracket for discussion.
19. The EWG Chairs have studied the proposed draft standard as presented in CCFFV21/CRD14 and made revisions wherever necessary.

Recommendation

20. CCFFV22 is invited to consider:
- (i) the proposed draft standard for fresh dates at Appendix I (revisions are presented in strikethrough and bold & underlined);
 - (ii) revised provisions for Non-Retail Containers (NRC) as per the latest guidelines on NRC and consequential amendment in codex procedural manual which was approved in CAC44; and
 - (iii) forwarding the proposed draft standard for fresh dates to CAC45 for adoption at Step 5 or Step 5/8.

Proposed Draft Standard for Fresh Dates

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;
- a slight deterioration due to their development and 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 Fresh Dates (*Phoenix dactylifera* L. from Arecaceae family), to be supplied fresh and whole to the consumer in unpitted form after preparation and packaging. 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; produce affected by rotting or deterioration, which makes it unfit for consumption is excluded;
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter;
- free from pests⁴, and their debris or excreta;
- Practically free from pest damage;
- free of unripe fruit, i.e. fruit light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture
- free of undeveloped and deformed fruits, as indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and naturally absence of pit;
- free of blemished fruit; i.e. fruit scarred, discolored 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 abnormal external moisture excluding condensation following removal from cold storage; and
- free of foreign smell and/or taste.

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

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

3.1.1 Minimum maturity requirements

Date fruits must be sufficiently developed and have reached an appropriate degree of development and ripeness according to the varieties or cultivar.

Dates shall have a moisture content not exceeding 85%, in accordance with criteria to the variety and stage of harvest/or commercial type and the area in which they are grown. Moisture content should not exceed:

⁴ Provisions for pests and damage caused by pests apply without prejudice to the applicable plant protection rules applied by governments in line with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

- 50-85% for khalal⁵stage;
- 30-45 % for rutab⁶ stage; and
- [10-25% and less for tamer⁷stage].

3.2 CLASSIFICATION

Dates are may be classified in ~~three classes defined below~~ according to the quality tolerances as specified in section 5.1 and as defined below. When unclassified, the provisions for Class II requirements apply.

3.2.1 "Extra" Class

Dates in this class must be of superior quality and they must be 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 and characteristics of the variety and/or commercial type.

The following slight defects, however, may be allowed, provided that they 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; and
- 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

Dates in this class must be of good quality and satisfying the minimum requirements as specified in Section 3.1. The following defects, 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; and
- 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 existing trading practices. When sized in accordance with existing trade practice, the package must be labelled with the count or size and method used. The following table may be used on an optional basis.

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

Size	Number of dates per 500gm	
	Khalal and Rutab	Tamer
A (Extra Large)	≤45	≤55
B (Large)	46-70	56-83
C (Medium)	71-100	84-125
D (Small)	>100	>125

⁵ khalal or basser (partially ripe) stage of date fruits at turning stage, but consumed fresh

⁶ rutab: Means soft or moist fully ripe stage, color changes to light brown and starts to lose weight and accumulate more sugars (mainly reducing sugars) (water content 30-45%).

⁷ tamer: Full ripe stage of development, more water loss and gains more sugars and depending on variety attains a high sugar-to-water ratio (low moisture content 10-25%).

B. When sized by weight, size is determined based on the individual weight of the fruit as mentioned below.

Grade	Weight of individual fruit in the package(gm)	
	Khalal and Rutab	Tamer
A (Extra Large)	>11	>9
B (Large)	>7-11	>6-9
C(Medium)	>5-7	>4- 6
D (Small)	≤5	≤4

5. PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES

5.1 QUALITY TOLERANCES

At all marketing stages, tolerances in respect of quality shall be allowed in each lot for produce not satisfying the requirements of the class indicated. Produce that fail conformity assessment, may be allowed to be resorted and brought into conformity in accordance with the relevant provisions in the *Guidelines for Food Import Control System* (CXG 47-2003).

S. No.	Quality Tolerance	Tolerances allowed percentage of defective produce by count or weight (Not more than)		
		Extra Class	Class I	Class II
1.	Total Tolerance not satisfying the quality requirement of which no more than: individual tolerance.	5	10	10
	Individual Tolerance			
	-undeveloped	1	3	6
	-Damage by pest	3	8	8
	-Blemished/discolored	3	5	7
	-Sour/decayed/moldy	1	1	1
	-living pest	0	0	0
2.	Additional tolerances			
	(a) Size Tolerances-off size from what is indicated/marked	5	10	10
	(b) Produce belonging to other similar varieties than marked	0	0	0
	(c) Loose dates among stems or clusters	10	15	18
	(d) Mineral impurities g/kg	1	1	1

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 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); and
- 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 10cm in length and carry an average of four–six fruits per 10 cm of length.

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 package in compliance with the appropriate sections of the *Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CXC 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. Packages 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 Pre-packaged Foods* (CXS 1- 1985), the following specific provisions apply:

7.1.1 Name of produce

Each package shall be labelled as to the name of the produce **fresh dates (stage of dates as per 3.1.1)** and may be labelled as to the name of the variety and/or commercial type.

7.1.2 Origin of Produce

Country of origin⁸ and, optionally, district where grown or national, regional or local place name.

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 (if the labels are placed inside the packages), 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)⁹.~~

7.2.2 Nature of produce

- ~~Name of the produce “semi dry” or “semi dry” and/or dry”.~~
- ~~Name of the variety and/or commercial type.~~
- ~~Presentation such as clusters, in stems or individual (optional).~~

7.2.3 Origin of Produce

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

⁸ The full or a commonly used name should be indicated.

⁹ The national legislation of a number of countries requires an explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/ or dispatcher (or corresponding acronyms) should be recorded very accurately.

7.2.4 Commercial Specifications

- ~~Class;~~
- ~~Size (if sized);~~
- ~~Crop year; and~~
- ~~Fruit and seed length and width, pulp weight /fruit weight ratio, fruit shape (oval, round, elongated), Epicarp (goffered, smooth, wrinkled) and color of the fruit (optional).~~

7.2.5 Official Inspection Mark (optional)

The labelling of non-retail containers should be in accordance with the *General Standard for the Labelling of Non-Retail Containers of Foods (CXS 346-2021)*.

8. FOOD ADDITIVES

No food additives are permitted in fresh dates.

9. CONTAMINANTS

9.1 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum levels of the *General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed (CXS193-1995)*.

9.2 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum residue limits for pesticides established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

10. HYGIENE

10.1 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 (CXC 1-1969)*, *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CXC 53-2003)*, and other relevant Codex texts such as Codes of Hygienic Practice and Codes of Practice.

10.2 The produce should comply with any microbiological criteria established in accordance with the *Principles and Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria related to Foods (CXG21-1997)*.

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