



---

# Survey on the quality and utility of food safety related scientific advice provided by FAO to Codex Committees

---

May 2011

prepared by

**Alessandro Patriarchi**

Consultant



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of  
the United Nations



For information please contact:

JEMRA  
(Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment)  
e-mail:  
[jemra@fao.org](mailto:jemra@fao.org)

JECFA  
(Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives)  
e-mail:  
[jecfa@fao.org](mailto:jecfa@fao.org)

or

Annika Wennberg  
FAO JECFA Secretariat

[Annika.Wennberg@fao.org](mailto:Annika.Wennberg@fao.org)

Sarah Cahill  
FAO JEMRA Secretariat

[Sarah.Cahill@fao.org](mailto:Sarah.Cahill@fao.org)

# **Survey on the quality and utility of food safety related scientific advice provided by FAO to Codex Committees**

---

Final Report



## ***Background***

FAO has recently implemented a more integrated and strategic results-based budgeting and work planning process. This approach is based on the setting of strategic objectives that provide a focus for action; the definition of expected results that contribute to attaining these objectives; and the alignment of programs and resources behind the objectives. Activities related to the provision of scientific advice on Food Safety and Nutrition are part of Strategic Objective D: “Improved quality and safety of food at all stages of the food chain”, and the relevant activities are mostly delivered through a multidisciplinary unit result “Scientific advice on food safety provided to standard setting bodies and FAO member countries”.

Scientific advice in the international context is provided by FAO, jointly with WHO and in collaboration with other UN agencies, on a wide range of issues, including the safety and risk assessment of chemicals and biological agents in food. The advice is developed with the collaboration of independent experts, using available data from as many regions and countries of the world as possible and information submitted by interested parties. The advice is for the most part generated through expert meetings and consultations.

The conclusions and recommendations (scientific advice) emanating from this process normally feed into the Codex standard setting process, and are aimed at facilitating the development of international food safety standards, guidelines and codes of practices. Adequate dissemination and communication of the advice is paramount, and the feedback from member countries of FAO and Codex on the adequacy and usefulness of the scientific advice provided is equally important.

The Food Safety Risk Assessment Group of the Nutrition and consumer protection Division has embarked on a follow-up exercise in this regard, to get information from Heads of Delegations on the general level of satisfaction as well as the usefulness of the scientific advice provided by FAO and WHO in 2008/2009 to the Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA), the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF) and the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) as well as in relation to food safety activities planned or undertaken in their country. The survey contribute to assess the delivery and outcome of the results related to the provision of scientific advice for the FAO medium term plan 2010-2013 and we have sincerely appreciated Head of Delegation’s views based on their experience in participating in Codex work, to judge the adequacy of the programme and areas for improvement.

## ***Survey objectives***

This survey was implemented for the purposes of indicating the performance of the FAO program on the provision of scientific advice on food safety issues and is envisaged as the first of series of surveys which would be implemented every two years. The purpose of this first study was to establish a baseline against which future work would be measured. Ultimately the surveys will serve to assess and analyze the delivery and outcome of the results related to provision of scientific advice for the FAO medium term plan 2010-2013.

## ***Survey design***

The survey, made available in English, French and Spanish, was designed to take no more than **15 minutes** to be completed. Participants were invited via e-mail containing the link to

start the survey. Furthermore, participants were informed on the possibility to receive the survey in a different format such as pdf file or hard copy upon request.

The structure of the survey included three links to sub-surveys related to the specific Codex Committees (CCFA, CCCF and CCFH). These links were sent to the Head of Delegations who participated in the corresponding meetings. Each of the sub-survey was created in English, French and Spanish.

### ***Outcomes***

This survey was started on 15 February 2011 and closed on 15 March 2011. The survey collected responses from all geographical regions of the world (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Near East, Central Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Central America and North America) and a relatively good response rate was observed (**50%** CCFH, **42%** CCFA, and **35%** CCCF). Results indicate that the majority of participants to this survey consider the scientific advice provided by FAO and WHO in 2008/2009 valuable. **82**, **75** and **72%** of participants of the CCCF, CCFA and CCFH meetings positively classified the scientific advice provided as Good / Excellent. Graphic representations of the responses for each of the Codex Committees are illustrated below.

A number of participants expressed their point of view in relation to ways to improve the delivery of scientific advice. These comments are listed in Annex 1 (related to CCFA), 2 (related to CCCF) and 3 (related to CCFH), respectively.

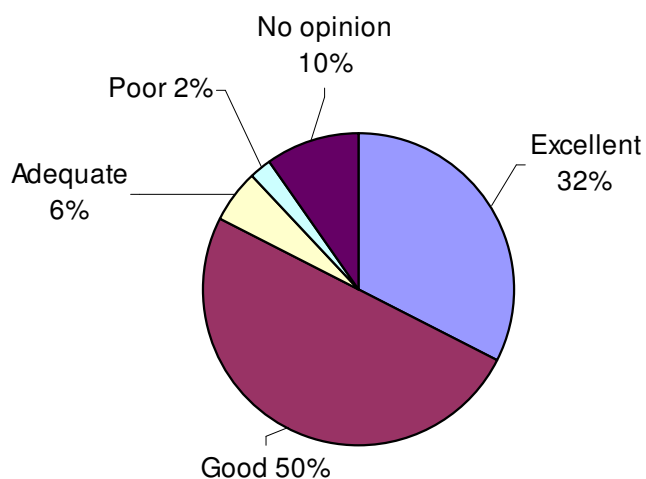
### ***Future work***

The comments will be analysed and possible areas for improvements discussed. As a follow up, a survey will be conducted at the end of 2011 to get feedback on the adequacy and usefulness of the scientific advice provided to the same Codex committees during the period 2010/2011.

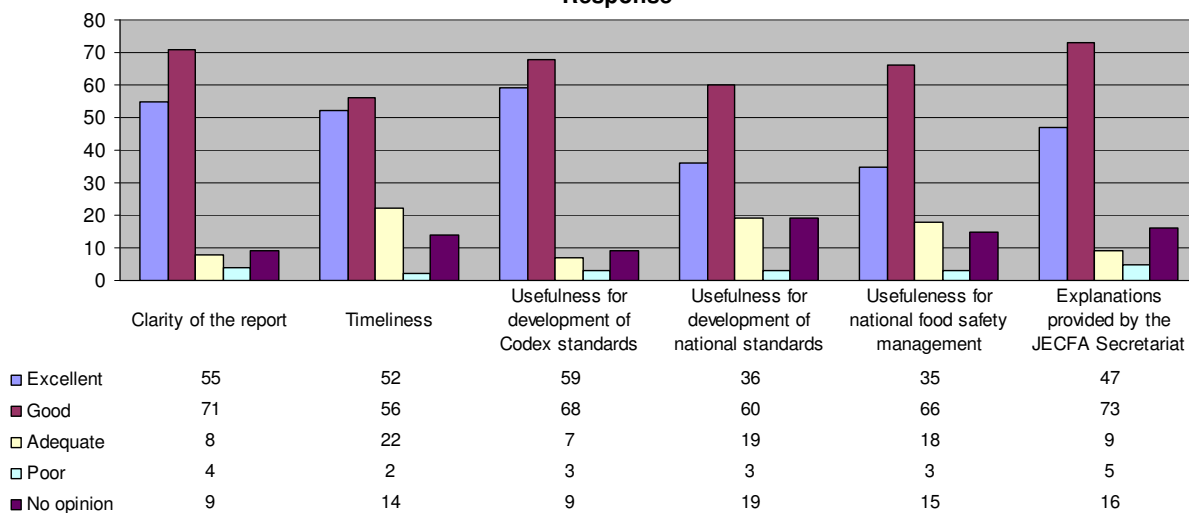
## Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF)

<b>Response rate:</b>	<b>35%</b>
Total invited	79
Respondents (including 1 Non-governmental Organizations)	28

**Overall satisfaction with the outcome of the scientific advice**



**Response**

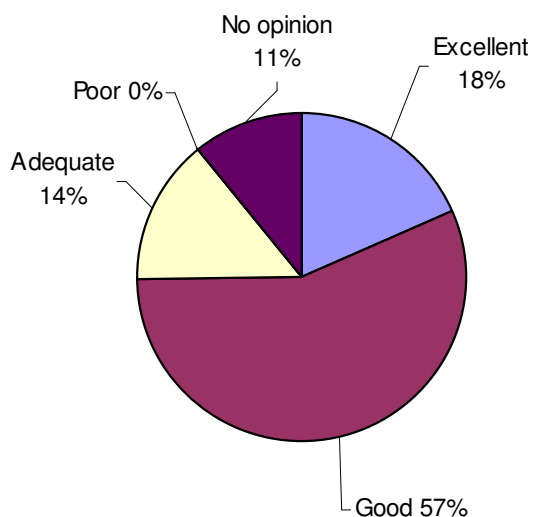




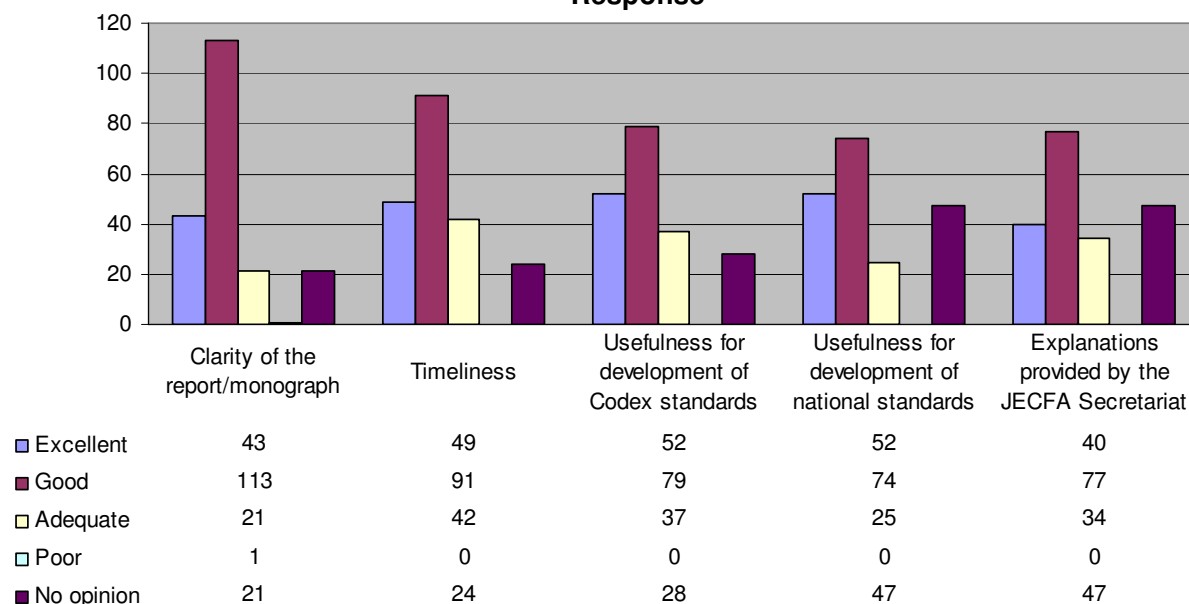
## Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA)

<b>Response rate:</b>	<b>42%</b>
Total invited	55
Respondents (including 3 Non-governmental Organizations)	23

**Overall satisfaction with the outcome of the scientific advice**



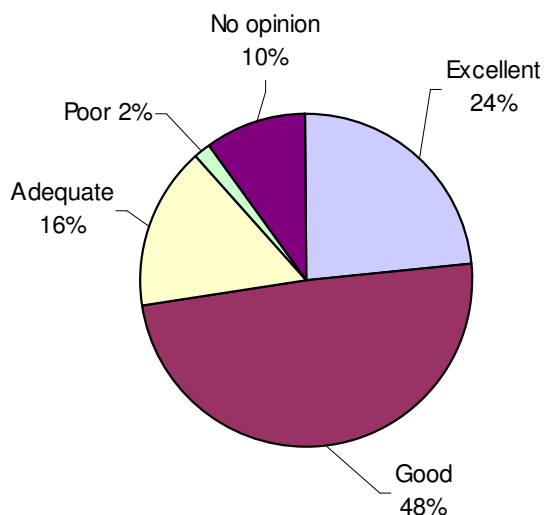
**Response**



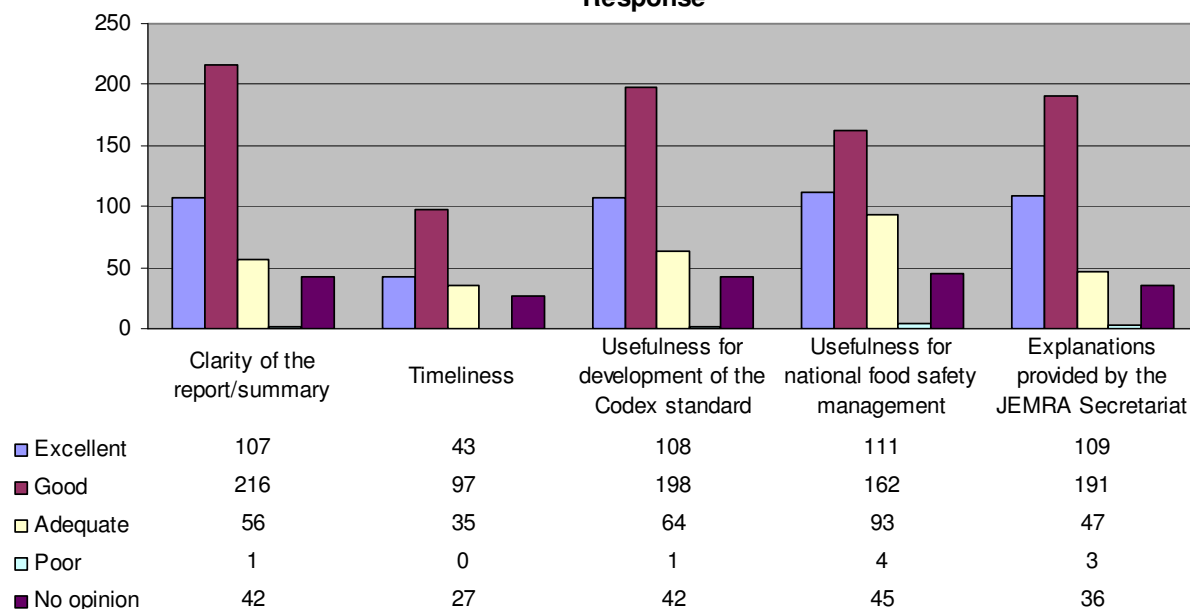
## Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH)

<b>Response rate:</b>	<b>50%</b>
Total invited	93
Respondents (including 5 Non-governmental Organizations)	47

**Overall satisfaction with the scientific advice provided**



**Response**



## Annex 1 (CCCF)

**Table 1.** Comments related to how to improve the scientific advice provided

<b>Communication and Understanding (1)*</b>	<b>Capacity development (1)</b>	<b>Expertise (4)</b>	<b>Timing (1)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The JECFA websites at WHO and FAO have improved greatly in the past several years. One improvement would be to link the JECFA information/reports/monographs (tox and specs) with the GSFA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It would be necessary to improve Codex members to send toxicological and exposure data and to develop research on the issue under discussion. Financial support to carry out more JECFA meetings per year in order to delivery scientific advice more frequently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The current work at the international level is excellent. However, agencies in developing countries / governments need continuous and constant training in updating as well as upgrading the knowledge of new staff at the national level due to reorganization or transfers of experienced staff.</li> <li>• To assist, particularly developing nations in providing education and information so that they improve effectiveness in their participation in Codex activities.</li> <li>• FAO may encourage forming expert group for CODEX advice and providing relevant information with technical explanation to this group.</li> <li>• Perform ongoing training and scientific updates to the Commission Codex Alimentarius on Food Safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We would like to see the final JECFA reports more quickly but appreciate the summary reports and the timeliness at which they are issued.</li> </ul>

\* Figure in parenthesis indicates the number of comments made by the survey's participants.

## Annex 2 (CCFA)

**Table 2.** Comments related to how to improve the scientific advice provided

<b>Communication and Understanding (2) *</b>	<b>Capacity development (5)</b>	<b>Expertise (3)</b>	<b>Timing (1)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better participation at data call-in from countries</li> <li>• Improve understanding of the new results of risk assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support capacity building for risk assessment in regions/countries where the capacity is limited. This will help obtain more regional specific data and views that can be harmonised at international level. I have in mind scientific bodies in regions such as Africa which can collect process and store food safety data from those regions and share the data with the FAO mechanisms that provide scientific advice to Codex Alimentarius Commission.</li> <li>• WHO and FAO representative offices in national countries should actively participate in national food safety programmes, funding for capacity building in food safety and for infrastructure for testing food.</li> <li>• Improve cooperation with countries experts, improve participation of developing countries.</li> <li>• FAO should support technically and materially Institutions of the country, researchers and other experts working on topics related to food contamination.</li> <li>• Improve cooperation with countries experts, improve participation of developing countries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an effective linkage with host contact point and FAO on recent developments and scientific research to ward off health hazards, posed to human, animal and plant health. Support discussion on irritants causing concern for health related issues.</li> <li>• Improve exposure studies.</li> <li>• Enhancement of participation of experts from developing countries and countries in transition in scientific advice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The timely provision of advice. I would urge the JECFA to provide its monograph conclusions and full report on a particular topic, well before the time-sensitive and critical meeting of the relevant Codex Committee concerned with that particular standard or topic/issue.</li> </ul>

\* Figure in parenthesis indicates the number of comments made by the survey's participants.

## Annex 3 (CCFH)

**Table 3.** Comments related to how to improve the scientific advice provided

<b>Communication and Understanding (8) *</b>	<b>Capacity development (7)</b>	<b>Expertise (5)</b>	<b>Timing (1)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organize more consultative seminars and workshops regionally to facilitate inter regional exchanging of scientific information.</li> <li>• The scope/content of a scientific report reflects point of view of the scientists. Therefore if the nomination procedure for selecting scientist is open to all, it will be more helpful for reports. May be information can be given to all countries CCPs.</li> <li>• Internet net working and capacity building via smaller group meetings can be effective. The communication tends to slow down response from relevant Government bodies because it has to go thorough so many routes! That limits responses.</li> <li>• Delay in communication for some countries is an issue because of the bureaucratic system of moving letters renders some communication ineffective because by the time it gets to the desk officers it is too late to respond. I</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientific advice could be disseminated not only via national contact points, but also directly to a larger number of scientific institutions and individual scientist. The general and regulatory uptake of the advice would be enhanced if the advice receives a wider support in wider scientific community as soon as possible.</li> <li>• Improve capacity building on how to undertake country assessments (relevant tools).</li> <li>• Developing countries still need capacity building and maybe better done in smaller groups rather than the big CODEX committee meetings.</li> <li>• FAO can improve scientific advice, get more involved with institutions that harmonize with Codex standards and people involved to coordinate the food committee normative work.</li> <li>• To hold the one day Pre-Conference or Symposium for</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many sources of expertise are not used since they reside within professionals who are full time employed and are unable to spend extended periods of time away from work. Video/web conferencing should be used wherever possible to facilitate input from such experts.</li> <li>• The publications are good but where possible and a country has a special interest in a particular area of scientific advice to make experts available to conduct seminars to provide a greater direct understanding. Analytical capacity building- eg methodology.</li> <li>• Make more use of scientific/technical expertise in the private sector.</li> <li>• FAO needs to further strengthen the scientific advice to countries least developed and participate in meetings as well as close support at international meetings, we need national support to the implement to improve the system of safety management food, since so</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It seems to me that the response of JEMRA is either delayed or altogether missing at times because of a lack of resources. This should be fixed, so that CCFH could expect to get answers to any relevant questions in time. Very often it seems like it is a negotiation between CCFH and JEMRA on whether a question is valid enough for it to be taken on the to do-list of JEMRA. With better resources, JEMRA could respond to some lighter calls for opinion as well. All taken, I'd like to say that JEMRA performs remarkably well if one takes into account the thinness of its organisation.</li> </ul>

<p>propose linkages to contact persons including the NCC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better communication with developing countries.</li> <li>• Having the information in different languages before the meetings and distribution. Have data or collect data from most countries, both developed and developing countries.</li> <li>• Dissemination of scientific information in the 3 official languages is often in delays.</li> <li>• Executive summary should be clear and concise to allow understanding of concepts that may have been explained in details in risk assessments.</li> </ul>	<p>delivering the high quality scientific advice to facility the CCFH relative items in consensus. To support the workshop and training courses on Codex affairs in China.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The two parent organisations of Codex, i.e. FAO and WHO, should ensure an appropriate level of financing for provision of scientific advice which is crucial for the quality, the relevance and the credibility of Codex work.</li> </ul>	<p>improving the work in the areas of legislation, inspection, monitoring and control capabilities of the laboratories, Risk assessment and communication.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve staff training in risk analysis.</li> </ul>	
--	---	---	--

\* Figure in parenthesis indicates the number of comments made by the survey's participants.