

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON RESIDUES OF VETERINARY DRUGS IN FOODS

Twenty-third Session

Houston, Texas, United States of America, 17 – 21 October 2016

OPENING REMARKS

Codex Secretary

Tom Heilandt

Dear Brian,

Dear Mahamadou,

Dear Kevin,

Dear colleagues,

One of my predecessors told me that whenever delegates would see him at a Committee meeting they would ask in fear: what have we done wrong that you are coming here to observe us?

Not to worry – whatever he was doing to earn that reputation - I am going to Codex Committees to learn more about those that I have never attended, to see my colleagues at work, to give support where I can, though they and you know much more about the topic than I do.

But I come also to talk to you about Codex: Your concerns, hopes and ideas for further improving it. Codex has installed this year an ongoing review mechanism for which the Secretariat is responsible – we have many ideas but you will also have ideas and being here is a great opportunity to discuss with you.

First of all I would like to recognize the contribution of the United States of America as host to the CCRVDF and they do not only host this one but three committees.

Without our host governments Codex could not run. They provide venue, translation – interpretation – logistics – a Secretariat and last but not least – the Chair ... Kevin – you are new in this role but I am sure your time as delegate has prepared you well to sit in that hot seat.

I am particularly happy that this session is taking place in Houston.

I spent a lot of time here as a child - virtually though - staring for hours at a black and white TV and looking at a room with many screens. Yesterday I was able to visit that room for the first time in real life.

The exploration of space – landing a man on the moon and bringing him safely back to earth. A vision becoming reality through science and many brilliant, courageous people working together.

People who had the time to do so also because they were not out hunting for their next lunch.

Civilization as we know it – science – culture - all of this would be impossible without agriculture. Agriculture made science possible and now more and more also the other way around.

Agriculture over the millennia developed through experience and good practices. Scientific backing though is relatively new – arriving over the last 300 years more or less. Hygiene became a science helping to keep food safe. Methods of analysis helped us to identify dangerous contaminants. Genetics helped to understand what farmers had been doing for ages. Chemistry provided new tools such as fertilizers, pesticides and veterinary drugs.

Science is helping us to work towards a planet where all have enough safe, good and nutritious food to eat in every home.

Where food production is a responsible business and those who work in it are appreciated appropriately.

Where food fraud is eliminated.

Where we have the time and peace to concentrate on exploring the world - write new books and music and explore space

Codex has its small contribution to all this and Codex is basing itself on science to do so.

There are different views about many applications of science in agriculture (and not only there). Whether it is the use of food additives, veterinary drugs or modern biotechnology. There are also often different views in science and science develops and continuously seeks to improve itself. This is the great thing about science but it also doesn't make it easier to base on it.

Codex has the task to find a consensus in the world on how to manage the risks and to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. Codex has done a great job and in over 99% of the cases we find consensus.

In areas where we have difficulties to do so because our views diverge too much I believe we need to find new creative ways of moving forward because that is what is expected from us.

Our difficult questions may spark off a larger debate that goes beyond the terms of reference of Codex about the future of agriculture and nutrition. How do we shape agriculture in the future? What is the best way to feed the world? Science will help us to answer these questions.

In this Committee as in other committees and the commission while working in accordance with our procedures and basing ourselves on the best science available I would also like us to work together keeping in mind the big picture and the larger global common goods towards which we are working. That may sometimes help us to get over a seemingly insurmountable difficulty.

I look forward to learning from you this week and observing you working together successfully.

Thank you.