

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 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Eighty-fourth Session
CICG, Geneva, Switzerland
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Joint FAO/WHO Scientific Expert Advice Program and International Agency for Research in Cancer: PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF CHEMICALS IN FOODS

Intervention by the Member from North America

The Member from North America would like to raise concerns about the potential undermining of the Codex scientific advice program.

There are duplicative reviews of the sweetener aspartame that were recently undertaken by two WHO bodies, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA).

It was disappointing that these duplicative reviews were agreed to as we believe that the IARC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which were adopted at the request of Members after problems caused by a previous IARC review of the pesticide glyphosate, should have prevented this from happening.

The SOP states that in the specific case of carcinogenic risks in food the IARC Monographs Programme will only conduct an evaluation if the IARC Director and WHO Deputy Director General agree this does not duplicate work or present a risk of contradictory evaluations.

IARC evaluations of food use chemicals are limited to hazard identification based on public data, whereas the evaluations of the joint WHO/FAO scientific advice program are full risk assessments, including hazard identification, based on all available data. An IARC review may identify a possible carcinogen, but the full risk assessment by JECFA (or other Joint FAO/WHO scientific advice bodies) could conclude that there is **minimal to no risk**. This can cause consumer confusion and undermine confidence in the Joint FAO/WHO risk assessment. This could further exacerbate the current climate of public scepticism around the validity of science and the scientific process, and ultimately, could undermine reliance on Codex.

The IARC/WHO SOP indicates that it will be updated as experience is gained in its application. It would be helpful to know if the SOPs will be updated.

This issue could also raise financial accountability questions, since Codex members contribute both to IARC and the Codex scientific advice program.

We know that we in this Committee strongly support the independent, international expert reviews conducted by the Joint FAO/WHO scientific advice program to support the work of Codex and we would be interested in the view of others around the room on this issue.

The Member from North America would like to suggest that CCEXEC re-iterate its support for the Joint FAO/WHO scientific advice program and recognize its role as the risk assessment bodies for food use chemicals.

Further, we would like to suggest that CCEXEC request that WHO and IARC update their standard operating procedure so as to avoid further duplication of evaluations of food use chemicals in the future.