

# CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



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**CL 2016/6-MMP**  
**April 2016**

**TO:** Codex Contact Points  
Interested International Organizations

**FROM:** Secretariat, Codex Alimentarius Commission  
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy

**SUBJECT:** **Request for Comments: Report on the Draft General Standard for Processed Cheese**

**DEADLINE:** **13 May 2016**

**COMMENTS:** **To:** Secretariat  
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme  
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla  
00153 Rome, Italy  
email : [codex@fao.org](mailto:codex@fao.org)

**Copy to:** Codex Contact Point for New Zealand  
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## BACKGROUND

1. The physical Working Group (PWG) on Processed Cheese that met in December 2015 prepared a draft standard and a report, which were issued for comments at Step 6 by Circular Letter CL 2015/34-MMP.
2. The comments received in response have been analysed by the New Zealand secretariat of the Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP), and their report and recommendations are attached as Appendix 1. It is intended that this report, together with comments received in response to this CL, will be discussed by the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission.

## REQUEST FOR COMMENTS

3. Comments are hereby requested on the conclusions and recommendations set out in the attached report (Appendix I).
4. Governments and international organizations wishing to provide comments should do so in writing **preferably by e-mail** to the above addresses before **13 May 2016**.

## **DRAFT GENERAL STANDARD FOR PROCESSED CHEESE ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES TO CL 2015/34-MMP (COMMENTS AT STEP 6)**

This report analyses the comments received at step 6 on the Draft General Standard for Processed Cheese and makes recommendations based on the analysis. Comments were requested in CL 2015/34-MMP, and responses were received from 21 member states, 1 member organization and 1 observer organisation<sup>1</sup>. The comments in English, French and Spanish are available at

[ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/meetings/CCMMP/ccmmp11/Comments\\_in\\_reply\\_toCL2016-34-MMP\\_CompilationE.pdf](ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/meetings/CCMMP/ccmmp11/Comments_in_reply_toCL2016-34-MMP_CompilationE.pdf)

The report includes an analysis of general comments (which were included in some responses) and an analysis of specific comments on each section of the standard. The analyses focus on the most significant points rather than referring to every comment that was made.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS**

Several responses included general comments. Countries expressed continued support for the development of an international standard for processed cheese to protect the authenticity of the product and avoid consumer deception. While there is general satisfaction with the progress achieved at the physical Working Group (pWG) there are concerns that many differences remain. Opinion remains divided on the key issue of cheese content. There are concerns that the standard as currently drafted could result in technical barriers to trade and exclusion of products that are currently traded in the international market as processed cheese.

### **SPECIFIC COMMENTS**

#### **1. SCOPE**

The EU Member States (EUMS) reserved their position on the Scope pending consideration of section 3, Essential Composition and Quality Factors, and one other country (Switzerland) suggested that the Scope may need to be reconsidered on the basis of their position that products under 3.1.2 could be more appropriately named as “processed cheese preparations”.

One country (Argentina) was concerned that products outside the scope should not be referred to as “similar in nature”, and proposed redrafting.

Based on these comments there is no consensus on the Scope as drafted, noting the strong linkages to section 3.1.

#### **2. DESCRIPTION**

A number of comments were received on this section, proposing some amendments and requesting some clarification.

EUMS suggested more technical discussion is needed on the Description, and asked for clarification of whether processed cheese can be produced without using any emulsifying salts. (Note further comments from IDF on emulsifying salts in section 4).

IDF also suggested a footnote to ensure that if processed cheese is labelled as spreadable it is in fact functionally spreadable.

An improvement to the Spanish translation was suggested, using “hilado” as an alternative to “filante”; one country (Canada) proposed an addition to the definition of named-variety processed cheese to mention that the named cheese variety is referred to in the name of the food.

The Description, with some amendments and further discussion along the lines proposed, could be concluded.

#### **3. ESSENTIAL COMPOSITION AND QUALITY FACTORS**

##### **3.1 Raw materials**

Two countries requested clarification of how two types of raw materials, enzyme-modified cheese and “rework” (processed cheese returned for reprocessing), should be classified. This has not been considered previously and could be considered in further technical discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Egypt, European Union, India, Iran, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Switzerland, Uruguay, United States of America, IDF.

One country (Colombia) proposed removing the categorisation of raw materials, in line with existing standards for milk products. However these categories are mentioned later in the standard and are supported by other countries.

### **Sections 3.1.1 – 3.1.4**

As noted in the report of the pWG, the draft standard proposes three categories of processed cheese according to their cheese content, with a fourth category of named-variety processed cheese. The following sections summarize the comments received.

The EUMS considered that more technical discussion is needed on the whole of section 3, in particular the issue of minimum cheese content.

One country (Egypt) proposed that sections 3.1.1 to 3.1.4 should be deleted, as cheese content may create trade barriers, and is difficult to measure. They proposed that processed cheese could be categorized according to fat-in-dry-matter content, similar to existing standards.

#### **3.1.1 Processed cheese with minimum cheese content of 75%**

Two countries noted that the requirement for 75% cheese content should be explicitly included in the text of the section; one country considered that the cheese content should be expressed as a proportion of both raw materials and ingredients; and two countries suggested that the final phrase (“for fat content standardization of the final product”) should be deleted since standardization is not the sole purpose of milk products rich in fat.

One country (Colombia) considered that milk products other than cheese and products rich in fat should be allowed.

#### **3.1.2 Processed cheese with minimum cheese content of 51%**

One country (Switzerland) proposed that this section should be deleted, or the product should be renamed as, for example, processed cheese preparations.

One country (Colombia) proposed that the cheese content should be specified on a “whole cheese” basis rather than a dry matter basis, and that the cheese content should be expressed as a proportion of raw materials and ingredients.

#### **3.1.3 Processed cheese designated with the qualifier “spreadable”**

The EUMS considered more discussion is needed to determine the appropriate minimum cheese content, taking due account of the technological requirements for producing this type of processed cheese.

Two countries (Colombia and Switzerland) proposed that this section should be simplified and clarified by referring only to the minimum 30% cheese content. One country (Argentina) proposed redrafting to allow a product with high cheese content. One country (Colombia) proposed that the cheese content should be specified on a “whole cheese” basis rather than a dry matter basis, and that the cheese content should be expressed as a proportion of raw materials and ingredients.

The IDF provided information that greater than 300,000 tonnes of spreadable products containing between 25% and 30% cheese are traded internationally, raising the issue, unresolved among IDF members, of whether the cheese content should be 25% or 30% of the total raw materials on a dry matter basis or whether these products should be regarded as processed cheese spreads.

#### **3.1.4 Named Variety(ies) Process(ed) Cheese(s)**

Several countries noted that this section should be drafted to ensure that Named Variety(ies) Process(ed) Cheese(s) conform to 3.1.1, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3.

One country (Colombia) proposed that the cheese content should be specified on a “whole cheese” basis rather than a dry matter basis.

One country (Philippines) considered the minimum content of named-variety cheese should be 30% rather than 51%.

These comments reflect divergent views on the construct of the section and on the minimum cheese content in relation to the naming of the products.

Based on these comments clearly there is no consensus on the sections as drafted, with categorisation by cheese content. In particular there are concerns regarding the product described in section 3.1.3 in relation to the minimum cheese content and the implications for existing trade, and whether this category of product should be described as a processed cheese.

### 3.2 Permitted ingredients

One country (Colombia) proposed that the reference to potassium chloride should be replaced by “salt substitutes”, as stated in food category 12.1.2, Salt substitutes, in the *General Standard for Food Additives* (i.e. seasonings with reduced sodium content intended to be used on food in place of salt).

Another country (US) proposed that the range of salt substitutes should be widened to include sea salt and other magnesium or calcium salts.

One country (Iran) noted that if potassium chloride is permitted, a test method should be included in the standard.

Two countries suggested the footnote should include a reference to GL66, *Guidelines for the Use of Flavourings*.

While the outcome of the pWG indicated broad consensus on ingredients, the comments indicate a need to consider widening the range of permitted salt substitutes.

### 3.3 Composition

This table on compositional specifications was inserted by the pWG in line with similar provisions under this section in other dairy standards.

The EUMS considered more technical discussion is needed, including whether it is appropriate to insert a link to the *General Standard for the Use of Dairy Terms* in line with other dairy standards.

One country (Colombia) proposed the section should be deleted to avoid ambiguity as sections 3.1 and 3.2 adequately specify composition. One country (Argentina) proposed that the first row should specify “Equal to or above **60%**” in order to be representative of products in the market. Some countries suggested improvements to drafting.

Comments indicate there is no consensus on the table as currently drafted.

## 4. FOOD ADDITIVES

### Functional classes permitted in categories of processed cheese

There was a range of views on the use of stabilizers and thickeners in processed cheese (51%) and processed cheese (75%). The EUMS indicated it would provide comments on permitted functional classes once the categories of processed cheese were agreed.

One country considered the use of stabilizers should be limited to processed cheese with a stringy texture, other countries considered the use should be widened to include ultra-high temperature (UHT) treated processed cheese and processed cheese (51%) made from cream cheese, while others considered stabilizers should be permitted in all types of processed cheese.

The pWG placed square brackets around the use of thickeners in processed cheese (51%). Views remain divided: some countries proposed that thickeners should be permitted while others considered they should not be allowed. Some countries proposed that thickeners should be permitted in all categories of processed cheese. Several countries proposed a maximum limit of 3% for the total of stabilizers and thickeners used, which would allow note (1) to be deleted.

The comments indicate continuing divergence of opinion on this section, and reflect previously expressed concerns on the technological justification for the use of stabilizers and thickeners in the manufacture of processed cheese.

### List of additives

The list of specific food additives was not discussed by the pWG but was included in the draft for completeness. It will need to be referred to the Food Additives Committee for its consideration at the appropriate stage. A number of countries did provide comments on this section.

Some countries accepted the list of specific additives while others proposed some amendments. The EUMS considered the list should be placed in square brackets. One country (Colombia) proposed that the standard should refer to the *General Standard for Food Additives* (GSFA) rather than including a specific list; other countries considered that the standard should be consistent with the GSFA.

IDF noted that citrate-based emulsifying salts can be formed from citric acid (from the ingredient lemon juice) and sodium ions (from sodium carbonate, which could be proposed as an emulsifying salt synergist).

## 5. PROCESSING AIDS

One country (Brazil) raised the question of whether it is necessary to describe the provisions on processing aids. The present draft follows the precedent of other dairy standards, of not listing specific processing aids.

## 6. CONTAMINANTS

One country (Colombia) suggested the words “shall comply with” should be replaced by “shall not exceed”. This is a helpful clarification.

## 7. HYGIENE

No comments were received.

## 8. LABELLING

One country (Canada) noted that the standard creates potential for a misleading impression arising from using the same name for different products with varying cheese content, and considered this to be a unique construct in Codex. The comment also suggested further that the provisions for declaration of cheese content may increase confusion for consumers, since labels for products with a high cheese content (section 3.1.1) may omit the declaration. The standard was drafted on the assumption that processed cheese without a declaration of cheese content would be understood by the consumer to have a high cheese content; but Canada’s interpretation raises fresh questions about this approach.

The EUMS indicated it may provide comments on section 8 further to agreement of the previous sections.

### 8.1 Name of the food

A number of comments were received on this section as follows:

- One country (Argentina) suggested improvement to the Spanish wording.
- One country proposed rewording of the provision for labelling named-variety processed cheese for consistency with section 2 and to allow it to be named “processed cheese”.
- IDF suggested specific additional text—
  - to clarify the naming of spreadable processed cheeses to reflect the three triggers for the mandatory labelling of spreadable processed cheeses (sections 3.1.3, 3.3 and 4), which the pWG recognized was needed, and
  - to provide for the naming of named-variety processed cheese when the cheese content is relatively low or the variety referenced is present in a lower quantity
- One country (Colombia) proposed that processed cheese should be designated with its firmness characteristics and fat content as provided for in the *General Standard for Cheese*.
- Several countries suggested the final paragraph should be deleted or should be made optional.

### 8.2 Declaration of milk fat content

No comments were received.

### 8.3 Declaration of cheese content

Several countries proposed that this section should be incorporated into section 8.1- Name of the Food, or be revised to require that the cheese content declaration is placed prominently. A number of countries also proposed that the declaration should be required for all types of processed cheese (i.e. including those covered by section 3.1.1), but one country (Paraguay) proposed that the declaration should be optional for products covered by 3.1.1. One country (Colombia) proposed that the paragraphs should refer to the provisions for quantitative ingredients declaration in the *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods*. One country (Iran) suggested that other significant dairy ingredients should also be declared.

These suggestions have significant implications for cheese content declaration in relation to the various categories of processed cheese, as set out in section 3.1.

### 8.4 Declaration of milk protein content

One country did not see a need for declaration of protein content.

### 8.5 Labelling of non-retail containers

No comments were received.

## 9. METHODS OF ANALYSIS AND SAMPLING

The lists of methods of analysis and sampling were not discussed by the pWG but were included in the draft for completeness. They will need to be referred to the Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling for its consideration at the appropriate stage.

The EUMS considered the lists should be placed in square brackets. Other countries provided suggestions for specific methods of analysis and sampling.

## CONCLUSIONS

As noted in CX/CAC 14/37/10-Add.1<sup>2</sup>, development of an international standard for processed cheese depends heavily on the ability to forge international consensus on core issues of product description, composition and acceptability of use of stabilizers and thickeners.

While good progress was seemingly made at the pWG meeting in December 2015, the responses to CL 2015/34-MMP clearly highlight the continuing differences among members around scope, product composition (including cheese content), the use of stabilizers and thickeners, and labelling. Based on the comments submitted it is clear that there is no consensus on core sections of the proposed draft. While some members could support the Draft General Standard for Processed Cheese with minor amendments, others have raised substantive concerns on key sections. Members opposed to the current draft point out the scope of the proposed standard and the related compositional provisions would have the practical effect of excluding a wide range of processed cheese products currently being traded in the international market. These countries have clearly indicated that they cannot support the advancement of the standard without significant modifications to the scope and compositional provisions.

There is also no clear consensus on the use of stabilizers and thickeners with members' views ranging from those that could support their use in all types of processed cheese to those that would like to see it restricted to processed cheese that requires specific functional characteristics.

Members also noted that the food additives and methods of analysis sections will need detailed consideration at CCMMP level before the standard is able to be advanced through the step process. These sections will also need endorsement by the relevant horizontal committees.

When the CAC approved this new work at its 37<sup>th</sup> session it was on the basis of the project document which envisaged a completion date of June 2016 (Annex 3 of CX/CAC 14/37/10-Add.1). The new work was predicated on a redefined scope and the development of a general standard for processed cheese akin to the *General Standard for Cheese*. This approach was intended to address the lack of consensus particularly with reference to scope and product composition (cheese content). However it has also been readily apparent from members' comments and the deliberations at working group level that an international standard that does not include provisions relating to cheese content is of little relevance to members.

Notwithstanding the efforts in this latest exercise to advance an international standard for processed cheese based on redefinition and a narrower scope, responses to CL 2015/34-MMP indicate that consensus remains elusive on the core issues and reinforce the previously noted concerns about the amenability of "processed cheese" to standardization. Processed cheese is a complex product, products in trade are highly variable in their composition, and while some countries expect that an international standard will facilitate trade, others foresee that it would create unwarranted restrictions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the CAC:

- **Note** the analysis and conclusions presented in this report;
- **Note** that the comments submitted in response to CL 2015/34-MMP highlight the continuing differences among members on the core issues relating to scope, product composition, food additives (stabilizers and thickeners) and provisions relating to labelling;
- **Note** that these differences are the very same issues that have previously impeded advancement of the standard; and
- **Consider** the next steps in relation to this work taking into account the analysis and conclusions presented in this report and the responses to this Circular Letter (CL 2016/6-MMP).

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<sup>2</sup> [CX/CAC 14/37/10-Add.1](#). Matters Referred to the Commission by Codex Committees; Matters Referred from the 36<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission: Processed Cheese: Report of the Electronic Working Group