



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME  
CODEX COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION AND FOODS FOR SPECIAL DIETARY USES**

**Thirty-ninth Session**

**Berlin, Germany  
4 - 8 December 2017**

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON GENERAL GUIDELINES TO ESTABLISH NUTRITIONAL PROFILES**

*(Prepared by Costa Rica with the support of Paraguay)*

## 1. Subject

Given that the Procedural Manual establishes among the mandate of the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) “to study specific nutritional problems assigned to it by the Commission and advise the Commission on general nutrition issues”; “to consider, amend if necessary, and endorse provisions on nutritional aspects proposed for inclusion Codex standards, guidelines and related texts”, it has been identified as a potential work for this Committee the establishment of guidelines for the development of nutritional profiles, in order to have the respective technical support that establishes the guidelines on which a nutritional profile should be built for labelling purposes, beyond a single definition of “high in” fats, sugars and sodium, among others.

In some of the front-of-pack nutrition labelling systems currently implemented by governments, nutrient profiles, defined as the science of classifying or categorizing foods according to their nutritional composition for reasons related to disease prevention or health promotion, are used (WHO 2015), with the aim of guiding the consumer to make better informed decisions and to promote a healthy lifestyle, however, the current Codex guidelines do not address definitions or criteria for nutritional profiles for the food labelling.

## 2. Brief summary of the situation

### a. Background

At the 44th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL), it was agreed to initiate new work on the development of general guidelines for front-of-pack nutrition labelling systems (FOPL) through an electronic working group (eWG) chaired for Costa Rica and co-chaired by New Zealand, with the following terms of reference:

- to consider the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling (CXG 2-1985) and any other relevant Codex guidelines;
- based on the key aspects of the project document, prepare proposed draft guidelines for circulation for comments, for consideration at CCFL45;
- make recommendations on the placement of the guidelines.

In the same sense, Costa Rica and Paraguay presented a room document (CRD) to the CCFL44 emphasizing that according to the available information on the multiple and different nutritional labelling systems implemented worldwide, it was evident that the nutritional profiles were used to complement these systems, so Codex should also work in parallel with general guidelines scientifically supported for the development of nutritional profiles.

The potential new work would supplement the work on front-of-pack nutrition labelling and could be undertaken by CCNFSDU. Given the above, the CCFL agreed to inform CCNFSDU of the new work and to request it to consider how it could contribute (REP18/FL, para. 49-50).

### b. Problematic

Countries have implemented different actions to carry out the strategies recommended by WHO in relation to improving the quality of their population's food supply, establishing legislation on food labeling, front of pack nutrition labelling and nutritional profiles, among others, with the purpose of making it easier for consumers

to choose healthier foods, in relation to their critical nutrient content associated with Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases.

Some labeling systems take into account approaches that include consumer information based solely on energy content, fats, saturated fats, sugars, sodium, without established reference values with an internationally recognized and harmonized scientific basis. In addition, new classifications of food were established that is confusing, the scientific basis on which they were based to establish these determinations is unknown.

Due to the above, it is currently possible to find on the market product labels with requirements from other markets, or double-labeled for the same label to meet for several countries. This, in addition to barriers to trade, is confusing to the consumer and to local authorities conducting product inspections.

The information that the consumer receives from a nutritional labeling system on the front of the pack can vary significantly depending on the nutrient profile approach that supports it, being able to go through warning statements emphasizing certain nutrients or quality labels that can be confusing for the consumer. This is why internationally recognized guidelines for the development of specific nutrient profiles for labeling could be applied globally and this would facilitate the work of countries wishing to develop their own nutritional profile, while at the same time reducing barriers to trade.

For developing countries dedicated to the production and commercialization of food, this problem generates serious economic implications, for having to adapt its package to be able to export to the different markets, complying with the labeling requirements.

### **c. Scientific basis of Codex**

The Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, approved by the World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2004, states that governments may require that information on key nutritional aspects be provided in accordance with Codex Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling CAC / GL 2 -1985, as consumers have the right to accurate information based on scientific evidence, standardized and comprehensible, on the content of foodstuffs, enabling them to make healthy choices.

However, the Codex General Guidelines on Codex Claims (CAC / GL 1-1979) state that it is prohibited to make claims that may raise doubts about the safety of similar foods or may arouse or cause consumer fear.

For the above; the scientific principles for establishing standards should prevail and the Codex Alimentarius as an international standardization body is the forum for harmonizing issues of trade and consumer protection.

### **3. Conclusion**

It is required that Codex establish general guidelines for the development of specific nutrient profiles for labeling, so that they can be used as a harmonized international reference in the discussion of emerging regulation in nutrition labeling. This ensures that they are also scientifically based, clear, transparent, non-discriminatory and that they facilitate global food trade and the growth of the production sector, especially in developing economies.

Likewise, it is estimated that any labelling system, in order to effectively meet the goal of promoting healthy diets, must necessarily be complemented by a process of education, awareness and communication to the consumer also promoting a healthy diet based on positive aspects of packaged foods, such as being low in sodium, low in saturated fats, source of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals or essential fatty acids.

### **4. Recommendation**

It is recommended that the CCNFSDU agree to create an electronic work group with the following mandate:

- a. Consider the attached project document (appendix I) for discussion and analysis of the new work proposed so that it may be modified as necessary by member states wishing to take it forward.
- b. Identify and review the trends of models of nutritional profiles that have emerged during the last years through the elaboration of a global stocktake.
- c. Assess the need to generate guidelines for the development of nutritional profiles, in accordance with current Codex provisions and scientific documentation, including documents generated by the World Health Organization (WHO).
- d. Review the Nutrition Labelling Guidelines and other relevant Codex texts to address these new guidelines.

**DRAFT PROJECT DOCUMENT****DEVELOPMENT OF GENERAL GUIDELINES ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NUTRITIONAL PROFILES**

(Prepared by Costa Rica)

**1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE NEW WORK**

The scope and purpose of the work is to develop guidance on the establishment of nutritional profiles that are frequently used on the front-of-pack labelling systems, and in this way have a harmonized base.

The work would seek to revise existing Codex provisions under the [*Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling (CAC / GL 2-1985)*] for the development of additional guidance to support the use of nutritional profiles, taking into account the WHO work in this matter.

**2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS**

The multiple interpretations of nutritional profiles currently available can be confusing, so a systematic comparison of different approaches is necessary, and the establishment of general principles to ensure that countries and organizations can use any model that is considered effective, adequate and scientifically based.

This proposal relates to development of guidance to assist governments (or other stakeholders) in the development and the application of nutritional profiles to be used on the front-of-pack labelling systems which has been identified as a significant opportunity in a number of countries. According to the stocktake undertaken by the eWG on "Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling" of the CCFL, there is an increasing number of Codex members where front of pack nutrition labelling systems is currently in use or being proposed for use.

The *Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling (CAC / GL 2-1985)* do not make reference to the use of nutritional profiles in labelling, so that currently it cannot be assured that barriers to trade are minimized.

Several organizations, including WHO, have been working globally on various strategies to help prevent and control the growing epidemic of obesity, overweight and chronic non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Since the Codex Alimentarius is the forum internationally recognized by the WTO in terms of food, an opportunity is visible for all member states and organizations to evaluate and discuss the methodologies developed to establish existing nutritional profiles and recommended by different organizations and this way to achieve global harmonization that helps protect public health and, in the same way, reduce barriers to trade generated by the diversity of existing methodologies.

This will also be an incentive for members to identify the existing scientific evidence in their own countries and with this, generate a valuable document to seek common points and achieve this harmonization.

**3. MAIN ASPECTS TO BE COVERED**

The *Guidelines for Nutrition Labeling (CAC / GL 2-1985)* in Section 5 allow for the use of supplementary nutrition information; however, further clarification is required and the present project document seeks to establish additional guidance which may include general principles for development of nutritional profiles.

The proposal is to develop specific guidelines that may or may not be included within the *Guidelines for Nutrition Labeling (CAC / GL 2-1985)*. The decision whether these guidelines should be placed within the *Guidelines for Nutrition Labeling (CAC / GL 2-1985)* or in a independent document will be made after they have been developed.

The aspects to be covered should be considered and defined as part of the work of the electronic working group.

**4. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW WORK PRIORITIES****General criterion**

Simplified nutrition information which includes nutritional profiles may have a role to play in facilitating greater understanding of the nutrition content of foods by consumers. This may also help guide consumers to healthier choices. Simplified nutrition information, may also encourage food manufacturers to reformulate their food products to gain a more positive nutrient profile, thus improving the nutritional quality of the food supply available to consumers. Improved nutrition via either a healthier food supply or consciously made healthier choices would improve the risk profile for a number of non-communicable diseases globally.

**Criteria applicable to general subjects**

(a) *Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade*

Several countries have adopted or are planning simplified nutrition labeling systems that use nutritional profiles either on a voluntary or mandatory basis. It is important that with a growing number of systems globally some consistency is maintained at a global level to ensure that impediments to trade that may arise from different approaches are minimized.

(b) *Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work.*

Conduct a review of Codex texts, including the *Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling (CAC/GL 2-1985)*, so that guidance on the use of nutritional profiles is developed.

(c) *Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies)*

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Association for the Study of Obesity (IASO) jointly organized a technical meeting on nutrient profiles in London (United Kingdom) from 4 to 6 October 2010. The meeting was convened as part of WHO's efforts and response to the global epidemic of obesity and non-communicable diseases related to diet (NCD). The report of the meeting "Nutrient Profiling- Report of a WHO/IASO technical meeting" was published in 2011.

(d) *Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardization*

Many countries are looking to Codex for clear and unambiguous guidance on areas such as front-of-pack nutrition labelling. The nutritional profiles are an input in many of these labeling systems, so the purpose of the new work proposal is to review the existing texts for the generation of additional guidelines that support the use of nutritional profiles, either in current guidelines or in a separate document.

(e) *Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue*

Simplified nutrition information on food packaging is a topic of interest in a number of countries around the world. Promoting healthier diets for consumers and encouraging manufacturers to improve the nutritional quality of the food supply are areas where adequate guidance could have a significant impact worldwide.

## **5. RELEVANCE TO CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

The proposed work is in line with the Commission's mandate for the development of international standards, guidelines and other recommendations for protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in food trade. The new work proposal will contribute to advancing Strategic Goals 1 and 3 as described below.

**Strategic Goal 1:** *Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food issues*

The use of nutritional profiles as part of a simplified nutrition labeling on the front of the pack is of increasing interest and activity in several countries worldwide. Currently there is no global guidance on best practices regarding the establishment of these profiles.

Therefore, there is currently a proliferation of systems that can lead to confusion and barriers to trade.

Providing guidance for countries looking to use nutritional profiles in front of pack nutrition labelling would help achieve a global harmonization level.

**Strategic Goal 3:** *Facilitate the effective participation of all Codex members*

Bringing this topic to CCNFSDU will enable all members who have an interest in simplified nutrition labelling and nutritional profiles to participate in discussions.

## **6. RELATION BETWEEN THE PROPOSAL AND OTHER EXISTING CODEX DOCUMENTS**

The proposal is related to the *Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling (CAC/GL 2-1985)* and these guidelines are applicable horizontally across all prepackaged foods.

## **7. REQUIREMENT FOR AND AVAILABILITY OF EXPERT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE**

None identified at this stage. There will be opportunity to consult with relevant bodies if necessary throughout the process.

## **8. NEED FOR TECHNICAL INPUT TO THE STANDARD FROM EXTERNAL BODIES**

None identified at this stage.

## **9. PROPOSED TIMELINE:**

The work is expected to take at least three sessions to the Committee to complete.