



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 6

CX/FICS 16/22/5 Add 1
January 2016

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION
AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS

Twenty-second Session

Melbourne, Australia, 6-12 February 2016

REVISION OF THE PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY SITUATIONS (CAC/GL 19-1995)

(Comments at Step 3 from Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Ghana, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand and the International Dairy Federation)

BRAZIL

Brazil would like to thank European Union and Chile for the working done chairing the eWG on the revision of the "Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations".

We would like to provide some comments as follows:

Paragraph 5.

The Principles and Guidelines apply to situations where the food safety hazard (e.g. a microbiological, chemical, radiological or physical agent) and food product has been specifically identified. ~~They may also apply to situations where the food safety hazard has not been identified, but relevant scientific information suggests a link between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects.~~

Paragraph 9.

e) The exchange of information on food safety emergencies should be between official contact points designated by the competent authorities in accordance with section 6.2. A channel providing the most rapid and effective information flow should be used. **All relevant information, according to items 1-6 of Annex, should be exchanged in a language used by Codex.**

Paragraph 12.

~~Competent authorities should provide clear, relevant, factual and timely information to their industry, consumers, other stakeholders and the media on the status of the food safety emergency. The development of a communications plan that includes the use of social media may also be useful.~~

Paragraph 16.

~~Consumers can enhance both their personal health and public health in general by adhering to, remaining informed of and following food safety-related instructions that have a role in managing those aspects of food safety emergencies which are under their control. They should be provided with information on how to achieve this. Multiple methods of providing **food safety emergencies instructions** such information to consumers should be prepared by the authorities. The information should concern health effects on the most sensitive groups (children, elderly people and people with reduced immune system) and how the affected food/foods can be identified and handled in order to reduce further spreading of risk (e.g. information to travelers about food in luggage).~~

Annex

Brazil is in favor of maintaining the original annex, because the document quotes some “relevant information” that must be informed by the exporting country. Is our understanding that the more details related to the necessary information, there will be a more efficient communication between involved countries. Additionally, the alternative annex is more prescriptive and incomplete, hampering the communication.

CHILE

Chile considers that this standard contains useful guidance for the purposes of the exchange of information in emergency situations. The exchange of information in food safety emergency situations is very important and useful; therefore there is a need for a guiding standard in this respect.

However, this should not extend to the management of the emergency.

Regarding the Annex, Chile is of the opinion that the original annex should be kept, with the suggestions made.

Specific Comments:

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN COUNTRIES ON REJECTIONS OF IMPORTED FOOD

On the title of the standard: It is suggested that the following text be added as a footnote on the title page: “¹ For the purpose of these guidelines, food includes feed for food producing animals, whenever the use of the feed may result in unsafe food”.

Rationale: The title needs to identify clearly and specifically the contents of the document. The CAC has instructed that items under the various committees be updated to include feed. It is also important to ensure consistency among Codex documents, and similarly to the footnote for the title of the “Draft Guidelines for the exchange of information between countries on rejections of imported food” (CX/FICS 16/22/6); this should be done for this standard. Additionally, the importance of feed in the food chain should be highlighted.

SECTION 3 – DEFINITIONS

Add the following definitions:

“Competent Authority: is the government agency with jurisdiction in the subject and its responsibilities are defined in CAC GL 82-2013.

Official contact point/s: this means the Point of contact for INFOSAN emergencies, as defined by the country.”

Rationale: These concepts are used frequently in the text and in the other definitions in Section 3, and so enhance the clarity of the Guideline.

Section 4 – Principles

Number 9, item b): Complement item b) with the following paragraph:

b) Information on the nature and extent of the food safety emergency, including a risk assessment when completed, should, where possible, be clearly and completely described by the relevant competent authorities. If the basis for the food safety emergency is related to the use of feed, the specific nature of the feed related problem and its impact on food safety should be indicated. **It is understood that where an emergency occurs, the first risk assessment may not have sufficient information; once the size of the problem has been determined and with more background information, the Competent Authority may carry out a new risk assessment so that the Authority of the importing country may adequately determine the size of the problem and measures are proportional to the risk.**

Once the size has been determined and the food and feed safety emergency has been resolved, and taking into consideration updated information, a new risk assessment should be conducted to cancel the emergency measure and so that the latter is not maintained without justification. Prior approval of this risk assessment should be obtained from the Competent Authority of the importing country, without undue delays, in order to return to the trade processes existing prior to the emergency.

Rationale: The purpose of the text is to return the situation to normal circumstances after the emergency event, and to prevent unjustified measures being maintained that may hinder trade for extended periods of time.

SECTION 5 - STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR RESPECTIVE ROLES

5.1 Competent authorities

In this point, add part of the text that appears under number 16, which refers to consumers, as follows:

"Multiple methods of providing such information to consumers should be prepared by the authorities. The information should concern health effects on the most sensitive groups (children, elderly people and people with reduced immune system) and how the affected food/foods can be identified and handled in order to reduce further spreading of risk (e.g. information to travellers about food in luggage)".

Rationale: The text is good, but it is not the role of consumers, but rather a task for competent authorities; this is why it makes more sense to place it under this item.

5.4 Consumers

Item 16: Transfer the text beginning with "Multiple methods...." up to the end, to item 5.1. The text to be moved is:

"Multiple methods of providing such information to consumers should be prepared by the authorities. The information should concern health effects on the most sensitive groups (children, elderly people and people with reduced immune system) and how the affected food/foods can be identified and handled in order to reduce further spreading of risk (e.g. information to travellers about food in luggage)".

Rationale: The text is good, but it is not the role of consumers, but rather a task for competent authorities.

ANNEX: STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCIES

1. Nature of the food safety emergency

Last paragraph: Add the word "public" after "health". The text would be:

"The nature and extent of any adverse **public** health effects associated with a food safety emergency should be described, e.g. incubation period, severity, other epidemiological data."

Rationale: To ensure consistency with the language used in the rest of the guideline and other Codex documents.

5. Action taken by exporting or importing country

Fourth bullet: Replace "reduce" by "mitigate". Delete the phrase "by appropriate physical treatment". The text would read: "- measures taken to ~~reduce~~ **mitigate** the risk ~~by appropriate physical treatment;~~"

Rationale: The definition of "mitigate" is wider and includes the management of a situation. "by appropriate physical treatment" should be deleted because there may be several other treatments that could be used.

ECUADOR

General Comments

Change all paragraphs to the present tense, as some are in the conditional tense.

Specific Comments

SECTION 3 – Definitions – Paragraph 2

Food safety emergency response: A process of assessing the risk, making risk management decisions, and communicating risks in the face of time constraints, and possible incomplete **and limited data and information** and knowledge.

Section 4 – Principles – Paragraph 9 – Principle b)

b) Information on the nature and extent of the food safety emergency, including a risk assessment when completed, ~~where possible~~, should be clearly and completely described by the relevant competent authorities **with the available information at the time**. If the basis for the food safety emergency is related to the use of feed, the specific nature of the feed related problem and its impact on food safety should be indicated.

Section 5 – Stakeholders and their respective roles – 5.1 Competent authorities - Paragraph 11

11. Upon identification of a food safety emergency, the competent authority identifying the emergency should promptly communicate with official contact point(s) (i.e. the INFOSAN Emergency Contact Point) of the country and the appropriate competent authority/ies of other affected or potentially affected country/ies. The competent authorities responsible for coordinating the response should update countries receiving the affected food of action taken, as appropriate. The accuracy and veracity of the scientific and other information regarding a food safety emergency should be verified to assist in carrying out of risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. Any misinformation **or disinformation** should be **expeditiously** corrected by competent authorities.

Section 5 – Section 5 – Stakeholders and their respective roles – 5.4 Consumers - Paragraph 16

16. Consumers can enhance both their personal health and public health in general by adhering to, remaining informed of and following food safety-related instructions that have a role in managing those aspects of food safety emergencies which are under their control. They should be provided with information on how to achieve this. Multiple methods of providing such information to consumers should be prepared by the authorities. The information should concern health effects on the most sensitive groups (children, elderly people, **pregnant women** and people with reduced immune system) and how the affected food/foods can be identified and handled in order to reduce further spreading of risk (e.g. information to travellers about food in luggage).

Section 6 – Processes for food safety emergency response – 6.6 Information flow - Paragraph 28

28. The information flow at the initial stages of the process will likely include presumptions and a level of precaution with regards to the measures implemented. This information should be refined as further detail on the nature of the food safety emergency becomes available. Communications between designated official contact points should be transparent and continue through all phases of the food safety emergency, from initial notification of the food safety problem including, ~~whenever possible~~, details, **where they exist**, of any relevant risk assessments that have been used through to notification of the resolution of the problem. This will enable countries to review their risk assessment, risk management and risk communication strategies as the situation changes.

ANNEX

STANDARD FORMAT FOR INFORMATION EXCHANGE IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCIES

1. Nature of the food safety emergency

The nature of the food safety hazard causing the food safety emergency should be described, and may include the following:

- biological/microbiological contamination (specify organism or toxin of concern; **range present**);
- chemical contamination (e.g. pesticides, drugs, industrial chemicals, environmental contaminants); **range present**);
- physical contamination (e.g. foreign bodies); **delete space after opening brackets. #**
- radionuclide contamination (specify radionuclide(s) of concern);
- undeclared allergen (the allergen should be explicitly named **and the range present**);
- other identified hazards (e.g. inherent chemicals in foods or produced through processing, processing/packaging faults);
- unknown agent (specify serious adverse health effects associated with consumption of specified foods; **dose**).

Translator's note: only applies to Spanish text.

4. Shipping and related information

Information on the following should be provided:

- exporter name and contact information;

- importer name and contact information;
- container and shipping details, including port of origin, **stops** and destination, and
- consignee(s) and shipper(s) and contact information.

5. Action taken by exporting or importing country

Information on action taken, such as:

- measures taken to identify and prevent the sale and export of the food;
- measures taken to recall food from markets including whether these recalls are voluntary or mandatory;
- measures taken to prevent further problems;
- measures taken to reduce the risk by appropriate physical treatment;
- methods of diagnosis and treatment of affected persons;
- measures taken regarding final disposition (e.g. destruction of the food);
- **official** laboratory analysis. **#**

Translator's note: also requests plural in Spanish. Not applicable in English.

6. Details of the designated primary official contact point and of the relevant competent authority

Full contact details, including the name of the competent authority, address, telephone, email address and facsimile numbers of persons or offices that can supply further information that may be sought by affected or potentially affected countries to assist in the management of the food safety emergency. A website address should be used ~~where available~~ to provide up-to-date information.

ALTERNATIVE ANNEX – NUMBER 6 – Paragraph 2 – Item 2

- any laboratory information (clinical or food related, including **Pulsed Field Gel Electrophoresis**, PFGE file, if relevant and available.

JUSTIFICATION: The full name should appear, followed by its acronym.

GHANA

General Comments

Ghana supports the proposed amendments to the principles and guidelines for the exchange of information in food safety emergency situations (CAC/GL 19-1995).

We believe there is the need for an annex containing information requirements. Moreover it would be preferable to align the information requirements with the INFOSAN requirements suggested in the alternative Annex.

Rationale

The alternative Annex is simplified to provide essential and immediate information needed to ensure prompt action to manage food safety emergencies. INFOSAN provides a unique global platform for sharing information during food safety incidents. Aligning the Codex text with INFOSAN information requirement will ensure harmonization of requirements at a global level.

INDONESIA

General Comments:

Indonesia agrees with the revision of the Principle and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situation. The conjunction of this guideline with other relevant documents, such as FAO/WHO framework for developing national Emergency Response Plan and INFOSAN, is considered effective and helpful for the national system.

Although the title emphasizes the communication mechanism during emergency, the guideline provides also the ideal food safety aspect for countries to achieve, particularly the appropriate plan to response to an emergency situation. Therefore, Indonesia suggest to use the existing title for the document.

Furthermore, Indonesia would like to suggest that appropriate plan referred in the proposed draft to include risk management related to food trade (the importation/exportation control, the responsible/ designated agency, etc.).

For the Annex, Indonesia prefers The Alternative Annex “Information to be Exchanged in Food Safety Emergencies”, with some additional comments as written in specific comments below.

Specific Comments

ANNEX

Alternative Annex “Information to be Exchanged in Food Safety Emergencies”

Indonesia suggests to add information to be exchanged between competent authorities of exporting and importing countries involved in a food safety emergency, as follows:

1. actions/measures taken by exporting countries
2. details of the designated primary official contact point and of the relevant competent authority

Rationale:

To emphasize these two aspects in information exchange during the emergency situation

JAPAN

Japan is pleased to submit the general comments as follows,

The attention of the Committee is drawn in particular to the following issues:

a) While certain new provisions and references have been introduced on the management of food safety emergencies, the revised text still mainly addresses exchange of information. The Committee should consider whether provisions should be further extended to cover the actual management of food safety emergencies. For that purpose, the FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures during Food Safety Emergencies² provides useful inspiration.

b) The original title of the document is kept at this stage but may need to be revised if the scope is extended from the mere exchange of information to the management of food safety emergencies.

At the first draft we suggested to incorporate risk analysis framework based on the FAO/WHO guide. In the current document, the element of the management was already introduced into this text. We should not further extend it to cover the actual management of food safety emergencies since the current reference to the FAO/WHO guide is adequately provided the guidance for the actual management of food safety emergencies.

c) Two options are given for the Annex on information to be exchanged: the original Annex of CAC/GL 19-1995 and an alternative Annex, which contains the information required by INFOSAN. They contain essentially the same information but the original Annex goes into greater detail. The Committee is invited to consider, first, whether there is a need for an Annex containing information requirements; if so, then the Committee should consider whether to keep the original Annex or whether to align the required information with the INFOSAN requirements, as suggested in the alternative Annex.

As stated at the first draft, we prefer to align the required information with the INFOSAN requirements, as suggested in the alternative Annex.

THAILAND

Thailand would like to express our appreciations for efforts of an Electronic Working Group chaired by the European Union and co-chaired by Chile for the preparation of Revision of the Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations (CAC/GL 19-1995) at Step 3.

General comments

We agree with the document in principle.

Specific comment

However, we would like to propose our comments on specific sections of the document as follows.

Section 4 – Principles

Paragraph 9: Key principles

Bullet d

From our view, term “risk management measures” mentioned in this bullet is too extensive, to be more appropriate, it should clearly specify that it is a review of Food Safety Emergency Response Plan.

Section 5 – Stakeholders and their Respective Roles

5.3 Food business operators

Paragraph 14

The meaning of term “traceability systems” in this paragraph is extensive and covers all of food manufacturers in every stage of the entire food chain which could make difficulties for practice, so it is proposed that this paragraph should read:

“14. Food business operators have the primary responsibility for ensuring food safety and are thus responsible for contributing to manage food safety emergencies related to their products. They are also responsible for having in place ~~traceability systems capable of the~~ effective tracing of food lots and for providing timely and relevant information to the competent authorities and other relevant stakeholders, including customers and/or consumers, on matters of relevance for managing food safety emergencies.”

Section 6 – Processes for Food Safety Emergency Response

Paragraph 17

1) “FAO/WHO guide for application of risk analysis principles and procedures during food safety emergencies” is useful for the application of risk analysis principles during food safety emergencies, nevertheless referencing to the whole document would not fulfil an objective of CAC/GL 19-1995 that places an emphasis on the exchange of information. So, the reference should be made to the FAO/WHO guide for only sections relevant to section 6.1 – 6.7 of CAC/GL 19-1995.

2) The use of term “read in conjunction with.....” is normally used when the reference is made to Codex Text, so if the term is used with other documents, it could lead to confusion that these documents have the same status with Codex texts which member countries have to follow and comply with.

INTERNATIONAL DAIRY FEDERATION (IDF)

General comments.

IDF supports the work on the revision of the Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations (CAC/GL 19-1995) and would like to thank EU and Chile for the excellent work done.

Specific Comments:

Section 2. Paragraph 5. To add “and relevant scientific information suggests a link between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects” at the end of the first sentence:

The Principles and Guidelines apply to situations where the food safety hazard (e.g. a microbiological, chemical, radiological or physical agent) and food product has been specifically identified **and relevant scientific information suggests a link between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects.** They may also apply to situations where the food safety hazard has not been identified, but relevant scientific information suggests a link between consumption of a food and the appearance of serious health effects.

Rationale: To bring clarity to the text and establish correlation between food safety hazard and food consumed.

Section 5. Paragraph 14. To add the foot note referring to the CAC/GL 60-2006 “Principles of Traceability/Product Tracing as a tool within a food inspection and certification system”.

Food business operators have the primary responsibility for ensuring food safety and are thus responsible for contributing to manage food safety emergencies related to their products. They are also responsible for having in place traceability systems capable of effective tracing of food lots ^(10bis) and for providing timely and relevant information to the competent authorities and other relevant stakeholders, including customers and/or consumers, on matters of relevance for managing food safety emergencies. They are also responsible for providing training or instruction to staff and for internal communication. These provisions also apply to feed business operators if the food safety emergency is associated with feed.

10 bis: CAC/GL 60-2006 – “Principles of Traceability/Product Tracing as a tool within a food inspection and certification system”.

Rationale: The document is not mentioned in the preamble of the current proposed revision of the guidelines. Adding the foot note will bring clarity to the text.

Section 5 paragraph 15. To remove the text of Section 5 paragraph 15. ~~In relation to food receipt, a food business operator must be able to provide information about what food it has on the premises and where it came from.~~

Rationale: These requirements are already covered by requirements stated in paragraph 61-62 (section 4.2 “System design”) of the Codex Standard “Principles and guidelines for national food control systems” CAC/GL 82-2013 with references to the text of the Codex Standard “Principles for Traceability/product tracing as a tool within a food inspection and certification system” CAC/GL 60-2006 and OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code, Chapter 4.1. “General principles on identification and traceability of live animals.”

Two options for Annex on information to be exchanged:

- a. IDF supports that there is a need for an annex containing information requirement so as to ensure that all necessary information be shared among competent authorities of both exporting and importing countries involved in a food safety emergency.
 - b. IDF supports to retain the original Annex of CAC/GL 19-1995. This annex goes into greater details and so can be more enabling to share information among competent authorities of both exporting and importing countries involved in a food safety emergency
-