

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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ALINORM 01/40

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARD PROGRAMME
CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION
Twenty-fourth Session
Geneva, 2-7 July 2001

REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
CODEX REGIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE
FOR THE NEAR EAST
Cairo, Egypt, 29 January-1 February 2001

Note: This report incorporates Codex Circular Letter CL 2001/3-NEA

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CX 3/25.2

CL 2001/3-NEA
February 2000

To: Codex Contact Point
Interested International Organizations

From: Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, FAO Viale delle Terme di Caracalla,
00100 Rome, Italy

Subject: **Distribution of the Report of the First Session of the Codex Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East (ALINORM 01/40)**

The Report of the First Session of the Codex Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East is attached. It will be considered by the Twenty-fourth Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Geneva, Switzerland, 2 – 7 July 2001).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The First Session of the Codex Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East reached the following conclusions:

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| MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND/OR THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION |
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| <p>The Regional Coordinating Committee agreed to report to the Executive Committee for approval as new work at Step 1 the following work plan:</p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Street-Vended Foods (Para. 52) • Proposed Draft Standard(s) for Processed Chickpea and Fava Bean (Hummus and Foul-medemes)(Paras. 57-58) |
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| <p>The Regional Coordinating Committee agreed to recommend to the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission that Egypt be reappointed for a second term as Regional Coordinator for the Near East. (Paras. 61-61)</p> |
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| OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMISSION |
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| <p>The Regional Coordinating Committee agreed to prepare the following papers for its next session:</p> |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper on the Organization of National Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees of the Region (Para. 24) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Discussion Papers on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Risk Assessment; – Application and use of HACCP, especially for imported food products; – Implications and application of the SPS and TBT Agreements (Para. 32) • Working Paper on the elaboration of a Regional Standard for Microbiological Levels in Food for the Near East (Paras. 52-56) |
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| <p>The Regional Coordinating Committee recommended that the Codex Secretariat explore the opportunity of using documents (Codex Standards) already translated into Arabic by Member countries of the Region to expedite the final publication of the Codex Alimentarius in Arabic. (Para. 59)</p> |
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INTRODUCTION

1. The First Session of the Codex Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East held its First Session in Cairo from 29 January to 1 February 2001, at the kind invitation of the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt. The Session was chaired by Dr. Eng. Mahmoud Eisa, President of the Egyptian Organization for Standardization. It was attended by 50 delegates from 15 Member countries of the Region and 5 observer countries, members of the Commission, as well as 11 Representatives of 9 international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. A full list of participants, including members of the Secretariat is contained in Appendix I to this report.
2. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Representatives of the Directors-General of FAO and WHO addressed the Committee, and highlighted the importance of the decision to establish a new Regional Committee for the countries of the Near East Region (for FAO) and the Eastern Mediterranean Region (for WHO). Both Representatives stressed the need for countries of the Region to establish or to strengthen national food control infrastructures to assist them in meeting the obligations and enjoying the benefits of the new international trading environment. The emphasis being given to food safety by both organizations was highlighted, in particular the Resolution of the World Health Assembly aimed at enhancing the role of the health sector in food safety.
3. The Session was officially opened by His Excellency Professor Moustafa El-Refaei, Minister of Industry and Technology, who welcomed all participants to this historic first session of the Committee. The Minister referred to the role of standardization in improving food industry practices for protecting consumers' health and improving fair practices in the food trade. He also noted the role played by the application of the ISO quality management standards in improving quality and the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System in improving product safety. He expressed his thanks to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for appointing Egypt as the first Coordinator for the Region and for organizing the First Session of the Committee in Cairo.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

4. The Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Mr. Thomas J. Billy, Administrator, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA, congratulated the Committee for holding its first session. He introduced his "Chairperson's Action Plan" indicating that he, as the Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, would promote the following in order to progress the work of the Commission:
 - strengthening the scientific bases in the Codex decision making process, by proposing an over-arching scientific committee to coordinate the existing FAO/WHO scientific consultations;
 - holding CAC meetings every year and forming a new committee consisting of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the CAC, Chairpersons of the Codex Committees and the Codex Secretariat to assist the Chairperson and the Secretariat at the Commission's meetings;
 - increasing the participation of developing countries by establishing a trust fund and by regularly holding Codex meetings in developing countries;
 - increasing transparency and the participation of NGO's;
 - increasing total support to Codex by the parent organizations by encouraging the World Health Organization (WHO) to match the level of support provided by FAO;
 - increasing the use of new technologies, such as Internet web casts, home pages and chat rooms, in order to improve communication and support for Codex.
5. Mr Billy informed the Committee that the Action Plan, when finalized, would be sent to Member Governments for their input and would be discussed at the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2001).

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (AGENDA ITEM 1)¹

6. The Coordinating Committee adopted the Provisional Agenda as the Agenda for the Session.

MATTERS REFERRED BY THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND OTHER CODEX COMMITTEES (AGENDA ITEM 2)²

7. The Secretariat informed the Coordinating Committee of the outcome of the 23rd Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Rome, June 1999), in particular the decisions of the Commission to establish the present Regional Coordinating Committee; changes to the Rules of Procedure to provide for the representation of the countries of the Near East on the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and to include Arabic as one of the Commission's official working languages.
8. The Secretariat also noted that the Commission was in the process of developing its Medium-Term Plan for the period 2003-2007, based on the FAO Strategic Framework 2001-2015 and the WHO Resolution on Food Safety. It was expected that a draft of the Medium-Term Plan would be submitted to Member Governments for comment and that the draft and these comments would be discussed at the 24th Session of the Commission in July 2001. The Committee also noted that action had begun to implement the Commission's recommendations for applying risk analysis to the standards-development process and the recommendations arising from the FAO Conference on Food Trade beyond 2000 (Melbourne, October 1999).
9. Several Delegations expressed their deep appreciation of the Commission's decision to use Arabic as a working language, especially since this meant that the officially adopted texts of Codex Standards would be translated into Arabic. Nevertheless, the Secretariat noted that progress in this area was not as fast as had been expected and that at present only the texts dealing with food hygiene and the Procedural Manual had been translated, although other final texts would be translated as they became available. It was noted that financial constraints were inhibiting the definitive translation of the Codex texts. The Committee agreed to discuss possible solutions to this problem under Agenda Item 9 – Other Business.
10. Several questions were raised about the implications of organizing annual sessions of the Commission, as proposed in the Chairperson's Action Plan, including the questions of holding annual sessions of all Codex Committees. The Secretariat pointed out that such a move could have serious cost implications for the budget of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and could impose additional costs on participating Member countries. It was recommended that the cost implications of holding annual sessions of Commission and Committee meetings be examined more fully, especially in view of the finalization of the biennial FAO Programme of Work and Budget.
11. The question of developing country participation at Codex meetings was also discussed, and it was generally agreed that developing country participation in Codex meetings at Committee level was not Representative of the Commission's membership as a whole, although at the Commission itself developing country participation was relatively high. It was noted that Codex Committees and Task Forces were all open committees in which the full participation of all members of the Commission was possible, either directly or by correspondence at the various Steps of the Codex Step Procedure. The Coordinating Committee noted that discussions between the primary standards-setting bodies and the WTO were being undertaken to see what could be done to improve the situation. The Coordinating Committee called on FAO and WHO and other interested parties to take positive steps to improve the participation of developing countries at all steps in the Codex decision-making process.

¹ CX/NEA 01/1.

² CX/NEA 01/2.

12. In relation to the participation of experts from developing countries in the expert scientific advisory committees of FAO and WHO, the Coordinating Committee noted that efforts were being taken to ensure that the experts selected for these committees and consultations were Representative of all regions. The Representatives of FAO and WHO noted that the Organizations had recently called for expressions of interest from competent scientists for consideration as experts in various scientific panels with the intention of developing rosters of experts from all regions with the necessary scientific background and experience.

**REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF FAO/WHO COMPLEMENTARY TO THE WORK OF THE
CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION IN THE NEAR EAST REGION
(AGENDA ITEM 3)³**

13. The Coordinating Committee was informed of the Joint FAO/WHO activities taken over the previous two years with a view to providing scientific guidance in the area of interest of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, in particular those activities taken by JECFA, JMPR and FAO/WHO Joint Consultations in the field of microbiological risk assessment and foods derived from biotechnology. The Coordinated Committee was informed in particular that a FAO/WHO/ILSI Regional Workshop on Risk Analysis had been held immediately before the opening of its present session to address the exposure assessment (See also Agenda Item 6).
14. FAO had convened in association with its partners WHO and WTO, an important international Conference on Food Trade Beyond 2000 (Melbourne, October 1999). The recommendations of the Conference were an important source of information for all countries wishing to bring their national food control capacities into harmony with the international trading environment. The Conference also made substantial recommendations to FAO and WHO on means to assist developing countries to achieve this goal.
15. The Representative of FAO further informed the Coordinating Committee of the organization's technical assistance activities that had been implemented in the Region as a part of the global framework and other activities designed specifically for the Region. Virtually all countries of the Region had benefited from the technical assistance projects undertaken by FAO in the field of food control and consumer protection.
16. The Representative of WHO presented activities of WHO and informed the Coordinating Committee that the World Health Assembly Resolution on food safety included several recommendations to WHO and its Member countries to allocate sufficient resources for food safety programmes. At the regional level, the 46th Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, delegates adopted a Regional Action Plan to Address Food Safety in the 21st century, based on a technical paper on food safety presented to the Ministers of Health of the Region. Activities to follow-up and implement this Plan had already begun with activities at the national level. Several countries have planned extensive reviews of their food safety systems with a view to general improvement of the systems, rather than their individual components. Various countries are presently preparing food safety profiles, which will be collated and published. Food legislation is being reviewed in most countries, and will be part of this publication
17. The Coordinating Committee noted that the different climate and breeds of animals in the Region might require the establishment of different MRLs for veterinary drugs than those determined on the basis of data prepared by industrialized countries and that more field trials on veterinary drugs of interest to the Region should be conducted in developing countries. The same was true for the development of MRLs for pesticides in products of importance to the Region. In this connection the Coordinating Committee was informed that the JECFA and JMPR were open in accepting all scientific data prepared by all interested parties, and that developing countries should be especially encouraged to provide data.

³

CX/NEA 01/3.

18. In regard to products of specific interest to the Region, the Coordinating Committee welcomed the work being undertaken by the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues to establish for spices and aromatic plants as these were being products that were economically important for the Region. It noted that special concern should be taken when establishing MRLs to ensure that the limits chosen would be specific to either the fresh or dried products, as appropriate, and that there should be no confusion between the two. For removal and disposal of obsolete pesticides FAO's Plant Protection Division offered technical assistance about which information was available on the website of that Division.
19. In reply to the observation that diseases such as BSE and Rift Valley Fever should be dealt with by FAO and WHO and other organizations, the Representative of WHO stated that a FAO/WHO/OIE consultation would be held in Geneva in April 2001 on the risk assessment of BSE in order to provide Member countries with the most up-to-date scientific information on the current situation. Concerning Rift Valley Fever, the Representative of WHO noted that there was no evidence that this was a food-borne disease, even though it was recognized that the disease could be transmitted from animals to humans. Information on this disease was available from the WHO Website.
20. In response to a question concerning support to food microbiology laboratories, the Representative of FAO, stated that such support was an integral part of the FAO technical cooperation as microbiology laboratories are an integral part of the national food control system. The Representative of WHO stated that WHO provided training, especially in detection of Salmonella and interpretation of results through its network of collaborating centres.
21. With respect to the recommendation made by some Delegations that a regional forum be established to exchange information on food safety and related issues, the Coordinating Committee, noting the difficulty of establish such a forum within the current Codex framework, was informed of the possibility of convening a meeting autonomously within the Region and/or with the assistance of FAO and WHO. The Pan-European Conference on Food Safety, organized by FAO with the cooperation of WHO at the request of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe, was an example of meetings of this kind. It was noted that similar regional food safety conferences were under consideration. The Committee strongly recommended that FAO and WHO organize such a Region-wide joint meeting to exchange information on food safety and related issues for the countries of the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean Regions of FAO and WHO, respectively.

**INFORMATION AND REPORTS ON THE FOOD CONTROL INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE STATUS OF FOOD IMPORT/EXPORT INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATE IN THE NEAR EAST REGION
(AGENDA ITEM 4)⁴**

**REPORT ON ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE HARMONIZATION OF FOOD LEGISLATION IN THE REGION IN ORDER TO PROMOTE ECONOMIC INTEGRATION
(AGENDA ITEM 5)⁵**

**COUNTRY REPORTS ON THE APPLICATION OF RISK ANALYSIS IN THE REGION
(AGENDA ITEM 6)⁶**

22. The Coordinating Committee recalled that Codex Circular Letter CL 2000/31-NEA had been issued in September 2000 inviting Member countries of the Region and relevant international organizations to submit information on these items. Several Delegations reported that for some reason, the content of the Circular Letter had not been brought to their attention and therefore no written reports had been provided to the Secretariat.

⁴ CX/NEA 01/4

⁵ CX/NEA 01/5

⁶ CX/NEA 01/5

23. Under the circumstances, the Chairperson invited the Delegations to make short oral presentations. It was agreed that countries would be requested to submit the information to the Secretariat and Coordinator so that a comprehensive report on the situation in the different Member countries could be prepared to guide the future work of the Committee and to serve as an information source for all Member countries of the Region. Many Delegations also provided brief written reports to the Coordinator and Secretariat. In the course of the debates on these items, a number of issues were raised which led to the recommendations indicated in the following paragraphs.

COMMUNICATION AND METHOD OF WORK

24. The Coordinating Committee recommended that each Member country of the Region should ensure that the official Codex Contact Point was functioning correctly, in particular that it was able to fulfil the Core Functions of Codex Contact Points as described in the Procedural Manual of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. These mainly related to the functions of Contact Points in ensuring that all interested government services and other interested parties were informed of Codex activities and documentation. The Committee also recommended that consideration should be given to the establishment of National Codex Committees in those countries which had not already established such a Committee. It agreed that the subject of the organization of national Codex Contact Points and Committees should be included on the Agenda of its next Session.
25. The Committee also agreed that the country appointed as Coordinator for the Region should act as a focal point for the dissemination of Codex information, and to the extent possible, should arrange for this to be done through a secretariat for the period of office of the Coordinator.
26. Several Delegations suggested that the Coordinating Committee should establish subsidiary working groups to study and report on special issues. It was noted that this would be contrary to the normal procedures of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. On the other hand, it was agreed that where required two or more countries could work together to prepare working papers or discussion papers for items on the future agendas of the Committee.
27. The Committee agreed that means should be sought to ensure that its objectives should be achieved in a sustainable manner.

STRENGTHENING RISK ANALYSIS CAPABILITIES

28. The Coordinating Committee called for support from FAO and WHO in the establishment or strengthening, as appropriate, of regional training centers especially in the application of risk analysis including training in the development, analysis and interpretation of data on exposure assessment, contamination monitoring and food-borne illness surveillance.
29. In particular, the Coordinating Committee called on Member countries of the Region to develop data on the residues arising from the use of pesticides and veterinary drugs so that Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) appropriate to the Region could be developed. Such information should be provided to JECFA and JMPR to ensure that internationally recommended MRLs developed through the Codex process also included the approved uses of these substances in countries of the Region. The introduction of new pesticides and veterinary drugs should be properly screened and studied by the government concerned before authority was given for their registration, use and the establishment of MRLs.
30. The Coordinating Committee recommended that consideration should be given to establishing a network of regional laboratories to provide quality assurance of test results and to act as reference laboratories for specialized analyses for food control and maintaining. It was noted that in general the laboratory infrastructure of the Region was of high quality and capacity.
31. In considering current risk assessment issues facing the Region, the Coordinating Committee called upon FAO and WHO to establish an early warning or rapid alert system that would notify countries of the situation regarding important food-borne diseases such as BSE or contaminants such as

dioxin. It was suggested that such a system could be extended to include other diseases especially zoonosis. The Secretariat noted that FAO and its partners were in the process of establishing an internet-based Clearing-House on Food and Agricultural Health and that one of the modules of the Clearing-House was to be a rapid alert system along these lines. It was noted however, that the information that FAO and WHO could provide in the case of outbreaks or food control emergencies depended very much upon the availability of the basic information provided by the country or countries concerned.

CONSIDERATION OF SPECIFIC TOPICS IN FOOD CONTROL AND IN REGIONAL HARMONIZATION

32. The Coordinating Committee, through the Coordinator and the Secretariat, undertook to prepare discussion papers for its next session on:

- Risk Assessment;
- Application and use of HACCP, especially for imported food products;
- Implications and application of the SPS and TBT Agreements.

REPORT OF A REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON RISK ANALYSIS - EXPOSURE ASSESSMENT, CAIRO, EGYPT, 27-28 JANUARY 2001

33. In association with the debate under Risk Analysis (Agenda Item 6), the Representatives of FAO and WHO reported on the outcome of a workshop organized jointly by FAO and WHO with the support of the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) and held immediately prior to the Session. The Workshop had been attended by 26 delegates representing 13 countries and 2 non-governmental organizations. The conclusions and recommendations of this Workshop are contained in Appendix II.

CONSUMERS PARTICIPATION IN FOOD STANDARDS SETTING IN CODEX AND NATIONAL LEVELS (AGENDA ITEM 7)⁷

34. The Secretariat introduced the working document, stressing the two different types of consumer participation: participation of consumers and consumer groups as members of national Delegations in sessions of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies; and consumers' involvement in the decision-taking process at the national level. The Coordinating Committee noted the importance of the role to be played by the national Codex focal point to enhance the level of the participation of consumers in the Codex procedures.

35. Most Delegations stated that the participation of consumers and consumer groups was essential for the development of standards whose objective was consumer protection. However, a significant diversity in the level of consumer participation was observed from country to country in the Region. Some Delegations stated that consumer Representatives were standing members of their national standard setting bodies or members of their Delegations to Codex. In other countries, the food standards were developed by the governments under their direct responsibility for consumer protection and public health and participation by consumer organizations in this process was limited.

36. The Coordinating Committee noted that in order to promote the participation of consumers and consumer groups certain actions needed to be taken, including specific education programmes to enhance the awareness of consumers. It was also mentioned that international or regional network might be a useful tool to increase the consumer participation.

37. The Representatives of the Consumer International and the Arab Consumer Federation expressed their appreciation to the Coordinating Committee's initiative to address this subject at its First

⁷ CX/NEA 01/7

Session. The Coordinating Committee noted the interest of consumer groups in participating in drafting food standards and in regional/international study groups. National Codex committees were expected to play an important role to distribute information to consumers. Consumers needed most reliable information on controversial food safety issues such as foods derived from biotechnology and BSE. From the viewpoint of consumer protection appropriate measures should be taken to prevent any misinformation and fraud.

38. Some Delegations observed that noting the importance of the consumer involvement in the implementation of national food safety policy where the government should have the primary responsibility, more efforts needed to be made to improve cooperation between the Government and consumer groups.

IMPLICATION OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION'S (WTO) AGREEMENT ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES (SPS) AND TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE (TBT) FOR THE REGION (AGENDA ITEM 8)⁸

39. The Delegation of Egypt gave a presentation on the SPS and TBT Agreements and their implications on national food safety and on food trade. It was stressed that the application of both agreements would enhance the systematic application of international standards for food safety and quality control.
40. Most Delegations mentioned that the accession of developing countries to the WTO and therefore to the SPS and TBT Agreements could cause significant difficulties as an amount of modification of national legislation would be required. Some Delegations mentioned that the effects of importing countries' SPS/TBT measures might be larger for small countries, where traditional products produced by small enterprises or manufacturers might not be able to afford the transition to rules based on scientific risk assessment principles and could therefore lose their foreign markets.
41. The Coordinating Committee generally agreed that assistance at every level would be needed for the countries of the Region to undergo structural changes in order to fulfil the obligations under the SPS and TBT Agreements.
42. The Representative of the World Trade Organization (WTO) clarified that the SPS Agreement enhanced the application of international standards for food safety; should a country choose not to use the relevant international food safety standards, its measures should be based on scientific risk assessment. The SPS Agreement provided also for the principle of non-discrimination in the sense that imported products should not be treated less favorably than equivalent domestic products. The decision making process under the SPS Agreement was open to all Member countries. It was stressed therefore that all Member countries should make every effort to participate in its decision-making procedures. The Coordinating Committee noted with appreciation that a variety of technical assistance and training were now provided by WTO on the request of its Member countries as well as bilaterally and through appropriate international organizations.
43. The Representative of FAO reminded the Coordinating Committee that FAO under its technical cooperation programmes, provided technical assistance especially for developing countries to adapt their infrastructure to the outcome of the Uruguay Round of the world trade negotiation. He referred also to the provision of the SPS Agreement concerning the cooperation between trade partners (Article 9 of the Agreement) and stressed the importance of technical assistance on a bilateral basis to achieve the objective in a cost-effective way.
44. The Representative of WHO stated that WHO was placing very high importance on food safety and reported that donors such as the Regional Development Banks were now willing to provide financial assistance to their Member countries to bring their food control systems into conformity with the requirements of the SPS Agreement.

⁸ CX/CNE 01/8

45. The Coordinating Committee noted that the Codex Alimentarius Commission had been aware of the possible implication of the SPS and TBT Agreements in relation to the Codex work and that the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) had been working in this area since its establishment in 1991. The work of the CCFICS had led to the completion of the drafting of the “Guidelines for the Judgement of Equivalence of Sanitary Measures Associated with Food Import and Export Certification Systems” which would be submitted to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for adoption at its 24th Session.

OTHER BUSINESS AND FUTURE WORK (AGENDA ITEM 9)⁹

46. The Committee considered its future work programme on the basis of a working paper prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Regional Coordinator and Member countries, which contained proposals for future work made by certain Member countries of the Region.

CONSIDERATION OF THE NEED FOR A CODE OF HYGIENIC PRACTICE FOR STREET-VENDED FOODS IN THE NEAR EAST REGION

47. The Committee noted that street-vented foods were an important item of household food supply in many countries of the Region, where they provided nutritious food at affordable prices for very many people. Moreover, the preparation and sale of street foods often had very desirable social and economic consequences in terms of employment, encouragement of small-scale entrepreneurs, and in many cases family adhesion. However, street-vented foods if not prepared properly had the potential to be sources of food-borne illness and consumer fraud.

48. The Committee noted that many of these issues had been addressed in similar regional codes drawn up by the Codex Regional Coordinating Committees for Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. The Commission had approved the development of these codes at a regional level, but had recognized that they would require further refinement at the national or even municipal level depending on local considerations.

49. Delegations expressed strong support for the development of a Regional Code. It was pointed out that such a code would be useful in assuring that the necessary food safety and quality controls would be applied in the street food industry. It was also pointed out that such a code would be useful when dealing with NGOs that were working in various countries and encouraging the development of the street food sector.

50. The Representative of Consumers International and the Arab Federation for Consumer expressed concern at the development of such a code, stating that street foods represented a public health and consumer protection problem in the countries of the Region and the importance of cooperation of all parties concerned in the development of a Regional Code for street-vented food.

51. The Coordinating Committee agreed to request the Commission’s approval to commence work on a Code of Hygienic Practice for Street-Vended Foods, taking into account the work already undertaken in other Regions.

CONSIDERATION OF THE NEED FOR THE ELABORATION OF A REGIONAL STANDARD FOR MICROBIOLOGICAL LEVELS IN FOODS

52. The Coordinating Committee considered a proposal to develop a regional standard for microbiological levels in foods based on the guidelines already prepared by the Standards Committee of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Several Delegations expressed their strong support for this initiative, especially as a “Yes/No” decision-making approach could be applied to potentially hazardous imported food products on the basis of such a standard.

⁹ CX/NEA 01/9.

53. The Secretariat and the Representatives of FAO and WHO advised the Coordinating Committee that the approach being recommended in this proposal was no longer considered to be the appropriate means of assuring product safety and for consumer protection. On scientific grounds it had been shown that end-product microbiological specifications were subject to significant error (especially for false negative results) due to the heterogeneous distribution of contamination in products and therefore led to a false sense of security. Moreover, the amount of sampling required to obtain any statistically significant result was extremely high. Also, end-product testing, or testing at any one point in the food chain, did not guarantee that the product would remain microbiologically sound, especially in hot climates or under conditions of poor handling. The internationally preferred approach to microbiological food safety was now the HACCP system.
54. The Representative of WHO also referred to the work being undertaken by FAO, WHO and the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene to see if microbiological limits could be established for certain commodity/micro-organism combination on the basis of modern risk assessment. Thus far, this work had proven to be very difficult from a scientific point of view.
55. However, Delegations stressed the urgent need for such guidance for countries of the Region, especially as the Region as a whole was highly dependent on imported foods and the HACCP model was difficult to accept due to the facts that a) HACCP was considered to be for voluntary application, and b) that the application of HACCP by a food manufacturer or processor in the country of origin was outside the jurisdiction of the importing country.
56. The Coordinating Committee agreed to prepare a working paper for its next session in which the proposed guidance would be compared with international standards and advice on the issue. It was agreed that the issue needed careful study in order to avoid establishing recommendations to governments that were not scientifically based. The Delegations of Egypt, Iran, Sudan and the Representative of the Gulf Cooperation Council agreed to cooperate in the preparation of the working paper.

CONSIDERATION OF THE NEED FOR STANDARDS FOR CHICKPEA AND FAVA BEAN

57. The Coordinating Committee noted that this proposal referred to chickpea and fava bean processed and traded as “humus” and “foul-medemes” respectively. Both products were extensively traded within the Region and also exported to other regions. It was noted that a Codex Standard already existed for chickpea and fava bean when sold as dried products (Codex Standard for Certain Pulses, Codex Stan 171-1989, Rev.1-1995).
58. The Committee agreed to request the Commission to initiate work on the elaboration of an international standard for these products (Step 1 of the Codex Procedure).

OTHER MATTERS

59. The Committee recalled its discussion concerning the translation of the full text of the Codex Alimentarius into Arabic (see paras. 7 and 9 above). While noting that FAO and WHO were committed to equal treatment of all languages, the Committee recognized that there existed within the Region a considerable resource of documents (Codex Standards) already translated into Arabic by the Member countries and Regional Organizations, that could be used to expedite the final publication of the Codex Alimentarius in Arabic. It recommended that the Secretariat explore the opportunity of using this resource to meet the obligation of full publication of the Codex Alimentarius in all languages.

NOMINATION OF COORDINATING (AGENDA ITEM 10) ¹⁰

60. Committee noted that the present incumbent, Dr Eng. Mahmoud Eisa (Egypt), had been appointed under the former Rules of Procedure to replace Professor Ali A. El-Nagaar. Under the current

¹⁰ CX/NEA 01/10

Rules, a Member country instead of person, was appointed by the Commission as the Coordinator. Coordinators were appointed for a term of office equal to the period between two Commission Sessions and were eligible for reappointment once only. Egypt, represented by Drs. El-Nagaar and Eisa, had served one term in the capacity of Coordinator.

61. The Coordinating Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission that Egypt be reappointed for a second term as Regional Coordinator for the Near East.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT SESSION (AGENDA ITEM 11)

62. The Coordinating Committee was informed that, subject to confirmation of the appointment of the Coordinator by the Commission, the next Session of the Committee would be held in Egypt in approximately two years' time, the exact place and date to be determined by the Codex Secretariat and the Host Government.

**FIRST SESSION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE
FOR THE NEAR EAST**

Summary Status of Work

| Subject | Step | Responsible for Further Action | Document Reference in ALINORM |
|---|-------------|--|--|
| Paper on the Organization of National Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees in the Region | - | Secretariat, Coordinator, Government inputs | Para. 24 |
| Discussion papers on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk Assessment; • Application and use of HACCP, especially for imported food products; • Implications and application of the SPS and TBT Agreements. | - | Coordinator; Member countries | Para 32. |
| Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Street-Vended Foods | 1 | Commission; Coordinator; Secretariat | Para. 52 |
| Review Paper on Microbiological Standards for Foods | - | Egypt; Iran; Sudan; Gulf Cooperation Council | Para. 56 |
| Proposed Draft Standard(s) for Processed Chickpea and Fava Bean (<i>Humus</i> and <i>Foul-medemes</i>) | 1 | Commission; Coordinator; Secretariat | Paras. 57-58 |

Appendix I

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Appendix II

**Extract from the Report of the
FAO/WHO/ILSI Regional Workshop on Risk Analysis
Exposure Assessment
WHO/EMRO, Cairo, Egypt, 27-28 January 2001**

The Workshop adopted the following conclusions and recommendations:

CONCLUSIONS:

- Data on dietary intake/food consumption are not available in most countries for a complete and comprehensive conducting of risk assessment of major contaminants. Limited data exists however from different projects and studies which could be a starting point for conducting risk assessment.
- FAO Food Balance Sheets provide a useful and sufficient tool for estimating exposure to various contaminants. They should be used until better, more precise data are generated for this purpose.
- Most countries of the Region are still lacking the necessary skills to carry out risk assessment and require specialised training in this field;
- Several participants expressed concern over the BSE disease and the potential of it spreading in the Region because of the reports on exports of meat and of MBM outside Europe. They were eager to receive more advise from FAO and WHO on the risks involved and on measures to prevent the disease from entering the Region.
- Participants underlined the necessity to prioritise resources for risk assessment and also recognized the necessity in some countries to sensitise the decision makers to the importance of risk assessment in developing food safety legislation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Workshop recommended that:

- Regional expert “Round Tables” be organised on the subject of risk analysis with the purpose of:
 - identifying regional human and technical resources needed for carrying out risk analysis;
 - establishing a regional network for information exchange on risk analysis between all relevant institutions;
 - developing common methodologies (as far as possible) for dietary intake studies, foodborne disease surveillance and contamination monitoring.
- Regional training centres be established within existing competent institutions to provide refresher training courses to food control professionals from the Region, in different food control related disciplines, including risk assessment; FAO and WHO should be encouraged to assist in this process;
- Countries of the Region should underline the benefits of adopting Codex standards, guidelines and other recommendations in relation to the conformity of their food legislation with WTO requirements and to save on much needed resources which could be used for other more pressing needs;
- FAO and WHO continue to support the countries of the Region through training in different aspects of Risk Analysis-Risk assessment, and also on HACCP, and Good Hygienic Practices at Regional, Sub-regional or National levels;

- Government officials and decision makers should be sensitised to the necessity of performing risk assessments at the national/regional level;
- Cooperation, coordination and communication between all sectors involved in food control, at national and regional levels should be improved through networking;
- Research Institutes and relevant academic institutions in the Region should collaborate in generating data and information necessary to carry out risk analysis - exposure assessment.