



**Food and Agriculture
Organization of
the United Nations**



**World Health
Organization**

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS

Sixth Session

Maastricht, The Netherlands, 26 – 30 March 2012

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM FAO AND WHO

CAPACITY BUILDING ACTIVITIES RELEVANT TO THE WORK OF THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS

This document provides additional information on FAO and WHO activities supporting national activities to strengthen the scientific basis for standard setting and data collection on key food safety issues. Feedback and general comment from countries is welcomed.

1. FAO/WHO project on mycotoxins in sorghum (2012-2014)

The 5th Session of the CCCF¹ held in March 2011 noted that the lack of sufficient and reliable data on occurrence of mycotoxins and mycotoxigenic fungi in sorghum producing countries contributes to the slow progress of this work. The Committee further noted the importance of data collection and supported the recommendations that countries continue to collect data on the occurrence of mycotoxins in sorghum and sorghum-based food products at the pre-and post-harvest levels as well as data especially from major producing countries on dietary intake.

The project is related to the ongoing discussions in the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) on the potential need for a Codex Maximum Level on mycotoxins in sorghum. Therefore, the aim of this project is to assist countries in generating data for JECFA to carry out a detailed risk assessment, with a view to the establishment of MLs for selected mycotoxins in sorghum.

In addition, an Annex for "Prevention and reduction of contamination by aflatoxins in grain sorghum" to the existing Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Mycotoxin Contamination in Cereals (CAC/RCP 51-2003) will assist countries in identifying best management practices to reduce contamination by aflatoxins in this product. In this regard, member countries have recognized at different sessions of CCCF that the revision of the CoP was a good start for limiting mycotoxin contamination in sorghum, however a risk assessment is needed by JECFA before considering setting MLs.

The FAO/WHO project will facilitate an assessment of the types and levels of mycotoxins in sorghum in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali and Sudan (four major sorghum producing/exporting countries). The project with a start-up date of January 2012 is funded by the European Commission through funds provided to the FAO/WHO Project and Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund).

The specific objectives of the project are:

Objective 1: To conduct a survey on the occurrence of mycotoxins in sorghum, the type of mycotoxins and their levels of contamination, and to determine the mycotoxin producing fungi that are present in different varieties of sorghum.

Objective 2: To enhance scientific and technical input to Codex on health and trade issues of particular importance to developing countries.

Objective 3: To collect information on sorghum production systems and practices in each of the countries included in the pilot project² (e.g. description of the production chain, quantities produced and uses – human consumption, feed, trade, private and public sector controls of sorghum quality and safety, testing and analytical capacities, etc.)

FAO and WHO officers are working closely to implement the project, a team of national and international experts has been identified and inception missions to each of the four countries are ongoing. A national consultant and national focal point are being identified in each country. Essential issues to the success of the project survey work include a robust sampling protocol, and effective analytical testing. Discussions are currently taking place on the design of a protocol for collection, sampling and analysis, as well as workplan and timelines for initiation of project activities in countries over the next six months.

¹ REP11/CF http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/report/758/REP11_CFe.pdf (English)
http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/report/758/REP11_CFf.pdf (French)

² This context is important to allow for future analysis of possible ways and means to reduce mycotoxin contamination which is beyond the scope of this pilot project. It can also provide additional supporting information to enrich future discussions in CCCF.

FAO and WHO are available to provide any additional information and will keep the Committee informed of progress project implementation and outcomes.

2. Tool to guide sampling plans for mycotoxin detection

Designing effective sampling plans for mycotoxin detection in food commodities is a complex task. FAO is regularly contacted by national food safety agencies and by other development partners for guidance on sampling and interpretation of test results to determine and quantify mycotoxin contamination in a range of food commodities.

On this basis, FAO has started investigating the feasibility of developing a tool to assist in the design and characterize the performance of sampling plans for mycotoxin detection. A workshop with a group of experts was held in October 2011 in Rome to determine the feasibility of developing a mycotoxin sampling tool and to define its main features. The views of the participants converged on the usefulness of the tool and it was agreed that the first step will be the collection of existing mycotoxin contamination data (including specific mycotoxin- commodity combinations, temporal, regional, and climatic variations etc) to set up a database that will serve as the basis for the tool development.

A concept document outlining the core aspects of the model to be used has been prepared. The concept is in brief to link the database to the computation models of the tool so that the assumptions which must be made by the tool user can be based on real data and will be increasingly more informed by an accumulating database of experience with new mycotoxin contamination data.

FAO in collaboration with various research institutes and other international organizations has started collecting mycotoxin contamination data. National authorities that are interested in providing mycotoxin contamination data from their surveillance and monitoring programmes, can contact FAO- Food Safety and Quality, Email: food-quality@fao.org