

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



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Agenda Item 9

CX/EURO 02/9

**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**  
**FAO/WHO REGIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE**  
Twenty-third Session  
Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 10-13 September 2002

**CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN CODEX WORK AND RELATED MATTERS**  
**GOVERNMENT COMMENTS**  
(Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Slovak Republic, European Community, Consumers International)

## FINLAND

### MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES TO ASSESS CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN CODEX

1. Finland has a National Codex Contact Point (General Secretary of the Advisory Committee of Foodstuffs)
2. The Advisory Committee of Foodstuffs under the Ministry of Trade and Industry is the National Codex Committee. Advisory Committee on Foodstuffs consists of representatives of the relevant ministries and authorities as well as the stakeholders (incl. consumers) of the food and feed sector. Public consultations has not been hold when developing national positions for Codex Meetings.
3. Independent consumer organisations have not been invited to participate in Codex meetings.
4. In the Advisory Committee of Foodstuffs (National Codex Committee) are representatives of the independent consumer NGOs. Under the Advisory Committee of Foodstuffs are several sub-committees for specific issues (like food additives and contaminants, labelling, residues of veterinary drugs in food etc.). In these sub-committees are also representatives of the independent consumer NGOs. National positions for Codex meetings are prepared in cooperation with these sub-committees.
5. In Finland there are two consumer NGOs participating in the Codex Process at the national level: The Finnish Consumers' Association (Suomen Kuluttajaliitto ry) and The Consumers (Kuluttajat-Konsumenterna ry).

## HUNGARY

According to the Checklist of Measurable Objefctives:

Question Nr.	Remarks
1	Hungary established it.
2	Hungary established it.
3	Hungary does it.
4	Hungary does it.
5	In Hungary they do.
6	One NGO participates in the Codex process at the national level, this is the so called: Országos Fogyasztóvédelmi Egyesület (National Assotiation for Consumer Protection in Hungary).

## **IRELAND**

In Ireland the main consumer representative organisations are routinely consulted on food related safety and consumer protection issues including proposals for legislation of both national and EU origin. A number of formal arrangements are in place for such consultation including the Consumer Liaison Group of the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Food Safety Consultative Council operated by the FSAI. The bodies listed in Annex 1 also provide consumers with information on food safety through a variety of other channels such as helplines, info-centres, libraries, websites, etc. There is extremely active participation by consumers via the media, particularly national radio. Given the national coverage of the relevant media programmes and the high level of consumer participation, this is a very effective method of ensuring that the needs and demands of consumers are met.

Regarding consumer involvement in Codex work, Ireland has implemented all the “measurable objectives” set out in the CL 2002/17-EURO e.g. designation of a dedicated Codex Contact Point; operation of a National Codex Committee; compilation and periodic distribution to interested parties inviting comment of a document summarising Codex Letters in circulation; organisation of occasional Codex information events such as a Workshop on Codex scheduled for October 2002 to which a large cross section of Codex stakeholders in Ireland will be invited.

It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Irish consumers have every opportunity to be involved, through their relevant NGO, in the preparatory process used to formulate the Irish position on a variety of Codex issues.

## **SLOVAK REPUBLIC**

A representative of the Association of Slovak Consumers is a member of the Slovak Food Codex Committee having thus a possibility to affect priorities of national food legislation and submit comments to the Codex Alimentarius documents. As already mentioned above, representatives of consumers are invited to the Commission on Food Safety sessions.

The Association co-operates closely with the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health and Food Research Institute. Close contact of the Association with the National Codex Contact Point enables consumers to study all Codex documents. The representatives of the Association and all consumers that are interested are regularly offered with various education documents. They are also invited to a range of professional workshops and participate at various activities such as within the Commission on Nutrition for Healthy Hearth. Consumers in the Slovak Republic organised at occasion of the World Consumers Rights Day individual campaigns linked to food safety: "Safe foods for all" in 1999 and "Consumers act in GMO issue" in 2001.

Gradual increase of consumer activities in Slovak Republic is evident. Consumers can be considered as a new control element in countries with economy in transition.

## **EUROPEAN COMMUNITY**

### **Consumer organisation involvement in EU food policy**

- As a general policy, to achieve more effective and transparent legislation at the EU level and to implement the better governance reform, the Commission will establish, in the autumn 2002, general principles and minimum standards for consultation of interested parties, including consumer organisations.
- Main European consumer organisations are informed in advance and consulted regularly on EU food policy initiatives.
- Moreover, consumer organisations have a forum, the Consumer Committee, for inputting into consumer policy, including food legislation. The Consumer Committee is an advisory committee, established by the Commission, and composed of consumer representatives from all Member States and of European-wide organisations.
- In the food safety area, the recently adopted Regulation<sup>1</sup> laying down the general principles and

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<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of 28 January 2002, OJ L31/2, 1.2.2002

requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in the field of food safety, provides for a specific legal provision on public consultation. Article 9 states: *“There shall be open and transparent public consultation, directly or through representative bodies, during the preparation, evaluation and revision of food law, except where the urgency of the matter does not allow it”*.

In conformity with this Regulation and with the White Paper on Food Safety of 12 January 2000<sup>2</sup>, a new consultative committee for the food chain and animal health will be set up reorganising and grouping existing consultative committees in this area. Consumer organisations will be consulted in this committee with other stakeholder representatives.

- The Commission is also in close contact with consumer organisations within the Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue (TACD). The TACD is a forum of US and EU consumer organisations, which develops and agrees joint consumer policy recommendations to the US government and the European Commission to promote consumer interest in EU and US policy making and in global issues. Food issues are one of the key priorities of this dialogue.
- Once the European Commission will be a Codex member, the Commission is open to develop a process of information and dialogue with consumer organisations representing interests of European consumers. The Commission is examining mechanisms for EC / consumer dialogue in this regard.

### **CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL**

Consumers International welcomes paper CL 2002/17-EURO on the involvement of consumers in the work of Codex and the continued commitment this represents to meet the objectives for improving consumer participation. We hope that sufficient time will be allowed for a full discussion on this issue at the CC Europe 2002 meeting. This exchange is essential if there is to be good co-ordination between governments on developments in consumer participation in the region.

With the gradual breakdown of trade barriers and Codex’s increasing influence as the global food standards setting body, it is essential that there is significant consumer participation within the Codex process. Codex committees both national and international will certainly benefit from the involvement of consumer organisations, as they will further legitimise these bodies and ensure that consumer interests are safeguarded.

For many years, CI has stressed the importance of well-functioning National Codex Contact Points (NCCPs) and National Codex Consultative Committees (NCCCs). Both these structures play a vital role in enabling active consumer participation in the Codex process for setting international food standards. The ‘Core Functions of National Codex Contact Points’ in the Procedural Manual sets out clearly the role and responsibilities of the national Codex Contact Points and Committees and how they need to function and how they fit into the wider Codex process. However, the experience of our members has shown that in a number of countries these are not functioning effectively.

In 1997 Consumers International carried out a survey with its membership on the level of consumer participation for CCEurope<sup>3</sup>. The survey found that although many countries had set up NCCPs, some consumer groups had specifically requested to be involved but had been refused access. In addition, the main barriers to consumer consultation at the national level were lack of resources within consumer organisations in terms of time, personnel and consequently sometimes expertise on the specific subjects.

Following the findings from the survey Consumers International promoted the setting up of national Codex committees, and since 1999 has provided capacity building training globally to its developing and transition economy members to strengthen the memberships understanding of how Codex operates, technical subject areas, avenues for consumer participation and building skills for campaigning.

In response to the request by Codex in Circular letter CL 2002/17-EURO on the state of consumer participation in Codex work, Consumers International’s Regional Office for Developed and Transition Economies carried out a renewed survey of its membership to determine their current level of involvement in

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<sup>2</sup> COM (1999) 719 final

<sup>3</sup> Responses for the 1997 survey were received from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden.

national Codex processes in their countries. The response rate increased from 11 members in 1997 to 24<sup>4</sup> members in 2002. This indicates a raised awareness of Codex, which we attribute in large part to CI's capacity building programme on Codex.

CI would like to take this opportunity to report on our 2002 findings of the situation in the European region. Responses were received from consumer organisations in the following countries, and grouped accordingly: Greece, France, UK, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway (European Economic Area), Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Turkey, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia (Accession), Armenia, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia and Russia (Other).

### Key Findings of 2002 Survey

We would like to outline a number of specific problem areas identified by our member organisations.

71% of respondents rated the level of consumer participation in Codex in their country as poor or non-existent, (In the survey of 24 members only 4 replied Good and 1 replied Excellent).

42% of the respondents reported that their organisations have never been contacted by their NCCP.

46% of respondents reported they had never been invited to participate in Codex meetings or submit written comments on an issue being discussed at Codex.

There is a high level of awareness of NCCPs, as 21 of the respondents did know their country had a NCCP, and only 2 did not know. However, when asked if there was a NCCC or comparable structure in their country, only 11 respondents said Yes, and 13 replied No or Don't Know.

Regarding differences found within the region, the level of public consultation was much lower in accession countries than EEA countries and the overall rating for level of consumer participation was found to be 'poor' by a higher proportion of transition countries. There were also similarities, which included similar levels of contact with NCCPs and invitation to submit comments or participate in a meeting within EEA and transition economies.

The greatest difference could be seen however in the reporting of Other countries where none of the respondents had ever participated in developing national positions for Codex meetings. The respondents there reported overall rating of level of participation in their country as poor or nonexistent.

### Recommendations

In the light of these findings CI proposes the following suggestions that would facilitate improving the involvement of consumer organisations in Codex decisions.

- All member governments in the region should commit themselves to setting up NCCCs, as set out in the Procedural Manual Guidelines, where they do not already exist, within an agreed time-frame and report on their progress at the next session of CCEUROPE.
- All member governments in the region should commit themselves to including at least one consumer representative on NCCCs, by informing national consumer organisations about the NCCC, and inviting them to participate in consultations. Every effort should be made to facilitate consumer involvement at all stages, for example, through the early distribution of Codex documents, including Circular Letters. This commitment may require funding expenses related to that participation, since even in developed countries, lack of funding is a major impediment to consumer participation. Member governments can obtain information about consumer organisations who are members of Consumers International in their country from the Consumers International website, [www.consumersinternational.org](http://www.consumersinternational.org)
- NCCPs should hold briefings or provide written feedback to national consumer organisations and other interested parties on the role their delegation has played at international Codex committee meetings. This should be in addition to the official Codex report. It is important for national consumer groups to know what position their official delegation took in the discussions and to what extent their views have been represented.
- Member governments should fund consumer organisations' representatives to participate as part of their

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<sup>4</sup> Responses to the 2002 survey were received from Greece, France, UK, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway, Hungary, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Poland, Turkey, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Armenia, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia and Russia.

delegation to international Codex committee meetings. An example of this is the Norwegian government who funds a consumer representative to participate as part of the Norwegian delegation at Codex Committee meetings.

- CCEUROPE should consider forming a drafting group to develop guidelines or models for enhancing consumer participation in Codex and food standards work at the national and international level, drawing in particular on the work and experiences from FAO, WHO, countries in the region which have had a high degree of success in involving consumers (e.g. Norway, United Kingdom) and countries which face considerable obstacles to consumer participation (e.g. in the “other” countries category, above). Consumers International would be pleased to participate in such an effort. We note that the Commission recommended that such work be undertaken by FAO and WHO, and look forward to an update of FAO/WHO work in this regard.
- CCEUROPE should compile information on the measurable objectives for consumer participation in the region, so that the results can be compared with the results from future sessions of the Committee, to determine the amount of progress being made. In addition, the information on measurable objectives should be forwarded to the Secretariat, and the Committee should emphasise the importance of having the combined information from all regions available for discussion at the next Commission meeting.
- FAO/WHO and member governments should identify the main obstacles to consumer participation in Codex and in the development of national food standards, and take steps to overcome these obstacles, such as:
  - training consumers to participate more effectively in national and international standard setting activities
  - sponsoring technical workings and seminars relating to the assessment, management and communication of food safety risks, and other issues of importance to national and international food standard setting activities, to which consumer organisations are invited and involved
  - training NCCPs and NCCCs on reaching out to and involving consumer organisations
  - funding consumer representatives to attend NCCC and Codex meetings and related activities

Follow through with the establishment of ‘measurable objectives’ for consumer participation to assess progress and the need for action.?

The implementation of these recommendations by all member governments would go a long way towards ensuring that meaningful consumer participation in Codex at the national level becomes a reality.