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codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FORTY-SEVENTH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland, 28-30 June 2000

CONSIDERATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND OTHER MATTERS ARISING FROM THE FAO CONFERENCE ON INTERNATIONAL FOOD TRADE BEYOND 2000: SCIENCE-BASED DECISIONS, HARMONIZATION, EQUIVALENCE AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION

(Melbourne, Australia, 11-15 October 1999)

Background

1. An FAO Conference on International Food Trade Beyond 2000: Science-Based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition was held in Melbourne, Australia, 11-15 October 1999. The Conference was held in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). It was attended by 353 participants including representatives of 75 countries and observers from 26 international governmental and non-governmental organizations. The report of the Conference has been published by FAO as ALICOM 99/25.

2. Recommendations were made by the Conference under each of the major items under consideration. A series of general recommendations were drawn together and adopted as the so-called "Melbourne Recommendations". These are presented in Annex I to the present paper and are submitted to the Executive Committee **for information**.

3. The Conference also adopted numerous recommendations addressed to FAO, WHO, Member governments and to the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Annex II of the present paper contains only those recommendations made by the Conference that are addressed to, or can be acted upon by, the Commission and/or its subsidiary bodies. The Executive Committee is invited **to consider** these recommendations with a view to their implementation.

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ANNEX I: THE MELBOURNE RECOMMENDATIONS

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

The FAO Conference on International Food Trade beyond 2000: Science-Based Decisions, Harmonization, Equivalence and Mutual Recognition, meeting in Melbourne, Australia from 11 to 15 October 1999, drew the attention of the Member governments of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization to the following general recommendations:

1. The Conference expressed its appreciation for the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its fullest support to the current direction of the Commission's work. The Conference stressed in particular the importance of the work of the Commission in providing standards, guidelines and other recommendations on consumer health protection and the facilitation of trade and called upon Member governments to strengthen their contributions and participation in its work.
2. Stressing the importance of consumer health protection in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Conference called upon the WHO to give greater emphasis to its work and strengthen its involvement in relation to the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Conference also called upon FAO and WHO to review their current relationship under the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme with a view to establishing a more equitable arrangement.
3. The Conference called upon countries to adhere to the Codex Code of Ethics for International Trade in Food in order to ensure that food products exported to developing countries met national or international requirements.
4. The Conference reaffirmed its commitment to the Statements of Principle Concerning the Role of Science in the Codex Decision-Making Process and the Extent to Which Other Factors are Taken into Account and to the Statements of Principle Relating to the Role of Food Safety Risk Assessment.
5. The Conference called upon all parties to recognize that precaution has been and should remain an essential element of risk analysis in the formulation of national and international standards, and agreed that the Codex Alimentarius Commission was the most appropriate forum to discuss this issue.
6. Governments should clearly acknowledge the role of consumers, producers and their representative bodies in the development of national and international food standards to improve transparency and engender commitment. Similarly, efforts should be made to establish national consultative structures for Codex Alimentarius that included the participation of all interested parties.
7. To ensure that adequate resources become available for implementing effective food control systems, there is an urgent need for developing countries to become aware of the economic and health benefits of such systems at the highest political and policy levels in the country. In implementing Codex work, FAO, WHO and funding agencies should give priority consideration to the special needs of developing countries, including infrastructure, resources and technical and legal capabilities, when considering and elaborating Codex texts.
8. Countries should accept the challenge of strengthening the capacities and capabilities of their national food regulatory systems by devoting increased resources, improving information technology systems, and participating more actively in meetings of relevant technical committees and commissions dealing with food regulatory matters.

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9. Governments of Member countries should take all necessary steps to apply Codex standards to all imported, exported and domestically produced and traded foods.
 10. FAO, WHO, government agencies, and industry should make greater efforts to learn and respond to consumers' legitimate concerns about food safety and quality and to ensure that food-related communication is a two-way, respectful, interactive process.
 11. The Conference recommended that Member Governments should support relevant food safety research; enhance surveillance systems for, and reporting of, foodborne diseases; increase research coordination and cooperation so that risk analysis data will be more universally accepted; and contribute national data to international database systems. Competent research institutes from developing countries should be supported to contribute to this effort.
 12. Member Governments, FAO and WHO should adopt policies wholly consistent with the need for an independent and transparent risk assessment processes in particular in relation to the selection of the scientific experts, the working procedures and the tightening of the conflict of interest requirements. FAO and WHO should also provide adequate resources to the expert bodies for risk assessment to continue to ensure confidence and competence in expert evaluations.
 13. WHO and FAO should establish an international expert advisory body similar to JECFA and JMPR to provide microbiological risk assessment support to FAO, WHO and other bodies.
 14. The Conference supported efforts by FAO and WHO to explore strategies to collect information from all regions of the world about consumer requirements, perceptions, beliefs and motivations concerning food, nutrition and food safety so as to consider the role that food labelling and other means of communication can play.
 15. FAO, WHO, WTO and other concerned international organizations, in cooperation with funding agencies and other suitable donors, should increase their technical support to developing countries to strengthen their food quality and safety assurance and control systems in order to allow them to participate actively in international food trade beyond the year 2000.

ANNEX II: OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS OF INTEREST TO THE COMMISSION

Decision-Making and Risk Analysis:

1. The Conference reaffirmed its commitment to the Codex Statements of Principle concerning the Role of Science in Codex Decision-Making Process and the Extent to Which Other Factors are Taken into Account and to its Statements of Principle Relating to the Role of Food Safety Risk Assessment and recommended that the CAC:
 - a) facilitate further collaborative work on food risk analysis methodologies for use in the development of international standards and to support member countries in adopting and applying these methodologies in reviewing and developing their national regulatory measures;
 - b) facilitate collaborative work on risk management guidelines incorporating appropriate impact analysis procedures for use in the development of international and domestic standards; and
 - c) initiate an examination of current Codex standards to identify those that might be reviewed and updated using a risk analysis approach with a view to facilitating the removal of any current unnecessary impediments to trade.
2. Codex Alimentarius should further develop guidelines for the application of internationally agreed food safety regulations based on risk analysis. FAO, WHO and governments should facilitate the creation of international intergovernmental fora to address safety assessments of new technologies and food products.
3. Relevant expert and Codex committees should develop quality criteria for data used for risk assessment. FAO/WHO should develop guidelines on the identification and documentation of uncertainty and variability in risk assessment.
4. A qualitative or quantitative estimate of uncertainty should be provided by the risk assessors in the expert scientific advice, identifying all sources of uncertainty and variability. Codex Committees should take into account this uncertainty in the decision making process to protect the health of the consumers rather than other considerations.
5. Recognizing that precaution has been and remains an essential element of risk analysis it was agreed that the Codex Committee on General Principles was the most appropriate forum to discuss the relevance of and clarify terms such as “precautionary principle” and “precautionary approach” as they might apply to food safety and to work on this issue as appropriate.
6. It recommended that the concept of the Threshold of Toxicological Concern should be submitted to further rigorous scrutiny and extensive peer-review.
7. The Conference appreciated efforts that had been made to identify the legitimate factors other than science that could be included in the Codex decision making process, but expressed the need for urgency in completing this review.
8. Relevant expert and Codex Committees should develop quality criteria for data used for risk assessment. FAO/WHO should develop guidelines on the identification and documentation of uncertainty and variability in risk assessment.
9. The Codex Secretariat should conduct a review to determine areas where the possible submission of additional dietary intake data from developing countries might result in a change of already established limits. In addition, FAO and WHO should consider the provision of technical assistance to developing countries to aid in the collection of dietary intake data which would not only benefit the Codex process but could also benefit national

governments in making risk analysis decisions as well in the area of improving nutritional status.

10. The Conference recommended that the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies continue to give high priority to enhancing the consensus basis of Codex norms to arrive at harmonized standards, and to ensure that such standards are acceptable to all countries.

Import/Export Systems, Equivalence and Information Exchange:

11. The Conference recommended that governments should make available, preferably by electronic means, information on food goods that had been detained or rejected at the point of import. This information should be made available for further follow-up by the exporting country and also to alert other countries of possible problems related to food imports.
12. The Conference recommended that FAO, WHO and Codex Alimentarius should study the need, feasibility and practical conditions of introducing an international system allowing exchanges of information about the existence of potentially hazardous foodstuffs in the international trade.
13. The Conference recognized the importance and urgency of developing Codex guidance on the judgement of equivalence, initially in a generic sense and subsequently in relation to specific topics such as equivalence of inspection and certification systems, and measures to ensure food hygiene.

General Issues:

14. The Codex Alimentarius Commission, whilst acknowledging that food safety standards cannot be compromised, should, when elaborating and deciding upon Codex standards and any related texts, take into consideration the special needs of developing countries including infrastructure, resources, technical and legal capabilities. Codex standards and related texts should not have the effect of creating unnecessary, unjustified or discriminatory obstacles to the exports of developing countries.
15. The Conference encouraged the Codex Alimentarius Commission to continue its efforts to specify general principles and guidelines for food labelling, to identify emerging issues so as to anticipate and provide for new labelling needs, and to promote a dialogue between all stakeholders on such issues.
16. With the aim of more intensively pursuing the objectives of protecting the health of consumers, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and facilitating the international trade in food, the Codex Alimentarius Commission should continue to elaborate food standards providing for compositional, sensory and safety criteria, and examine and recommend ways to reduce problems of food quality and safety, reduce levels of detentions and rejections of food moving in international trade, and reduce levels of food adulteration.
17. The Conference stressed that Codex standards for food quality and safety, including labelling aspects, should be carefully prepared to ensure that they were not over-prescriptive and not more restrictive than necessary to meet the objectives of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.
18. Codex Alimentarius should continue to work along these principles and promote the application of HACCP principles as laid down in the Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene. These principles should be applied to all foodstuffs, throughout the whole food chain and include feedingstuffs.

Enhancing Participation:

19. FAO/WHO/Codex should consider providing more support, including where possible financial support, for developing countries to participate more fully in the work of Codex.

20. Consideration should be given to holding more Codex Committee sessions in developing countries and to holding the Codex Commission in all regions of the world so as to give more opportunity to these regions to participate. Consideration should also be given to not holding concurrent working group meetings in Codex Committees.
21. The Codex Alimentarius Commission should consider reaffirming the effectiveness of written comments, which should be fully discussed at Codex meetings, especially written comments from countries not able to be represented at meetings. Chairpersons should ensure that all written comments received before the meeting are systematically tabled for discussion at Codex meetings and decisions made should be recorded in the report accordingly.