

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel.: 57051 Telex: 625825-625853 FAO I Email: Codex@faol.org Facsimile: 39 (06)5705.4593

Agenda Item 2

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME **CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD HYGIENE**

Thirty-second Session
Washington DC, U.S.A., 29 November – 4 December 1999

REPORT BY THE SECRETARIAT ON MATTERS REFERRED BY THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND/OR OTHER CODEX COMMITTEES TO THE FOOD HYGIENE COMMITTEE

1. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE 23RD SESSION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

1.1 ADOPTION OF TEXTS ELABORATED BY THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD HYGIENE

Documents adopted as a final texts

The Commission adopted the following Draft Codes as a final texts elaborated by the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (ALINORM 99/37, paras 113-115):

- Draft Code of Hygienic Practice for Refrigerated Packaged Food with Extended Shelf-Life¹
- Draft Principles and Guidelines for the Conduct of Microbiological Risk Assessment²
- Draft Amendment to the Recommended International Code of Practice: General Principles of Food Hygiene (Cleaning Procedures and Methods)³

Documents adopted at Step 5 of the Procedure

The Commission adopted at Step 5 of the Procedure (ALINORM 99/37, para. 176):

- Proposed Draft Code of Hygienic Practice for the Transport of Foodstuffs in Bulk and Semi-Packaged Foodstuffs

Note: The Committee will discuss the above Code at Step 7 under Agenda Item 4.

1.2 AMENDMENTS TO THE PROCEDURAL MANUAL OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

1.2.1 Amendment to the Rules of Procedure

Rule X. 2 – Elaboration and adoption of Standards

The Commission adopted Rule X.. 2 stressing the need for consensus when adopting standards and related texts (ALINORM 99/37, para. 62 and Appendix III)

¹ ALINORM 99/13, Appendix III
² ALINORM 99/13A, Appendix II
³ ALINORM 99/13A, Appendix III

The Commission shall make every effort to reach agreement on the adoption or amendment of standards by consensus. Decisions to adopt or amend standards may be taken by voting only if such efforts to reach consensus have failed.

1.2.2 Amendments to the Procedural Manual

Relations Between Commodity Committees and General Committees: Draft Amendment to the Food Hygiene Provisions

The Commission adopted the amendment concerning the food hygiene provisions to be used in the commodity standards as proposed by the CCFH (ALINORM 99/37, para. 68).

1.3 PRINCIPLES OF RISK ANALYSIS

While considering the Principles of Risk Analysis under Agenda Item 7 (ALINORM 99/37, paras 47-58) the Commission adopted the following recommendations to be applied in the framework of Codex:

- a) Programmes that contribute to risk analysis should have high priority;
- b) Relevant Codex Committees should continue to develop and to apply risk analysis principles and methodologies appropriate to their specific mandates within the framework of the Action Plan and report their progress to the Commission on a regular basis;
- c) Proposals for new or amended definitions for use within the framework of risk analysis, as appropriate, should be considered by the Codex Committee on General Principles;
- d) To overcome confusion about the usage of the terms “risk analysis” and “hazard analysis”, the Commission should reiterate its definitions for these concepts and explain how they apply in practice;
- e) The Commission should continue and expand its efforts to increase the participation of those national governments and NGOs that are members or observers but that are not presently active participants in Codex matters;
- f) Relevant Codex committees should appoint a co-author from a developing country for position papers, where the main author(s) is from a developed country;
- g) Relevant Codex committees should consider developing quality criteria for data used for risk assessment. To the extent possible such criteria should be consistent with one another, taking into account the technical differences in the disciplines covered;
- h) Relevant Codex committees should consider the acute aspects of dietary exposure to chemicals in food;
- i) Recognizing that primary production in developing countries is largely through small and medium enterprises, risk assessment should be based on global data, including that from developing countries. This data should particularly include epidemiological surveillance data and exposure studies;
- j) Risk management should take into account the economic consequences and the feasibility of risk management options in developing countries. Risk Management should also recognize the need for flexibility in the establishment of standards, guidelines and other recommendations, consistent with the protection of consumers’ health.

1.4 DEFINITIONS FOR THE PURPOSE OF CODEX: DEFINITIONS OF RISK ANALYSIS TERMS RELATED TO FOOD SAFETY (RISK COMMUNICATION - RISK MANAGEMENT)

The Commission agreed to amend the definition of *Risk Communication* as suggested by the Delegation of Canada, deleting the reference to “hazard” in order to avoid any confusion between risk and hazard. The Commission adopted the revised definitions of *Risk Communication* and *Risk Management* to as proposed therefore those definitions are to read (ALINORM 99/37, para.70):

Risk Communication - The interactive exchange of information and opinions throughout the risk analysis process concerning risk, risk-related factors and risk perceptions, among risk assessors, risk managers, consumers, industry, the academic community and other interested parties, including the explanation of risk assessment findings and the basis of risk management decisions.

Risk Management - The process, distinct from risk assessment, of weighing policy alternatives, in consultation with all interested parties, considering risk assessment and other factors relevant for the health protection of consumers and for the promotion of fair trade practices, and, if needed, selecting appropriate prevention and control options.

1.5 DESIGNATION OF HOST GOVERNMENTS FOR CODEX COMMITTEES AND AD HOC INTERGOVERNMENTAL TASK FORCES

1.5.1 Review of Subsidiary Bodies (ALINORM 99/37, paras 219-220)

The Commission confirmed the abolition of the Joint UNECE/Codex Groups of Experts on the Standardization of Fruit Juices and on the Standardization of Quick Frozen Foods. It decided that revision of the Codex Standards for quick frozen fruits and vegetables be transferred to the responsibility of the Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables. **It also decided that any revision of the Recommended International Code of Practice for the Processing and Handling of Quick Frozen Foods that might be required should be undertaken by the Committee on Food Hygiene.**

1.5.2 Establishment of New Subsidiary Bodies (ALINORM 99/37, Paras 221-230)

The following Subsidiary Bodies of the CAC were established:

- *Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Codex Task Force on Fruit Juices*
- *FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East*
- *Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Codex Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology*
- *Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Codex Task Force on Good Animal Feeding*

2. GENERAL MATTERS FROM FAO AND WHO

2.1 JOINT FAO/WHO EXPERT CONSULTATION ON RISK ASSESSMENT OF MICROBIOLOGICAL HAZARDS IN FOODS, GENEVA, 15 – 19 MARCH 1999

At the request of the 22nd Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (ALINORM 97/37, para. 139) FAO and WHO convened an Expert Consultation in Geneva, Switzerland, from 15 to 19 March 1999 to develop an international strategy and supporting mechanisms for risk assessment of microbiological hazards in foods.

The Consultation concluded that there is a critical need for technical advice on risk assessment of microbiological hazards in food to meet the needs of national governments, the food industry, the scientific community, trade organisations and international consumers groups. It also concluded that a vehicle for the provision of expert advice on microbiological food safety risk assessment should be established by FAO and WHO. Initially this vehicle should take the form of a series of Meetings of Experts to provide advice in response to requests from Member Countries through FAO, WHO, and CAC.

The report of the Consultation is available in English, French, and Spanish on the Internet at the following URL:

<http://www.who.int/fsf/mbriskassess/Consultation99/index.htm>

Member governments and interested international organizations by means of the Codex Circular Letter No 17 were invited to study this report and share their comments/opinion regarding their views on priority issues at international level which require risk assessment.

The Committee is invited to consider a future work in this area.

2.2 FAO EXPERT CONSULTATION ON THE TRADE IMPACT OF *LISTERIA* IN FISH PRODUCTS, AMHERST, MA, USA, 17 - 20 MAY 1999

The globalisation and growth of international trade in fish and fishery products in recent years has made these products one of the most important items traded in terms of value. Concerns regarding the safety of these products has prompted the emergence of a number of new regulations such as zero-tolerance policy for *Listeria monocytogenes* in fishery products or the use of risk based approach to establish maximum limits for *Listeria* in these products. The Consultation reviewed the available data in assessing the risk associated with the contamination of fish products with *Listeria*, and evaluated its impact on international trade of fish products. It documented the current scientific knowledge regarding the risks of listeriosis in relation to the fishery products, discussed current regulations and their impact on trade and provided guidelines for the prevention and control of *Listeria* in these products. The Consultation was organized jointly by the Fish Industries Division and Food and Nutrition Division of FAO and hosted by the Department of Food Science of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

Follow-up: The provisional report of the Consultation is available on the FAO home page at the following URL:

<http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/ECONOMIC/ESN/listeria/listeria.htm>

The report of the consultation will be published by FAO. *L. monocytogenes* will also be discussed under Agenda Item 10.

2.3 INTERNATIONAL FOOD TRADE BEYOND 2000. SCIENCE-BASED DECISIONS, HARMONIZATION, EQUIVALENCE AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION, MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA 11-15 OCTOBER 1999

The Uruguay Round Agreements have been in effect for five years. In the light of the new round of multilateral trade negotiations FAO in cooperation with the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization, hosted by the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Victoria will hold an intergovernmental conference on the implementation of Codex work with the aim to achieve the full involvement of Member Governments in existing and proposed activities related to the Codex Alimentarius and WTO.

The Conference will address how food quality and safety issues affect trade, health and development at both domestic and international levels while pointing the way from 2000 onwards, it will take into account recommendations of the 1991 conference, current needs in the field of food trade, the Uruguay Round Agreements and the forthcoming round of WTO negotiations.

The Conference will review the response to the earlier FAO/WHO conference and the action taken by these two organizations, with WTO, to assist Member Governments in meeting their SPS and TBT obligations and this will necessarily entail a full analysis of current Codex, SPS and TBT procedures and of the prospects for further change. Such a review should generate coherent recommendations on scientifically based approaches to promoting better-quality and safer foods in domestic and international trade.

2.4 WHO CONSULTATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF HACCP IN SMALL AND/OR LESS DEVELOPED BUSINESSES, THE HAGUE, THE NETHERLANDS, 16-19 JUNE 1999.

The World Health Organization (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports, the Netherlands, convened a Consultation on the *Development of a Strategy for the Implementation of HACCP in Small and/or Less Developed Businesses* (SLDBs).

Small food businesses represent a large proportion of food enterprises and are responsible for a large share of human food consumption. Many of them lack an adequate food safety management programme and have experienced difficulties in applying the HACCP system as described in the Codex

Guidelines on the subject. Public health officials nevertheless recommend applying the seven Codex principles as a basic requirement for the production or preparation of safe food, regardless of the size or the level of development of a food business.

The objectives of the Consultation were to:

- review the difficulties experienced when applying the HACCP system in small industries;
- review the initiatives and approaches taken by different governments or sectors in assisting small businesses in implementing HACCP;
- define the role of governments, enforcement agencies and professional trade bodies in assisting small businesses in implementing HACCP; and
- develop a strategy for implementing HACCP in small businesses, considering different practical options.

The Consultation agreed to define “small or less developed businesses (SLDBs)” as businesses that encounter difficulties in implementing HACCP in their food business either because of their size, lack of technical and/or economic resources, or the nature of their work. The term “less developed businesses” refers to the status of the food safety management system and not to the number of staff or volume of production.

The Consultation addressed the implementation of HACCP in SLDBs in the developing as well as the industrialized countries. As an initial step in the development of a strategy for the implementation of HACCP in SLDBs, the Consultation reviewed the benefits and barriers to the implementation of HACCP in SLDBs and developed recommendations on ways to overcome these. Among these, it recommended the development of sector-specific industry guides and adaptation of the Codex text “The HACCP System and Guidelines for its Application” to the situation of the SLDBs.

Note: The matter of Small and Less Developed Businesses will be discussed under Agenda Item 9.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM CODEX COMMITTEES

3.1 CODEX COMMITTEE ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Role of Science and Other Factors in Relation to Risk Analysis (ALINORM 99/33A, paras 64-76)

The Committee agreed that other factors should be defined according to the principles of transparency, objectivity, and proportionality and that their application should be clearly documented in the decision process. The Committee recognized that there was no consensus on the integration of a number of other factors including animal health, animal welfare and the environment, and agreed that the document should be revised in the light of the above discussion for further consideration at the next session.

The Committee agreed to ask the relevant committees to identify and clarify the relevant factors taken into account in their work, in the framework of risk analysis, as this would facilitate the general debate in the CCGP on other legitimate factors.

The Committee on Food Hygiene is therefore invited to identify and clarify the relevant factors to be taken into account in its work, in the framework of risk analysis.

3.2 CODEX COMMITTEE ON FISH AND FISHERY PRODUCTS

Residue Levels of Chlorine in Shrimps and Prawns (ALINORM 99/18, para. 5)

The Committee noted that the matter of the residual levels of chlorine in shrimps and prawns had been referred back by the Committee on Food Hygiene, which had recommended that a paper be prepared on this question. The Committee was informed that the use of chlorinated water was common practice in a number of countries, while it was prohibited by EC legislation, and recognized that this matter required further discussion as significant differences in approach existed among member countries. The

Committee welcomed the offer of FAO and WHO to prepare a discussion paper on the use of chlorinated water and agreed that a Circular Letter ask member countries to provide information on their experience in this area, in order to facilitate the preparation of the document.