

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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AGENDA ITEM NO. 4(B)

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

**CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING
THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION
OTTAWA, CANADA, APRIL 28 - MAY 2, 2008**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE PRODUCTION, PROCESSING, LABELLING AND
MARKETING OF ORGANICALLY PRODUCED FOODS:
DRAFT AMENDMENT: ADDITION OF ETHYLENE
(CL 2007/34-FL & ALINORM 07/30/22 - APPENDIX IV)**

GOVERNMENT COMMENTS AT STEP 6

COMMENTS FROM:

**ARGENTINA
AUSTRALIA
BRAZIL
COSTA RICA
KENYA
PHILIPPINES
THAILAND
UNITED STATES**

**GUIDELINES FOR THE PRODUCTION, PROCESSING, LABELLING AND
MARKETING OF ORGANICALLY PRODUCED FOODS:
DRAFT AMENDMENT: ADDITON OF ETHYLENE
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GOVERNMENT COMMENTS AT STEP 6

ARGENTINA:

Argentina supports the recommendation of the Commission regarding the need to include a clause indicating that “ethylene should be used only in accordance with good agricultural practices and that all required conditions for use should be met in order to ensure the safety and quality of the products treated with ethylene.”

Furthermore, we believe that ethylene should be included under a new category to be called “Products for post-harvest treatment” within the context of organic production.

AUSTRALIA:

Australia is pleased to provide the following comments in response to CL 2007/34-FL with regard to the Draft Amendment to the *Guidelines for the Production, Processing, Labelling and Marketing of Organically Produced Foods: Inclusion of Ethylene*.

Australia supports the inclusion of ethylene gas in the ripening of kiwifruit and bananas, however feels that justification has not been made for its use on other tropical fruits. Furthermore, Australia also supports the general view of the Committee at the 35th Session that the most appropriate place for the inclusion is at the end of Para 82 of Annex 1 of the Guidelines.

Australia is aware that some delegations expressed the view that the substance should only be used in accordance with good agricultural practices and that conditions for its use should be met in order to ensure the safety and quality of the products treated with ethylene. Australia would suggest that instead of the Guidelines specifically stating conditions for use, the phrase “Conditions of use of ethylene may be specified by the certification body or authority” should be used. This statement is consistent with that contained in other parts of the Guidelines, namely Para 2 in Annex 2

BRAZIL:

Brazil agrees with the use of ethylene and its inclusion in the Annex 2, Permitted Substances for the production of Organic Foods, Table 4, Processing Aids with the following specific condition: “applied in accordance with good agricultural practices to induce ripening in bananas and kiwifruits”

Justification:

Ethylene available on the market is a gas obtained by means of processes which depends on non-renewable hydrocarbons derived fuels (oil, natural gas and mineral coal) and this would be a reason not to approve its use on the organic food production.

Exogenous ethylene is used in small doses to initiate the ripening process in fruits, inducing an autocatalytic process of endogenous ethylene synthesis. The use of ethylene does not leave residues in fruits and does not represent risk to human health and to the environment. Furthermore, it is the only technology available and it guarantees the viability of fruits trading. Brazil agrees with the use of ethylene and its inclusion in the Annex 2, Permitted Substances for the production of Organic Foods, Table 4, Processing Aids with the following specific condition: “applied in accordance with good agricultural practices to induce ripening in bananas and kiwifruits”

Work must be done to develop methods for obtaining ethylene from renewable sources as it could assist organic producers on reducing the dependence of the property to external resources.

COSTA RICA:

Costa Rica is grateful for the opportunity to state our point of view regarding this issue and would like to support the opinion expressed by some delegations during the debate at the 35th Session of the CCFL, indicating that the use of ethylene should not be limited to ripening kiwifruits and bananas, but be extended to other tropical fruits, as ethylene complies with the criteria for the use of substances in the organic system (ALINORM 07/30/22, paragraph 95), and it considers that the data provided for kiwifruits and bananas is also applicable to other tropical fruits.

Like other delegations we believe that the use of ethylene must be extended to other species without need of presenting additional justifications or criteria, as they are the same already presented for kiwifruits and bananas; the same criteria apply and therefore also the same justifications, not implying however that the approval of the project should be delayed due to this reason, only that it should be extended to other tropical fruits. We suggest therefore that it should read: “Ethylene may be used for ripening of kiwifruit, bananas and other tropical fruits”

In the case of Costa Rica, ethylene is also used to induce uniform flowering in pineapples (*Ananas comosus*), without which this flowering would be uneven, making management commercially unfeasible.

The pineapple plant flowers naturally as a reaction to environmental stress, particularly temperature, but it flowers in an uncontrolled manner and, to produce the fruit, it is necessary for such flowering to take place all at the same time, which can only be achieved through the use of ethylene. Tests have been done in Costa Rica using different methods (such as cold water) but they have not achieved the desired results (to be sustainable, economic and not affect the environment), which is the reason why ethylene is the only option to achieve a flowering that favours uniform ripening. For Costa Rica the use of ethylene is not an artificial process but rather a factor that facilitates and provides uniformity to the natural process of the plant itself.

The use of ethylene is important to our country as a natural substance for organic production that would, within the Codex scope, facilitate the international food trade, thus our support to extend it to other tropical fruits as long as valid justifications for its use are presented. The acceptance of ethylene in international markets to induce flowering in pineapples, starting in 2005, has allowed Costa Rica to improve its export offers for organic pineapples, increasing from 604,157 kg in 2006 to 815,498 kg in 2007, which could open new markets encouraging international trade.

With this in mind, Costa Rica requests that the sentence in Section C. HANDLING, STORAGE, TRANSPORTATION, PROCESSING AND PACKAGING, should be kept to read as follows:

Ethylene may be used for ripening of kiwifruit, bananas and other tropical fruits

We request, as a Country, that the use of ethylene be allowed to induce flowering in pineapples due to the following reasons:

- Complying with the requirements for the inclusion of new substances in Annex 2, and taking advantage that the inclusion of ethylene for fruit ripening is presently being analyzed, it is important that its use for inducing flowering in pineapples be also allowed.
- Pineapples naturally produce flowering as a reaction to stress provoked by environmental effects, particularly temperatures, but it takes place in an unevenly.
- For commercial production such flowering must take place all at the same time, which can only be done using ethylene.
- Tests have been done in Costa Rica using different methods (such as cold water) but they have not achieved the desired results (to be sustainable, economic and not affect the environment), making ethylene the only option.
- It does not have any effect over the final product which may mislead the consumer, it is only to induce flowering in the plant, a process previous to the production of the fruit.
- It is not an artificial process but rather an element that facilitates and provides uniformity to the natural process of the plant itself.
- This substance (ethylene) is found in nature and plants themselves produce it in some of their physiological stages.
- There are no reports of negative effects of this product or its method of application over human or animal health or their quality of life.

Due to all the aforesaid, the use of ethylene for inducing flowering in pineapples is consistent with the principles of organic production.

KENYA:

Kenya supports the use of ethylene as long as the user does not exceed the limits given in the relevant codex standard and all required conditions for use to be met in order to ensure the safety and quality of the products treated with ethylene.

PHILIPPINES:

For Comment	Position
Some delegation expressed the view that this substance should be used only in accordance with good agricultural practices and that all required conditions for use should be met in order to ensure the safety and quality of the products treated with ethylene.	We support the inclusion of the phrase or statement “ this substance should be used in accordance with good agricultural practices ” in the finalization of the amendment on the inclusion of ethylene.

THAILAND:

Thailand supports that the draft amendment to this Guideline on the inclusion of ethylene can be submitted for adoption by the Commission at step 8.

UNITED STATES:

The United States does not object to the consideration of Ethylene as a permitted substance for the ripening of Kiwi fruit. Based on the review of the justification submitted by New Zealand at the 34th Session of the CCFL in CX/FL 06/34/11, the research suggests that its use is consistent with Section 5 of the Guidelines. However, the research was only provided for Kiwi fruit and not bananas and other tropical fruit. The Working Group from the 35th session recommended that delegations interested in including the use of ethylene for other tropical fruit should provide justification in accordance to the criteria in Section 5 of the Guidelines as well. The United States has not reviewed such justification to comment on the inclusion of Ethylene for the ripening of bananas and other tropical fruit.

When considering the precise placement of the proposed amendment to include Ethylene as a synthetic substance allowed in the ripening of organic kiwifruit, further evaluation is necessary. Ethylene, as proposed, is a substance that will be used in the post-harvest handling (not production) of organically grown kiwifruit and bananas. As a result, Ethylene, a post-harvest handling substance, does not neatly fit under Annex 2: PERMITTED SUBSTANCES FOR THE PRODUCTION OF ORGANIC FOODS. Instead, it is being considered for general inclusion as a permitted substance for use in ripening of kiwifruit and bananas within the Guidelines under the Handling, Storage, Transportation, Processing and Packaging provisions of Annex 1, Principles of Organic Production, Paragraph 82.

The United States believes that the general placement of such a substance is not consistent with the method in which other substances are specified for use under the Guidelines (e.g., substances permitted under Annex 2) and may be problematic when considering the addition or inclusion of similar substances raised for consideration in the future. As a result, the CCFL should continue to evaluate the most efficient and effective way to acknowledge the proposed use of Ethylene under the current structure of the Guidelines or request guidance or elaboration from the Commission on how best to proceed.