

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel.: 3906.57051 Telex: 625825-625853 FAO I Email:codex@fao.org Facsimile: 3906.5705.4593

Agenda Item 8

CX/GP 00/9-Add.1

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Fifteenth Session

Paris, France, 10 - 14 April 2000

CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN CODEX WORK AND RELATED MATTERS

COMMENTS RECEIVED ON CX/GP 00/9

CONSUMERS INTERNATIONAL

Consumers International is highly supportive of the proposals contained in CX/GP 00/9. Appendix A details Proposed Draft Guidance on Measurable Objectives to Assess Consumer Participation in Codex. While these proposals outline useful measures they contain no specific details of how these measures should be achieved in practice.

For all monitoring exercises to be effective specific targets must be set, detailing what will be measured, how, by whom and when. Consumers International notes that within Appendix A details of precisely what should be measured is given in detail. Consumers International agrees with these proposals. However, how, when and by whom these measures should be implemented must also be included and implemented.

In addition, it is critical that independent consumer NGOs be correctly identified so that the measures accurately reflect the situation with regards to consumer participation. Some organisations are concerned with consumer viewpoints or consumer research but are actually more representative of academia or industry than of consumers; other organisations that allegedly represent consumers do not have an independent consumer voice due to industry funding and subsequent conflict of interests. Consumers International uses a set of strict criteria to judge whether a potential new CI member organisation is actually an independent consumer organisation. These Consumers International criteria could be considered for adoption or amendment by CCGP to help member governments and the Secretariat to achieve these objectives.

Consumers International offers the following proposals for consideration by CCGP to fill these gaps, in an otherwise excellent proposal.

- **How should the objectives be monitored?**

A formal monitoring report, as a standing agenda item, should be submitted to each meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

This report should, in the first instance, summarise the present situation of consumer participation in Codex at the national and international level and subsequently update the Commission on improvements in consumer participation.

This information should be co-ordinated at the Regional level.

- **Who should be responsible for this monitoring exercise?**

Consumers International recommends that the Codex Secretariat, being the keeper of formal information and notifications of membership, be responsible for collating this information and reporting to Codex Alimentarius Commission every two years.

- **Who will supply the information?**

Each member government should prepare a brief written report, in response to a Circular Letter (CL) by the Secretariat, addressing the national status on each applicable item on the Check List, for presentation at the meeting of the Regional Co-ordinating Committee of which it is a member. The CL might contain a form to fill out, to standardise the reporting of results.

Interested INGOs can also be requested to provide their own input, feedback and observations to the Secretariat or to the Regional Committees, as appropriate from their experiences at the national level.

There should be a Standing Agenda Item on consumer participation at Regional Co-ordinating Committees where information from member governments and interested observers on the measures contained in the Appendix A, CX/GP 00/9 is considered.

The Regional Co-ordinating Committees (RCC) may wish to call to the attention of the Commission to outstanding examples of successful practices and major progress within their regions.

In addition, each RCC should provide the Secretariat with statistics for the members in the region (all members, not just those attending the Regional meeting). This report could be in the form of an annex to the Report of each RCC. It could give the data on a country-by-country basis.

The Secretariat can supply information on point 7 in Appendix A, CX/GP 00/9 (the number of international consumer NGOs that participate in international Codex meetings).

- **How does consumer participation compare with other NGO observer participation?**

This paper is specifically concerned with consumer participation and monitoring improvements in the overall level of that participation at the national and international level. Yet it has also been recognised that one of the factors limiting further participation is the pressure on resources - especially financial constraints faced by consumer organisations. These constraints are not so apparent for business and industry NGOs participating in ever increasing numbers. Thus the imbalance between consumer and public interest NGOs and those representing industry and business NGOs in Codex continues. Consumer participation thus should ideally be set in the overall context and balance of all observer NGO participation in Codex.

CCGP may wish to consider extending the proposed monitoring to reporting on corresponding participation by industry and other observer NGOs particularly on points 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 in Appendix A, CX/GP 00/9.

- **When should the monitoring take place and how should it be reported?**

The Secretariat should initially undertake a detailed survey among members, prior to the next Commission meeting in July 2001 to establish this 'baseline' information.

This survey would serve as an effective monitoring tool, which is easily updated as suggested above at subsequent sessions of the Regional Co-ordinating Committees. The global situation could then be collated and presented at each session of the Commission.

Consumers International Surveys of members' experiences at the national level.

Consumers International has on several occasions surveyed its members on their experiences at the national level. For example, whether there is an effective Codex Contact Point and effective consultation. Consumers International is currently reviewing the data on file with a view to updating this survey and making further full details of its surveys publicly available.

Conclusion

Consumers International is of the opinion that significant advances have been made in formalising the requirements for consumer participation in Codex work through improved national consultations and Codex Contact Points.

This impetus should be maintained and effective monitoring procedures adopted to ensure this momentum is fully exploited.

These proposals for assessing consumer participation are a major step in the right direction. However this is no time for complacency. Consumer confidence in Codex and its procedures is more significant now than at any time in the past. Consumers are increasingly becoming better informed and more concerned about their food. For example: consumers are concerned about food safety, standards and health; about accountability and independence in decision-making; and the implications of Codex decisions on global food trade.

Codex should continue to make its processes and procedures more accessible to consumer organisations and the public at large. Further practical measures should also be considered to make Codex more accessible to consumers worldwide.