

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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Agenda Item 8

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH-WEST PACIFIC

Sixth Session

Perth, Australia, 5 – 8 December 2000

CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF CODEX AND RELATED MATTERS

Background

The 23rd Session of the Commission considered consumers' involvement in Codex work and agreed to consider the development of a checklist of measurable objectives to assess consumer participation in Codex work at the national and international levels and asked the Committee on General Principles to review the proposal contained in the document (see Annex).

The Commission also proposed that Regional Coordinating Committees continue to take the opportunity to provide a forum for the exchange of experiences on the ways and means of developing consumer input into National Codex Committees and Contact Points¹.

The 15th Session of the Committee on General Principles considered the recommendations of the Commission concerning Measurable Objectives to Assess Consumer Participation in Codex. The CCGP welcomed the progress made in addressing the question of increasing consumer participation in Codex work, both in the Commission and at the national and regional levels, and agreed that the names be included of countries that have established a national Codex Committee or Contact Point or held open consultations with consumers when developing national positions for Codex meetings. It was also agreed to include information on the action of governments to support the establishment and activities of consumer NGOs. On that basis the Draft Guidance was endorsed by the Committee as being appropriate for the development of a baseline set of data and for consideration by the Regional Coordinating Committees when discussing the standing item on consumer participation in the countries of the various regions. The Committee called upon the Secretariat to begin the development of a set of baseline data as soon as possible. It was recommended that a report should be made to the Commission every two years².

Considerations

Circular Letter (CL 00/34 NASWP) invited Member Countries of the two Regions to provide information on the "measurable objectives" set out in the Annex to this paper, and generally about consumer participation in the work of Codex and related matters. Responses to the CL and other information provided by Member Countries in regard to consumer participation in the work of Codex is at Attachment 1.

¹ ALINORM 99/37 para 43

² ALINORM 01/22, paras 109-110.

**Proposed Draft Guidance on Measurable Objectives
to Assess Consumer Participation in Codex**

To assist Codex in assessing the goal of increasing consumer participation in Codex over time, the following measures may be useful to consider:

1. the number or percentage of member countries that have established a National Codex Contact Point;
2. the number or percentage of member countries that have established a National Codex Committee;
3. the number or percentage of member countries which hold public consultations when developing national positions for Codex meetings;
4. the number or percentage of member countries that have identified independent consumer NGOs and invited them to participate in Codex meetings or in submitting written comments;
5. the number or percentage of member countries where independent consumer NGOs have participated in developing national positions for Codex meetings;
6. the number of consumer NGOs that participate in the Codex process at the national level.

**MEMBER COUNTRY COMMENTS ON THE PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDANCE ON
MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES TO ASSESS CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK OF
CODEX
AND OTHER INFORMATION RELATING TO CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK
OF CODEX AND RELATED MATTERS**

AUSTRALIA

Australia has a long history of involving consumers in the work of Codex. In 1975 Australia was the first Member Country to include a consumer representative on an official delegation to a Codex meeting. Consumer views remain important in coordinating Australia's input to the work of Codex, however in more recent years the ability of consumer bodies to participate fully has decreased, primarily due to resource issues.

The National Codex (NCC) has been addressing, within its recent review of the Committee, ways in which to improve the ability of consumer NGOs to participate more fully. Consumer NGOs have been asked to identify which organisations should be invited to participate in the NCC and whether there should be a restriction on NCC members to NGOs that are affiliated with an international NGO, with no similar limitation on consumer NGOs participating in Codex Advisory Panels.

Codex Australia makes available all Codex reports and working papers to any consumer representative within Australia who wishes to contribute to Australia's work in Codex. This frequently involves the collation of written comments as physical attendance at meetings is not always possible due to resource constraints. The NCC has been concerned about the decreased level of participation in the Codex work over the past few years and is presently liaising with consumer organisations to ensure adequate opportunity exists for ongoing participation in this work.

Comments on measurable objectives on consumer participation in Codex:

1. Australia has a National Codex Contact Point.
2. Australia has a tiered Committee structure in relation to Codex including:
 - a Codex Policy Committee that provide high-level policy advice on Codex matters;
 - a National Codex Committee that meets twice each year. The NCC includes representatives from national consumer organisations;
 - a series of Codex Advisory Panels that coordinates input to the work of all Codex Committees and Task Forces in which Australia participates. These include representatives of consumer and public interest groups.
3. Australia does not hold public consultations when developing national positions for Codex meetings, although there is no restriction on representatives from any organisation or agency participating in Codex Advisory Panels.
4. Australia invites independent consumer NGOs to participate in all Codex meetings in which it participates, and to submit written comments to all Codex work.
5. Consumer and public interest groups, and independent consumer advocates are generally active in developing positions for Codex meetings, either through the broad consultative processes or through correspondence.
6. Within Australia, there are three key consumer NGOs (Australian Food Network, Australian Consumers Association, and GenEthics Network) that have an interest in the work of Codex and

regularly contribute to the development national positions for Codex meetings. In addition, there are three consumer advocates that regularly contribute to work in Codex by correspondence.

CANADA

Canada supports and is committed to the involvement of consumer organizations to the greatest extent possible in the work of Codex.

The current approach used in Canada in managing and coordinating Codex activities is through the Codex Contact Point for Canada (CCPC) and an interdepartmental committee established to review and endorse Canadian participation on Codex initiatives. The CCPC acts as the main focal point for ensuring transparency and broad participation at the national level, with federal and provincial governments, consumers, industry and special interest groups in the development of the Codex programme. This is accomplished by carrying out various functions such as:

- establishing and maintaining consultation lists for each Codex Committee;
- consulting on draft documents, proposals, recommendations and other information of interest to Canada on an on-going basis;
- inviting the participation of consumers and other interested parties to attend Codex sessions as part of the Canadian delegation;
- holding public consultation meetings to discuss Canada's positions for Codex sessions;
- Maintaining the "Codex Canada Web-site" to facilitate transparency and expediency of Codex information

One of the key objectives of Canada's Strategic Plan for Codex is to expand the involvement of consumers and other interested parties in Canada's participation the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. In this regards, Canada has developed draft Guidelines for non-governmental participation in Canadian Delegations.

The issue of consumers' involvement in the development of policies designed to protect their health and safety is not unique to Codex. As a response to Canadians' desire for more information about health protection issues and more involvement in the development of policies, Health Canada created the Office of Consumer Affairs and Public Involvement to better engage citizens in the Department's health protection responsibilities. The work undertaken by this Office, e.g consultation framework, is of interest to the CCPC when examining ways to broaden consumer involvement.

Comments on measurable objectives on consumer participation in Codex

1. Canada has a National Codex Contact Point located in Health Canada.
2. The management of Canada's Codex program is conducted through an Interdepartmental Committee for Codex which consists of senior managers representing Health Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and Industry Canada.
3. Canada holds broad consultations when developing national positions for Codex meetings. For some Codex meetings, the consultations will include a public meeting for discussion and direct input into Canada's position on agenda items.
4. Canada has an established NGO list which it actively engages in the Codex Consultation process of Circular Letters, Alinorm reports, and background papers for relevant Codex Committees of interest to Canada. The list includes approximately 34 consumer groups/individuals who have expressed to the Canadian Codex Contact Point an interest in being consulted/informed on issues under elaboration/development by the Codex Alimentarius.

5. Consumer groups in Canada are active in providing input to assist in the development of Canadian positions for Codex meetings.
6. As indicated in (4) above, there are a number of consumer groups/individuals who are involved in the Codex process at the national level. However, with the exception of the CCFL which meets in Ottawa, attendance by consumer groups at actual meetings of Codex outside of the country is rare. Although all consumer groups have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the position Canada takes to Codex meetings, attendance at meetings outside of Canada is often beyond the financial capabilities of most consumer groups/individuals.

NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand recognises the importance of involving stakeholders in the work of Codex and is committed to incorporating the views of interested and affected parties into our national positions in Codex matters. A sound consultative process is essential for policy development and advocacy of New Zealand interests. A particular priority is to increase Maori and Polynesian involvement in Codex matters to a much greater extent than at present, with a view to informing and seeking input on issues of particular interest to those communities.

The New Zealand Codex Contact Point currently has in place a consultation process on Codex matters based on the principle of transparency, inclusiveness and open exchange of information. The process involves:

- dissemination of Codex documents to organisations known to be interested in or affected by the work of the CAC and its various committees;
- coordination of public pre and post meeting consultations and debriefing with interested parties;
- ad hoc public consultations on matters of significant public interest (e.g. Codex work on biotechnology);
- use of the internet to publicise and disseminate information on Codex activities and interests; and
- inclusion of industry and non governmental groups/individuals as observers to various Codex meetings.

Consumer participation

Currently, consumers are invited to have input into development of New Zealand's position on Codex matters via comments on papers and participation in preparatory and debriefing meetings held by the NZCCP around Codex committee meetings.

Given the strong interest of consumers and industry in the CAC, New Zealand has actively encouraged non governmental groups to participate in Codex processes both at the national and international levels. In recent years, New Zealand delegations to particular Codex meetings have included consumer representation. Such participation and involvement are welcomed and encouraged within the framework of rules and guidelines of Codex and the New Zealand delegation.

The issue of consumer and public interest group involvement in government policy setting is not unique to Codex. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) held forum on consumer representation in September 2000 in conjunction with the Ministries of Health and Consumer Affairs. Representatives from US Consumers Union, Consumers International, and the NZ Consumers Institute attended. Forum participants gave suggestions to the three Ministries about the areas of food safety that needed consumer input, how that input should be organised, what consumers expected from government, and what government expected from consumers.

Discussions are underway among these Ministries on a consultative framework for consumers in the area of food safety, which may include a consumer forum to consider issues. The NZCCP supports these advances and is eager to utilise the framework in developing New Zealand positions on Codex matters.

Comments on measurable objectives on consumer participation in Codex

- 1 New Zealand **has** a National Codex Contact Point.
- 2 New Zealand **does not have** a National Codex Committee.
- 3 New Zealand **holds** public consultations when developing national positions for Codex meetings.
- 4 New Zealand **has** identified independent consumer NGOs and invited them to participate in Codex meetings and to submit written comments.
- 5 New Zealand **has** involved independent consumer NGOs in developing national positions for Codex meetings.
- 6 Approximately **4** consumer NGOs participate in the Codex process in New Zealand.

