

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
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**Agenda Item 9**

**CX/NFSDU 07/29/9**

## **JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**

### **CODEX COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION AND FOODS FOR SPECIAL DIETARY USES**

**Twenty-ninth Session**

**Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler, Germany**

**12 – 16 November 2007**

### **DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING STANDARDS REGARDING THE NUTRITIONAL QUALITY AND SAFETY OF FOODS**

### **GUIDELINES FOR USE BY CODEX COMMITTEES ON THE INCLUSION OF PROVISIONS ON NUTRITIONAL QUALITY IN FOOD STANDARDS AND OTHER CODEX TEXTS**

**(Prepared by Canada)**

## **INTRODUCTION**

At the 28th Session of the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (ALINORM 07/30/26), the Delegation of Canada expressed its support for proposed action 5.1 of the WHO/FAO Draft Action Plan for Implementation of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (CL 2006/44-CAC) to consider reviewing and re-establishing the Guidelines for the Use of Codex Committees on the Inclusion of Provisions on Nutritional Quality in Food Standards and Other Codex Texts, included in the Codex Alimentarius Procedural Manual until their revocation by the Commission in 1997.

In view of the request by several delegations with regard to the nature and scope of this proposal, particularly its relationship with national nutrition policies, the Committee agreed that the delegation of Canada would prepare a document providing additional explanation on the review of and potential revision of the above guidelines, for consideration at its next session.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Guidelines for Use by Codex Committees on the Inclusion of Provisions on Nutritional Quality in Food Standards and Other Codex Texts, developed by the then Codex Committee on Foods for Special Dietary Uses (ALINORM 87/26, Appendix IV), were adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) at its 17<sup>th</sup> Session in 1987 (ALINORM 87/39) and were included in the CAC Procedural Manual.

At its 18<sup>th</sup> Session, the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) agreed to include in its future work “*Consideration of a revision of the Guidelines for Use by Codex Committees on Inclusion of Nutrition Provisions on Nutritional Quality in Food Standards.*” (Para 25, ALINORM 93/26). This action was based on a number of discussions by the Committee regarding the need for standards to address concerns over excessive intakes of fat, sugars and sodium and inadequate intake of fibre. The Committee had also indicated the need to consider whether some standards, by unnecessarily restrictive non-nutritional quality criteria, could reduce the availability or raise the price of nutritive food, particularly in developing countries. Canada agreed to prepare a draft revision of the Guidelines which was

presented at the 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee (ALINORM 95/26, paras 69-72).

In its introduction to the Draft Revised Guidelines (CX/NFSDU 95/11), Canada stated that “*Food standards have a role to play in the implementation of dietary recommendations and nutrition policies.*” The document also referred to a paper prepared by Dr. Norman Tape for the CCNFSDU entitled *The Changing Perspective on Nutrition and Health, A review of Nutrition in the Codex Programme* (CX/NFSDU 92/3, May 1992), which concluded that although some Codex Alimentarius Standards provide considerable flexibility with respect to fat, sugar and sodium contents, additional flexibility should be considered in other standards to permit alternative products with reduced fat, sugar and sodium contents and increased dietary fibre. Two specific recommendations made were that the CCNFSDU should consider a revision of the Guidelines for Use of Codex Committees on the Inclusion of Provisions on Nutritional Quality in Food Standards and Other Codex Texts and that the CCNFSDU should collaborate with the CCFL in the development of guidelines for the use of nutrient content descriptors for modified versions of standardized products. The proposed draft revisions included factors with regard to nutritional quality that needed consideration as well as a section providing guidance respecting the nutritional quality of modified versions of standardized food products. With regard to the latter it was proposed that Committees should recognize the need to develop modified versions of standardized foods that have reduced or increased levels of nutrients that are the subject of dietary guidelines aimed at reducing the risk of diet-related diseases.

At its 20<sup>th</sup> Session (ALINORM 97/26, paras 101 and 102), the Committee noted that the Committee on General Principles and CCEXEC had recommended to redraft the Guidelines as General Guidelines directed to governments instead of instructions to Codex Committees. Although it was suggested that advice directed to Codex committees might still be needed, the Committee noted the clear request of the CCGP and CCEXEC and recognized that many definitions and objectives of the Guidelines were already covered by the General Principles for the Addition of Essential Nutrients to Foods. It was also pointed out that advice on nutrition policy was outside the mandate of the Committee and that the context had changed since the adoption of the current guidelines. In view of these considerations, the Committee came to the conclusion that the document was not needed and that work in this area should be discontinued, and agreed to refer this proposal to the Executive Committee.

At its 22<sup>nd</sup> Session, the CAC concurred with the proposal of the CCNFSDU to formally withdraw the Guidelines currently included in the Procedural Manual (ALINORM 97/37).

## **WHO GLOBAL STRATEGY ON DIET, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH**

The WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health identified nutrients that are associated with increased risk of noncommunicable diseases. The specific recommendations for

diet for populations and individuals contained in Paragraph 22 of the Global Strategy are:

- *achieve energy balance and a healthy weight*
- *limit energy intake from total fats and shift fat consumption away from saturated fats to unsaturated fats and towards elimination of trans-fatty acids*
- *increase consumption of fruits, vegetables and legumes, whole grains and nuts*
- *limit intake of free sugars*
- *limit salt (sodium) consumption from all sources and ensure that salt is iodized.*

The Global Strategy specifically requested that the Codex Alimentarius Commission continue to give full consideration, within the framework of its operational mandate, to evidence-based action it might take to improve the health standards of foods, consistent with the aims and objectives of the Strategy. In addition, paragraph 59 of the Global Strategy states: “*Public health efforts may be strengthened by the use of international norms and standards particularly those drawn up by the Codex Alimentarius Commission*”. Of the areas recommended by the Global Strategy for further development, the one of specific relevance to the CCNFSDU is “*production and processing standards regarding the nutritional quality and safety of products.*”

In its Draft Action Plan for Implementation of the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health (CL 2006/44-CAC), one of the actions addressed by the WHO/FAO to the CCNFSDU was to “*Review the need for guidelines intended for governments on the use of sound nutrition principles in the production,*

*processing and formulation of foods based on the population*

*nutrient intake goals of the 2002 Expert Consultation” (Action 5, Production and Processing Standards regarding the Nutritional Quality and Safety of Foods). Paragraph 43 of the Draft Action Plan stated “Guidelines intended for governments on the use of sound nutrition principles in the production, processing and formulation of foods based on the population nutrient intake goals of the 2002 Expert Consultation taking into account advances in nutrition science during the past decade and the General Principles for the Addition of Essential Nutrients to Foods could assist in the development of foods suitable for inclusion in diets aimed at reducing risk of noncommunicable diseases. For example, when reducing or eliminating the trans-fatty acids in foods, advice on more healthful alternatives may be useful.”*

## **NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF SOUND NUTRITION PRINCIPLES IN THE PRODUCTION, PROCESSING AND FORMULATION OF FOODS**

Food standards, both those of Codex at the international level as well as food standards at national levels, must give consideration to the nutritional safety of foods as well as to their nutritional quality to protect the nutritional health of consumers. Both the nutritional safety and nutritional quality aspects of food are modifiable by industry. Guidelines to Codex Committees as well as to governments responsible for the development of food standards would provide guidance on nutritional and technical aspects of the production, processing and formulation of foods to ensure their nutritional safety and quality.

A nutritionally safe food supply is one that would have a minimal impact on the risk of adverse effects due to insufficient or excessive intakes of nutrients (e.g., vitamins, minerals), energy (e.g. calories) and other dietary components that may affect health, both naturally occurring and introduced through processing and/or intentional addition. Nutritional safety relates to the food supply providing sufficient quantities of nutrients and related substances to prevent deficiencies, as well as limiting excessive amounts of nutrients or other components. Deficiencies of nutrients and related substances may increase the risk of developing a chronic disease or condition (e.g., osteoporosis) and in some instances an acute disease or condition (e.g., scurvy). Excesses of nutrients and other components (e.g. saturated fat, trans fat, sodium) also increase the risk of chronic diseases or other conditions (e.g. heart disease).

Nutritional quality can be said to refer to the ability of a food, through contributing essential nutrients and other related substances, including bio-active substances, to not only meet the physiological needs for nutrients, but also provide additional nutritional benefits.

Food standards can and should promote, not impede, the development of foods that are consistent with the Global Strategy. Food standards can clearly address several of the recommendations for diet in the Global Strategy, namely

- *limit energy intake from total fats and shift fat consumption away from saturated fats to unsaturated fats and towards elimination of trans-fatty acids*
- *limit intake of free sugars and*
- *limit salt (sodium) consumption from all sources and ensure that salt is iodized.*

Guidance in the production, processing and formulation of foods that would address the above recommendations would be useful for consideration both by Codex Committees and national authorities.

It is worthwhile noting that there exist numerous examples of Codex guidance documents including various Codes of Practices and Hygienic Practices.

## **POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS**

The CCNFSDU could consider reviewing, revising and/or re-establishing the Guidelines for the Use of Codex Committees on the Inclusion of Provisions on Nutritional Quality in Food Standards and Other Codex Texts, or potentially developing a new set of guidelines in this regard. The guidelines would have to include consideration of nutrients and other related substances that should be in foods as well as those that should be minimized. The guidelines would aim to encourage the production of foods of high nutritional quality and safety that meet the diet recommendations of the Global Strategy and ensure choice for consumers.

The compositional aspects of food standards that impact the nutritional safety and quality of foods are much broader than only those provisions that address specific nutrients (e.g. addition of vitamins and mineral nutrients) since all the ingredients of a food affect its nutritional safety and quality. Although the focus of

the Guidelines that were revoked in 1997 was largely on addition of essential nutrients to foods, there were nevertheless a number of principles that continue to be relevant and that should be considered and expanded on, including:

**Section 4.1:** *Committees should be aware of the broad range of factors which influence the nutritional quality of foods to ensure that their consideration of nutritional aspects takes into account all relevant matters including the importance of conserving nutrients as far as possible.*

**Section 4.4:** *Quality criteria which influence nutritional quality such as minimum quantities of either principal or characterizing ingredients or nutrients form these ingredients should be included in the body of the standards whenever appropriate.*

**Section 4.5:** *Advisory information on choice of processing methods to minimize adverse effects on established and recognized nutritional quality should be included where appropriate.*

Should the Committee agree to review the revoked Guidelines document, potential issues that would have to be addressed include the Scope of the document, its intended audience and the details of the guidance to be provided. As stated in paragraph 44, such Guidelines would have to recognize the advances in nutrition science during the past decade, as well as the current public health priorities of many countries.

Finally, it is noted that the Codex Committee on Food Labelling has recently undertaken work with regard to Modified Standardized Common Names (ALINORM 07/30, paras 141 to 144) which will explore the use of modified standardized common names, with respect to nutrition variance, as an alternative to developing new standards for these foods. It is considered that this work would ensure that consumers were not misled about the nature of the food and be harmonized with other work done by Codex on the implementation of the Global Strategy. As well, the CCNFSDU has on its agenda a proposal for new work to review the Codex General Principles for the Addition of Essential Nutrients to Foods (CAC/GL 09-1987) to ensure that these are consistent with current science and practices (ALINORM 07/30/26).