

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
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Organization

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DISCUSSION PAPER ON

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL STANDARD FOR CANNED PORRIDGE (CONGEE)

(Prepared by China)

BACKGROUND

1. CCASIA22 (2023), noting the similarity of issues raised in the two discussion papers on the development of a standard for cooked rice and on the development of a standard for canned congee, proposed that the way forward be the same in both cases. CCASIA22 requested the Republic of Korea and China to work together to examine the possibility of combining both proposals.¹
2. Given that canned congee and cooked rice differ in quality requirements, the merger of the two proposals has been precluded. The Republic of Korea and China have thus upheld their original proposals for respective Asian regional standards for the two product categories.
3. This discussion paper aims to provide more information on canned porridge, and explain the need to develop a regional standard for the commodity.

INTRODUCTION

Canned Porridge

4. The invention of canned porridge traces back to the early 19th century when the canning process was pioneered by Nicolas Appert and later refined by Peter Durand with tinplated steel cans. Initially used for preserving meats and vegetables, canning technology soon expanded to include ready-to-eat meals, including porridge.
5. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, canned porridge gained popularity as a convenient, non-perishable food for military rations, explorers, and industrial workers. Brands like Heinz and Campbell's experimented with oatmeal and rice-based canned porridge, often marketed as quick, nutritious meals.
6. In the mid-20th century, canned porridge saw a decline in Western markets due to the rise of instant dried cereals. However, it remained a staple in some Asian countries, where canned porridge with meats or preserved eggs is a common shelf-stable food. Today, canned porridge is not only a daily diet for Asian people but also a type of emergency food.
7. Canned porridge is a type of canned food prepared from fresh or dried grains and/or rice which is suitable for human consumption and may contain other edible ingredients, packed in hermetically sealed containers (including metal packaging, high-barrier plastic packaging, glass packaging, aluminum-plastic composite packaging etc.) and shall have received a processing treatment sufficient to ensure commercial sterility. It should be able to be stored for long-term periods at room temperature. Canned porridge is widely consumed in Asian countries because of its high nutritional value and its characteristics of being easy to eat and digest.

REGIONAL STANDARD

8. The proposed regional standard for canned porridge will specify raw materials, product specifications, processing procedures, hygiene and labeling requirements, so as to improve product quality. It is also important to protect the health of consumers and promote equitable international trade.

NECESSITIES TO DEVELOP THE STANDARD

9. Market Demand: In recent years, canned porridge is a common food in Asian countries and has a broad market prospect. Since 2016, canned porridge has been continuously traded in more than 20

¹ REP23/ASIA, paragraphs 113-114

countries with significant increases of the annual output and export volume. It is widely traded among some countries and regions, especially Asian countries (e.g. China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand etc.). From 2020 to 2024, the international trade volume of canned porridge increased steadily, with an annual rate of growth of more than 10%.

10. Promoting International Consensus on Products: At present, some Asian countries (e.g., China) have already established national standards for canned porridge. The formulation of unified standards will help align the standards adopted by various countries, foster international consensus on this category of products, and further contribute to advancing common prosperity among nations.
11. Technical Necessity: Standards can specify technical indicators based on different product categories, including drained weight, dry matter content, soluble solid content, moisture content, pH value, etc. For instance: Canned porridge products designed for special emergency rescue scenarios must meet the relevant technical requirements regarding minimum moisture content. Canned porridge products tailored to meet nutritional needs must not fall below the specified indicators for dry matter and solid content.
12. Meet the CODEX Policy Requirements: The establishment of international standards for canned porridge products will drive the growth of their international trade, which can effectively reduce food waste caused by spoilage. Additionally, these products can cater to the nutritional needs of most populations, thereby helping to alleviate the global challenge of hunger. In this way, canned porridge products can contribute to the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
13. Canned porridge is supposed to be a vital category of emergency foods (referred to as food products specifically designed, processed, and packaged to provide essential nutrition during crises, disasters, or situations where conventional food supply is disrupted). In light of the tense international situation and the frequent occurrence of natural disasters worldwide, it is imperative to establish a regional standard at present, and eventually a unified international standard for canned porridge, in order to harmonize its quality system globally.

CONCLUSION

14. The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has not developed a Codex standard for canned porridge yet. Different countries have different classifications and requirements of canned porridge, which to some extent impedes its international trade and development of industry.
15. Therefore, a regional Codex standard will unify the requirements of canned porridge, improve its quality and safety, protect consumers' health, and reduce trade barriers.

RECOMMENDATION

16. CCASIA23 is invited to consider the development of a regional standard for canned porridge and forward the project document (Appendix I) to CAC48 for approval as new work.

PROJECT DOCUMENT**Proposal for the development of a regional standard for canned porridge****1. The purposes and scope of the standard**

The purpose of the proposed regional standard for canned porridge is to protect the health of consumers, ensure the quality of canned porridge and promote fair trade and industry development. This regional standard applies to canned porridge.

Examples of canned porridge are provided in the Annex of this document.

2. Its relevance and timeliness

Recently, canned porridge has become important commodity with noticeable growth rate among food industries in the world. Canned porridge is increasingly being consumed and traded globally in more than 60 countries. According to estimation of relevant industries in China, the annual output of canned porridge is more than 1.5 million tons per year. In recent years, as the international situation changes and natural disasters occur frequently, there is a great demand for canned porridge which is an important type of emergency foods in the international market. As shown in Table 3 in the Annex, Japan has already designed a type of canned porridge as their emergency food.

In spite of growing canned porridge production and trade, most trading countries do not have national standards and regulations applicable to this product. It may cause various obstacles and quality issues among trading countries and regions due to the lack of unified standards. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a regional standard for canned porridge as this product is more widely consumed across Asian countries. It will ensure fair international trade within the region, enable consumers to access high-quality products and expand the international market in the future. It will also effectively promote food conservation, which is of great significance to the elimination of hunger by the United Nations and the realization of sustainable development goals.

3. The main aspects to be covered

The regional standard for canned porridge will be developed according to the Codex Procedural Manual. The main contents in this standard will include:

- ✓ Scope
- ✓ Terms and definitions of canned porridge
- ✓ Product classification
- ✓ Composition and quality requirements (including drained weight, soluble solid content, moisture content, dry matter content, pH etc.)
- ✓ Food additives
- ✓ Hygiene
- ✓ Contaminants
- ✓ Weights and measures
- ✓ Labeling, packaging
- ✓ Methods of analysis and sampling

4. An assessment against the criteria for the establishment of work priorities**General Criterion**

The proposed standard should protect consumers from the perspective of health and food safety, ensure fair practices in food trade, and take into account the needs of developing countries. The proposed standard will cover the following points, in order to comply with the above demands:

- ✓ Protect consumers from fraud
- ✓ Improve food quality and solve consumers' concerns
- ✓ Solve trade barriers

Criteria applicable to commodities

a) Volume of production and consumption in individual countries and volume and pattern of trade between countries

1) Total production volume, sales and export data of canned porridge in China

In recent years, there is a huge and expanding demand of canned porridge in China. The total annual output is more than 1.5 million tons. China is the largest producer and exporter of canned porridge in the world. So far, there are more than 50 enterprises producing canned porridge in China, and their products are exported to more than 20 countries (e.g. Japan, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand etc.). According to the estimation of relevant Chinese Industry Associations, the average annual total sale of canned porridge from 2019 to 2023 was about 1.5 billion USD (see Table 1). In 2023, China's total export of canned porridge was more than 800 tons, with a total value of about 1 million USD. China also imported a small amount of canned porridge from Japan, Republic of Korea and Thailand.

In the international market, canned porridge is becoming more and more popular among consumers due to its convenient consumption, rich nutrition and long-term storage. The international trade volume also increases gradually. The total annual sale of canned porridge is about 1.5 billion USD. China, Japan and the Republic of Korea are the main producers, exporters and consumers in the world. According to relevant data, since 2019, the total export value of canned porridge of a leading enterprise in China has shown an upward trend (see Table 2).

Table 1 – Chinese canned porridge output and total sales data from 2019 to 2023

Year	Total output (ton)	Total sales (100 million/USD)
2019	1,614,873	13.27
2020	1,595,320	13.85
2021	1,731,141	15.26
2022	1,667,557	16.09
2023	1,759,277	16.89

Source: estimation of relevant Chinese industries

Table 2 – Chinese canned porridge export data (2023)

Countries	Export volume (ton)	Total exports sales (USD)
Japan	168	185,927
Republic of Korea	163	180,259
Singapore	71	78,089
Malaysia	22	24,375
Thailand	20	21,260
Others	419	467,604
Total	863	957,514

Source: estimation of relevant Chinese industries

b) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade

Different countries have different requirements on canned porridge such as quality elements, hygiene, additives, labeling, packaging, storage time, etc. Some countries have no national standards. All these requirements will impede fair practices in trade, improvement of quality and development of industry.

c) International or regional market potential

The international market of canned porridge is expanding. Recent data shows that the output, export volume and international trade volume of canned porridge is increasing. From 2019 to 2023, the international trade value of canned porridge increased steadily, with an annual average of about 1 million USD.

d) Amenability of the commodities to standardization

At present, CAC has not yet developed relevant standards for canned porridge. Although CAC has already established guidelines on canned food packaging media, hygienic operation specifications for canned food with low acidity, hygienic operation specifications for preventing and reducing inorganic tin pollution in canned food, these standards are not specifically aimed at the canned porridge. Therefore, the composition, key process requirements, quality requirements and processing technology of the product have not been standardized yet.

The proposed regional standard will put forward specific requirements for the canned porridge and its raw materials, including product classification, code, requirements and composition, processing, test method, inspection rules, quality indicators (e.g. physical and chemical indicators, sensory requirements, net content, soluble solids, packaging, water, fat, protein), methods of analysis, temperature and environment for product storage and transportation, labeling, packaging and so on. The use of product additives and the limit of contaminants should meet the requirements of relevant Codex standards.

e) Coverage of the main consumer protection and trade issues by existing or proposed general standards

The existing Codex tests mainly aim at some hygienic requirements for canned products during processing, but do not include the raw materials, technology, indicators, additives, processing process, hygiene and quality requirements of canned porridge.

f) Number of commodities which would need separate standards indicating whether raw, semi-processed or processed

At present, there is no need for any separate standard other than the proposed standard. Because the proposed standard will cover the raw materials of products of canned porridge as well.

g) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental bodies

None identified at this time.

5. Relevance to the Codex strategic objectives

With regard to the Codex Alimentarius Commission's 2026-2031 strategic plan, the development of regional standard for canned porridge will help to improve product quality and ensure a safer consumption of the product, which are vital issues related to fair international trade practice of these specific foods. Therefore, the development of the regional standard is closely related to the identification of needs and new issues which is mentioned in "Strategic Goal 1: Respond to Members' needs for protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade in an evolving global landscape by developing science-based standards and related texts".

The proposal is also closely related to the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025, Objective 1.1 (Identify needs and emerging issues) and Objective 1.2 (Prioritise needs and emerging issues), under Goal 1 (Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner).

6. Information on the relation between the proposal and other existing Codex documents as well as other ongoing work

This proposal will take into account existing applicable Codex standards and guidelines, such as the:

- *General principles of food hygiene* (CXC 1-1969)
- *Code of hygienic practice for low and acidified low acid canned foods* (CXC 23-1979)
- *Code of hygienic practice for aseptically processed and packaged low-acid foods* (CXC 40-1993)
- *Code of practice on measures to reduce direct sources of food contamination by chemicals* (CXC 49-2001)
- *Code of practice for the prevention and reduction of inorganic tin contamination in canned foods* (CXC 60-2005)
- *General standard for labeling of prepackaged foods* (CXS 1-1985)
- *General standard for food additives* (CXS 192-1995)
- *General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed* (CXS 193-1995)
- *Standard for rice* (CXS 198-1995)

- *Recommended methods of analysis and sampling (CXS 234-1999)*

7. Identification of any requirement for and availability of expert scientific advice

The need for expert scientific advice has not been identified.

8. Identification of any need for technical input to the standard from external bodies so that this can be planned for

The need for support from external agencies has not been identified.

9. The proposed timeline for completion of the new work

The work is expected to be completed within two sessions of CCASIA, subject to the approval of the new work by CAC.

Annex

Product definitions

The different kinds of canned porridge in Asia is shown in Table 3

Table 3 - Different kinds of canned porridge in Asia

Picture	Countries	Product description
	China	Sweet taste, made mainly from eight or more kinds of plant-based raw materials such as grains, beans and dried fruits, with or without the addition of other auxiliary materials, through processing
	China	Sweet taste, made mainly from water, cereal, fish maw and edible bird's nest, sugar, etc.
	China	Salty taste, made mainly from water, rice, meat, preserved egg, salt, etc.
	China	Plain taste, made mainly from water, oat, quinoa, etc.
	China	Plain taste, made only from white rice and water
	China	Sweet taste, main raw materials: water, sugar cane syrup, glutinous rice, Cereals, peanuts, red beans, longan, job's tears, etc.
	China	Salty taste, made mainly from water, white rice, abalone, salt, etc.

Picture	Countries	Product description
	Republic of Korea	Sweet taste, main ingredients: water, pumpkin, red bean, etc.
	Republic of Korea	Salty taste, main ingredients: glutinous rice, abalone, carrot, etc.
	Republic of Korea	Sweet taste, main raw materials: water, pumpkin, etc.
	Japan	Plain taste, made only from white rice and water
	Thailand	Sweet taste, main raw materials: jasmine rice, oat bran, etc.