

APPENDIX IV

PROJECT DOCUMENT

GUIDANCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF SANITARY REQUIREMENTS

1. Purpose of proposed Standard

The purpose of the work is to develop a guidance document that will provide information and how countries can simplify and standardize the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements included in official certificates, based on ontology methods. Harmonized syntax and semantics would turn the negotiation for a new certificate, and the update of an existing one, into a very objective activity. Also, it will turn the e-CERT implementation easier, because digital verifications can be implemented and automatized into processes and an accurate language is very important to avoid confusion on what is intended to achieve. The guidance would not be mandatory and are not specific for electronic documents.

The following activities are proposed:

- Assess and refine the pilot results: validate the theoretical and methodological foundations and results.
- Gather information: Identify and reference any existing and relevant documents, guidelines, and regulations related to the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements in official certificates, including any existing standards or best practices.
- Explore new possibilities: understand how existing and future Codex guidelines can incorporate a section with an ontology-like structure to represent guidance knowledge in a structured format.
- Develop the guidance:
 - Use examples from the pilot results to demonstrate how to use the methodology and demonstrate the results of simplification and standardization.
 - Provide key direction on how to analyze and simplify an existing attestation/statement, and how to create a simple, accurate, and clear new attestation/statement when needed.
 - Provide key direction on creating ontologies and taxonomies to organize the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements included in official certificates into a hierarchical classification system based on their characteristics, such as the type of requirement, the hazard, or the level of risk it represents.
 - Provide key direction on how to implement and maintain the taxonomy and ontology into the relevant systems, processes, or tools.

2. Relevance and Timeliness

Countries are facing challenges to implement electronic certification systems. The OECD paper entitled *Electronic Sanitary Certificates for Trade in Animal Products (2023)* identified that “*At present, there is no “one” international standardised sanitary certificate schema for all countries that can facilitate the standardised exchange and processing of e-sanitary certificates*”.

Creating an XML file for electronic certification embedded with information that is presented on paper is not difficult. The challenge, and the real watershed, is to create digital and automated processes that will improve safety at the same time that reduces unnecessary processes at borders.

Digital transformation seems a buzzword nowadays, but the truth is that it can only be achieved with new processes and new tools, designed with a digital mindset, using and reusing public and private data as appropriate and as needed throughout the supply chain.

The standardization proposed will support establishment of a more digital mindset among countries for the the attestations or statements included in sanitary certificates, making the journey to the electronic certification easier and faster. The lack of schema highlighted by OECD can be at least minimize, or even solved.

3. The main aspects to be covered

The proposed work is intended to provide guidance to countries in simplifying and standardizing attestations and statements, when required in official certificates. The proposed work will also use the results of the pilot project to demonstrate how this simplification and standardization could lead to a broader, structured taxonomy of statements/attestations that could facilitate greater eCert adoption and use.

The guidance will encompass definitions, methods, tools, and processes designed to simplify and harmonize representation in a manner accessible to non-experts in ontology and related techniques. This approach will enable easy adoption for those new to these concepts. It will also guide countries through a seamless transition

from the current (as-is) to the desired (to-be) scenario, remove ambiguities and establish univocal relationships between the natural language text of the requirement and its translation into triples.

Furthermore, the guidance will detail the use of attributes to represent variables of a requirement that may differ based on location, procedure, or any other variation, such as a fixed value or a temperature range.

4. Assessment against the Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities

The proposal is consistent with the criteria as follows:

General Criterion: Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries.

The proposed new work will enable a more organized and systematized approach to sanitary requirements, that can be applied from production to certification of plant and animal products. This holistic structure will leverage controls allowing automated checks to be performed by autonomous systems. Better processes lead to better results, and in this case, deliver a safer product for consumption.

Criteria applicable to General Subjects

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

The development of the proposed standard would assist in achieving harmonization at global level, facilitate the agreement of requirements and also the control of their compliance by the national authority.

b) Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work

Refer to scope of work above.

c) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies)

Similar work was performed for other areas, like WCO and WHO as explained in the Introduction above.

d) Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardisation

The deliverables of the working group will be proposed as a new standard.

e) Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue

Manage hundreds of certificate models may lead to errors and inefficient processes and controls. Countries are having difficulties to implement electronic certification systems mainly related to the incorporation of the e-CERT document into the existing processes. The standardization will enable that new processes may be designed and implemented based on data collection and reuse, private-public interoperability and track and trace strategies.

5. Relevance to Codex strategic objectives

The project proposal outlined above relates to the Codex Alimentarius Commission's Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 in several ways:

1. Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food safety and quality issues: The proposal aims to standardize representation of sanitary requirements in the attestations or statements included in official certificates, and develop a global standard for sanitary requirements that can be digitally processed, which would contribute to international food safety standards and facilitate trade.
2. Ensure the application of risk analysis principles in the development of Codex standards: By creating a standardized, digitally processable set of sanitary requirements, the proposal would allow for improved risk analysis and data-driven decision-making.
3. Facilitate the effective participation of all Codex members, particularly developing countries, in the standard-setting process: The proposed standardization of sanitary requirements would simplify the process for all countries, making it easier for developing countries to participate in trade negotiations and comply with international food safety standards.
4. Implement effective and efficient work management systems and practices: The proposal focuses on creating a harmonized and semantic standard for sanitary requirements, which would lead to more efficient work management systems and practices in the context of sanitary certificates and e-CERT implementation.
5. Strengthen communication and promote the use and understanding of Codex standards and related texts: By standardizing the sanitary requirements, the proposal would make it easier for countries to

communicate, understand, and implement Codex standards in their trade agreements and certification processes.

6. Information on the relation between the proposal and other Codex documents

The proposed standard creation will help to address the objectives presented by the documents below.

1. Codex Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and use of Generic Official certificates (CXG 38-2001)
2. Principles for Traceability/Product Tracing as a Tool within a Food Inspection and Certification System (CXG 60-2006)

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

Taxonomy and ontology experts are required to establish the base on what the project will be implemented. The project aims at standardising the representation of existing knowledge without adding any new knowledge and it demands a multidisciplinary team. Depending on the achievements, additional expert advice from the FAO or WHO, may be sought should need arise.

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

Technical input will be necessary from external consultants and domain experts in order achieve the best possible results.

9. Proposed timeline for completion of the new work, including the start date, the proposed date for adoption at Step 5, and the proposed date for adoption by the Commission; the timeframe for developing a standard should normally not exceed five years

Subject to the Codex Alimentarius Commission approval, it is expected that the new work can be completed within two or three sessions of CCFICS.