

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX COMMITTEE ON SPICES AND CULINARY HERBS

Fifth Session

Virtual, 20 - 29 April 2021

Opening remarks

Mr. D. Sathiyam IFS, Secretary, Spices Board

Hon. Chairman of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Dr. Guilherme Antonio da Costa Júnior,

Hon. Chairman of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs, Dr. M. R. Sudharshan,

Respected Chairperson of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, Ms. Rita Teatota,

Representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization of the United Nations,

Representatives from the Codex Secretariat,

Delegates and observers,

Ladies and gentlemen -

Namaste, and a very Good morning / good afternoon / good evening to all of you!

It is with great honour and pleasure that I wish you, **on behalf of the Government of India**, a warm welcome to this fifth session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs, CCSC5.

I earnestly hope all of you are keeping safe along with your families in these very trying times of the global pandemic, Covid-19. Its recent resurgence seems to be quickly undermining the good results achieved world over in tackling the first wave. In the face of adversity, we are learning our lessons and adapting well, yet the path to overcome the pandemic seems still long.

It is heartening and encouraging to note that even in the midst of this difficult situation, the member countries have shown tremendous interest in the spices and culinary herbs committee. In fact, we now have nearly 50 member countries participating in this virtual session, which is way more than what used to be in the past sessions.

The current session, i.e, CCSC 5 stands in contrast from the past four sessions, by being the first session ever to be held virtually from start to finish - and CCSC is proud to be the first Codex Commodity Committee to take this online route.

In a way this decision was inevitable – as physical sessions became impossible due to the pandemic. I am glad, rather than waiting indefinitely for the situation to improve, we chose to carry on with the works of the committee using all the means available at our disposal.

Having opted for the Virtual sessions, we do realize that these sessions would bring in significant challenges to the organizers, the Chair as well as the delegates.

Firstly, there is the time pressure. In the physical sessions, we had six hours of deliberations every day of the session; now it is reduced to three. This has been addressed to a considerable extent by the preparatory works already done by the Committee and the Codex / CCSC secretariats. The electronic working groups too continued with their work during the time when the committee session was delayed due to the pandemic. Also, the past weeks have seen several preparatory meetings between the secretariats, eWG chairs, regional coordinating committees and such. I am sure, all these would sufficiently compensate for the limitations of time associated with the virtual session.

The second challenge is technological and logistical. With the chair, secretariats, interpreters and even members of delegation of the same country are distributed across the globe, I am yet to fully grasp the challenges in ensuring effective and efficient deliberations on technical subjects. However, we do have before

us two recent examples of two virtual Codex events, viz. the CAC43 in September 2020 and CCGP32 in February 2021; And their success gives us confidence in going forward.

Additionally, the dynamics of human interactions during virtual sessions may not be the same that happen during the physical sessions. Perhaps the physical sessions support much closer engagements among the members of different delegations, their interactions often continue beyond the normal duration of sessions, and this could often positively contribute to the outcome of the deliberations.

Even with all these challenges, we are hopeful and confident of having an efficient session of CCSCCH 5; there are seven draft standards that will be taken up for discussion by the plenary session over the next six session days, and perhaps some of these will advance to the next stages of the Codex step procedure.

Given the large number of spices and culinary herbs waiting in the ranks for consideration by the committee, it would be pertinent at this stage to have a thought about the future sessions of the committee too.

It seems an obvious and logical choice to bring in 'grouping of spices' to cover more ground quickly. Indeed, it is heartening to note that there is an agenda item under the new work proposals which seeks to address this.

Although grouping approaches have been tried by other Codex committees in the past, it has never been tried at the scale it would need to be tried by the spices committee; so the challenges are not small. But given the past track record of this committee – which has achieved four adopted codex standards in four sessions - this is indeed a worthy challenge.

With these words, I would like to again extend a very warm welcome, on behalf of India, to all the distinguished participants in this online session.

I wish all of you very effective, constructive and productive deliberations in the coming days of the CCSCCH session.

Thank you all for your participation in CCSCCH 5 and for your kind attention.

Ms. Rita Teatitia IAS, - Chairperson, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India

A very warm welcome from Delhi. The last session, as has been pointed out of this meeting was held physically in India at Trivandrum in the state of Kerala, over two years ago. And that's a time that now seems like a world away, and a very long time ago, which the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic which has resulted, not just in a severe global crisis, but has also altered the way the world works. And I think that the Codex functioning has been no exception to the changes in our working that we have seen around us.

Another positive, that has, however emerged out of this crisis is the fact that globally, people are paying more attention to their health. There's definitely been a shift to healthier diets, and people have started to draw inspiration from ancient wisdom. By moving towards our traditional foods, more than ever before.

Across the globe people recognize the value of traditional spices and condiments like turmeric, ginger, garlic, black pepper and so on. And they're proven performance as antiviral and antimicrobial agents that can fight infections. The golden milk that is milk with turmeric in it now needs no introduction, anywhere in the world, for the benefits that it offers to consumers in terms of health and immunity.

Spices are the building blocks of flavor in food preparations. Globally, the food industry depends largely on spices as taste and flavor makers. Consumers in many countries prefer the natural colors and flavors of plant origin, instead of synthetic ones, and I'm happy that India remains the cradle as well as well as one of the major producers and exporters of spices, around the world.

However, the higher economic value added to spices has always had the potential for unscrupulous and intentional adulteration of these commodities. Spices tend to be susceptible to adulteration, as they are often sold in ground or powdered form, rendering them as targets for substitution or alteration with low cost imitation products or fillers.

This economically motivated adulteration, is a major malpractice, and such practices can extend beyond quality and fraud as they may cause serious negative effects on health and safety of the consumer. And therefore, we need to be extremely vigilant, particularly in the regulatory space, or to such practices.

I believe it is for this reason that it is all the more important that we have harmonized Codex standards for spices products in the global trade. And this is a work that needs the highest priority. In order to ensure the safety and quality of these spices and culinary herbs that are being traded across the world.

India on its spot has created a responsible regulatory system that focuses on globally benchmarked process and product standards related to food. Food Safety and trade related issues are addressed through standardization in terms of quality and safety, and these are effectively implemented through a systematic

regulatory oversight and compliance by the food industry.

Spices and culinary herbs have been one of the major commodity groups for which India has certainly developed nearly 30 mandatory national standards under the food safety and standards, regulations. These standards have been developed by duly considering the quality and nature of the spices, being consumed, as well as traded. And these standards have helped us to restrict fraudulent practices and adulteration.

Further, it's important to mention that testing remains an important component of any food control system, carefully planned programs of sampling and testing provide us with assurance that hygiene controls applied by food chain operators, result in safe food products that comply with national regulations and meet international food safety requirements.

In so far as food control issues and spices are concerned. I believe that it's time for us to fix. Focus on gradually shifting from an end-product testing approach to preventative controls approach through adequate process monitoring along the entire value chain including the production practices. To this end, India has begun to establish and provide data to Codex system based on production chains, market surveillance for setting harmonized standards for majorly grown spices and culinary herbs in the country.

A detailed study conducted on contaminating mycotoxins and frequently rejected spices is something that is very important in case of dried spices and culinary herbs. I must mention here that an agenda pertaining to aflatoxin and ochratoxin is kept pending in the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) due to lack of sufficient data. India is committed to submit a reliable and scientifically collected occurrence data – especially in case of aflatoxin and ochratoxin as well as for lead in Spices – to the CCCF. These data would be submitted at the earliest to GEMS database in order to enable CCCF to establish the levels considering the data from the major spice producing region of the globe.

India also believes that countries should contextualize, adopt and implement the Codes of Practice for prevention and reduction of contaminants in reference to spices/culinary herbs. India also urges all the delegates to submit data pertaining to the commodity to Codex, after implementation of such CoPs or guidelines.

Despite the pandemic, India through its Spice Board and in collaboration with FAO launched a project on “*Strengthening Spice Value Chain in India and improving market access through capacity building*” by conducting a virtual workshop in October 2020. This project is being supported by the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) of WTO and implemented by FAO and Spices Board, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Govt of India.

India hopes that the key points and outcomes arrived from this project will be effectively considered for assessing the system to introduce an electronic system of linking farmers to exporters, thereby improving traceability through certification in order to ensure the credibility of these products.

These are some of the issues that make the outcomes of the current agenda items in the CCSC meeting a very important step in the right direction.

CCSC in its previous 4 sessions has deliberated and approved standards for Cumin, Thyme, Black, White & Green Pepper and Dried garlic. The spirit and stature of these four sessions indicate the possible influx of relevant proposals for standardization of other spices and culinary herbs as well. The presence of regulators and bodies that administer quality laws would certainly generate enough of academic information as well as scientific data on crops and safety & quality standards.

With India hosting CCSC, a culture of quality has started pervading the Indian spices sector. True to the cardinal principles of Codex Alimentarius Commission, the world's single anchoring platform for all matters relating to quality food, CCSC has started sending waves of positive signals to all the spices and herb producing countries on the basics to evolve harmonization in standards to ensure fair practices in trade besides ensuring safety of consumers.

The committee in its current session has a lot of work on its platter that is filled with discussions on 7 standards and 3 new work proposals. I am positive that the CCSC assembly would deliberate, discuss and adopt these standards in order to pave the way for development and adoption of more standards. With its strategy to develop group standards, India as the host country is positively hopeful that the work of the committee will be streamlined to a great extent which will ensure coverage of about 109 commodities that are currently classified as spices and culinary herbs into respective Codex standards.

India hopes that the onward march in organizing future sessions of the CCSC will bring closer association for transparent business in evolving standards and coming to science based conclusions to set them to realize the objectives of the Committee in the larger interest of the world.

On behalf of India and FSSAI, once again I extend a warm welcome to all the delegates into this virtual world of CCSC5 and wish for fruitful deliberations in the next 4 days that would culminate, hopefully, in the adoption

of most of the Standards that would be deliberated.

Stay safe and Stay healthy

Mr. Konda Chavva, Assistant FAO Representative in India

Namaste!

Hon'ble

Chair of Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), Guilherme Antonio da Costa Júnior (*pronounced as Gia-me Da-Costa*)

Chair of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs, Dr. M. R. Sudharshan

Distinguished Guests

From Spices Board

Shri D. Sathiyam, Secretary, Spices Board India, the Indian Secretariat for CCSCH committee,

From the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

Ms. Rita Teotia, Chairperson FSSAI

From WHO

Dr. Roderico H. Ofrin, WHO Representative in India

Esteemed Delegates from Codex Members Countries, Colleagues and Friends.

Good morning and good afternoon! These are very unusual times. I hope you and your families are safe and healthy.

On behalf of FAO, first I wish to thank the Spices Board of India and FSSAI for hosting this 5th session of Codex Committee.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, an international body jointly established in 1963 by FAO and WHO, with membership of over 188 countries, works for development and adoption of internationally accepted standards and guidelines pertaining to food.

The C O D E X A L I M E N T A R I U S international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice contribute to the safety, quality and fairness of international food trade. Consumers can trust the safety and quality of the food products they buy and importers can trust that the food they ordered will be in accordance with their specifications.

Public concerns about food safety issues often place Codex at the centre of global debates. Veterinary drugs, pesticides, food additives and contaminants are some of the issues discussed in Codex meetings. Codex standards are based on sound science provided by independent international risk assessment bodies or ad-hoc consultations organized by FAO and WHO.

While being recommendations for voluntary application by members, Codex standards serve in many cases as a basis for national legislation.

The reference made to Codex food safety standards in the WTO's SPS (Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures) Agreement means that Codex has far reaching implications for resolving trade disputes. WTO members that wish to apply stricter food safety measures than those set by Codex may be required to justify these measures scientifically.

We congratulate the Spices Board of India for its preeminent role in establishing Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH) in 2013, which is one of the subsidiary bodies under Codex Alimentarius Commission.

As we all know, India is the 'Spice Bowl of World' and the glory of Indian spices are recognized all over the world. Indian spices are widely known for their exquisite aroma, texture, flavour and medicinal value in domestic as well as in the international markets.

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has registered 109 commodities classified as spices and culinary herbs, the development of Codex standards for these commodities will help improving international spice trade. The participation of major spice trading countries like North America, Latin America and Europe, in the CCSCH's session is very important to ensure the development of effective and universally accepted Codex standards for spices. CCSCH committee has produced 4 full-fledged Codex standards in the five years since its commencement, making it one of the most productive of the presently active Codex

committees.

Predominant food safety and quality issues are microbial contamination, excess pesticide residues mycotoxin contamination specifically aflatoxins, filth and impurities. The developed countries, being the major importers of spices, have insisted on strict standards, which has implications on spice trade globally.

FAO is making efforts to improve and harmonize standards by implementing specific steps and building capacities at various level to ensure food safety and fair trade, and protecting producer and consumer interests, and encouraging deliberations towards harmonization of global quality standards for spices and culinary herbs.

In India spices are grown in small landholdings, improving spice value chain, based on codex food standards, will lead to the acceptability of farmers' products in the global markets and better price realization for small and marginal farmers.

FAO has extensive global and international experience in addressing food safety issues along the food value chain and know-how specifically on building capacities of the public and private sector and research institutions to deliver training for strengthening the spice value chains.

FAO and the Spices Board, Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) with the support of STDF, World Trade Organization (WTO) aim to enhance capacities of key stakeholders in the Spice Value Chain to expand production and exports of safe and high-quality spices (based on Codex standards) in India and export markets. Lastly, I wish you all the best for the productive discussion/deliberations sessions on draft standard of selected spices and culinary Herbs.

Thank you very much.

Stay well and safe. Namaste.

Dr. Roderico H. Ofrin, WHO Representative in India

Dr. M R Sudharshan, Chair of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs CCSCCH

Mr D Sathiyam, Secretary, Spices Board

Ms Rita Teatota, Chairperson, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

Dr. Guilherme da Costa, Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission

Mr Konda Chavva, Assistant FAO Representative in India

Representatives from FSSAI, international experts of the CCSCCH, officials of the Spices Board of India, and the Codex Alimentarius Commission, esteemed colleagues and all participants — Good afternoon!

It is my privilege to be here with you for the fifth meeting of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs.

Do allow me to thank and congratulate the Codex Commission and FSSAI for their leadership role and sustained efforts in contributing towards strengthening codex structures not just in India but the world to facilitate international trade of food commodities through the development of globally-accepted standards.

India is the the home of spices and has a long history of trading in spices with the ancient civilisations of Rome and China. Today, Indian spices are sought-after globally for their exquisite aroma, texture, flavour and medicinal value. It is the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices; and accounts for half of the global trading in spices. India also has the largest domestic market for spices in the world.

I am delighted to note the significant strides the committee has made since its conception in the development of harmonised standards for spices which have been adopted by Codex including those for cumin, thyme, pepper and garlic.

I am positive that these standards will be used by the member countries worldwide to align their national regulations and standards with respect to spices.

In order to be a successful food exporter, a country must produce food that is acceptable to consumers in other countries and which complies with the statutory requirements of the importing countries. Compliance with the statutory or mandatory requirements of importing countries is an unavoidable and essential prerequisite to successful and profitable food export.

Adopting the 'Farm to Fork' approach, all food must be traceable throughout the entire supply chain, including exporters from developing countries and should be safe and organic, free from contaminants and unsafe additives.

Both the producers as well as the food regulators have a critical role in ensuring compliance with food safety,

quality and sustainability standards which is becoming increasingly demanding because of the concern around food safety, especially in the current context of COVID-19.

In addition, an increasing number of importing countries require agreed inspection and examination procedures as well as certification from the governments of exporting countries that the products are in compliance with the quality and safety requirements.

WHO, has been a proud partner of FSSAI in this endeavour of ensuring quality control of food produced in the country, closely working with colleagues on building institutional capacities not just in India but in the south east Asia region to adapt and implement codex standards to strengthen food safety systems and the collaboration between key vigilance stakeholders in India and neighbouring countries.

Apart from establishing harmonised standards for food countries must ensure that food products are not harmful to the consumer and can be traded safely between countries. For this, they need to invest in:

- ensuring institutional coordination,
- availability of technical skills and equipment,
- implementation of updated standards,
- a responsive monitoring system,
- awareness of safety and quality control among food handlers

I applaud the Codex Commission and FSSAI for creating an enabling environment for countries to align their operating activities with national and international standards and targets, and for consumers to demand healthier and safer foods.

Apart from supporting farmers, food, conforming to international standards, contributes to increased export and contributes to the 'Make in India' campaign of the Government of India.

WHO is committed to working with the government towards:

- strengthening the functioning of Codex structure in India through effective engagement in Codex activities and setting standard processes to make food systems healthy;
- facilitating improved inter-country coordination and collaboration among Codex partners in the South East Asia Region, including supporting common positions in international platforms for the expansion of global food trade while ensuring food safety!

Thank you for your time!

Dr. A. B. Rema Shree, Spices Board

A very good morning / good afternoon / good evening to all the distinguished and esteemed dignitaries, delegates and colleagues who have joined today in this online edition of the fifth session of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs.

Today, we had the privilege of hearing Mr Guilherme Antonio da Costa Jr., Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Mr. Chairperson, your kind words of encouragement will provide a sense of direction to the upcoming CCSCH5 session. On behalf of all the participants, I would like to thank you for your gracious presence in this opening session.

Dr. M. R. Sudharshan has been at the helm of CCSCH committee since its inception, and under his guidance the committee has established itself as one of the most productive Codex Committees active today, with four adopted Codex standards in spices and culinary herbs in as many sessions. Mr. Chairperson, I extend all our warm gratitude to you, for your kind words of guidance in your opening remarks and I wish you yet another productive and efficient committee session.

Ms. Rita Teaotia, the chairperson of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, and the head of the national codex contact point in India, graced us with a thoughtful and encouraging inaugural address which touched up on the importance of Codex activities and the relevance of Codex standards. On behalf of all of us, I thank you for your participation in this opening session.

Mr. D. Sathiyam IFS, as the head of the Spices Board, the organization which functions as the Secretariat of CCSCH committee on behalf of India, has been the guiding force in all the activities that went into organizing this virtual session of the committee. I would like to place on record, on behalf of all the participants, our warm gratitude to you.

I thank Dr. Roderico H. Ofrin, WHO representative in India, and Mr. Konda Chavva, Assistant FAO

representative in India, for their participation in this opening session and for addressing the members of the committee.

I would also like to place on record our gratitude to the colleagues in Codex Secretariat, who worked tirelessly with the Indian Secretariat of this committee and guided us with patience and encouragement, in organizing this first ever online session of a Codex Commodity Committee.

We have seven draft standard documents which are coming up for discussion in this session of the committee. Even during the inevitable delays imposed by the effect of COVID in holding a session of this committee, the eWG chairs and co-chairs who coordinated the work on these standards have worked tirelessly to make the documents as refined as possible, in order to facilitate their discussions in the plenary session. On behalf of all the participants, I extend our warm gratitude to all the eWG chairs.

I would like to thank all the distinguished delegates from all the member countries who have joined this session of the CCSCCH committee. The fact that this fifth session is seeing the largest ever number of countries and delegates, signifies the great interest that the members have for the work of this committee.

Finally, I would like to thank all the participants who are working behind the scenes to bring this committee together yet again – this time in virtual mode; the interpreters who have joined us from across the globe, the officials who provide technological support for the online session, and all other colleagues who are working to make this session a success.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you all once again for your participation in this opening session of CCSCCH5, and wish you successful and productive deliberations in the days ahead.