

CODEx ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
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Agenda Item 2.1, 7.3

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

COMMENTS OF MEXICO WITH THE SUPPORT OF CUBA, CHILE, GUATEMALA, URUGUAY

Item 2.1 Request for information on the use of the "country of harvest" declaration in the labelling of spices (CX/SCH 25/8/2 Add.1) and Item 7.3 Update of the template for standards on spices and culinary herbs (CX/SCH 25/8/10).

For the eighth session of the CCSCH, Mexico, supported by Chile, wishes to express its considerations regarding the proposal of the Codex Committees on Food Labelling (CCFL), which at its 47th session (2023) agreed:

- i. Ratify all labelling provisions of the Standard for dried floral parts: saffron, except country of origin (8.3.1) and country of harvest (8.3.2); and
- ii. Refer the above two provisions to the CCSCH for reconsideration, and request the CCSCH to clarify the distinction between country of origin and country of harvest and to explain why the country of harvest provision should be mandatory and how such a declaration would be beneficial for the prevention of fraud.

1. Context

The Codex Committee for Spices and Culinary Herbs has among its powers to establish those provisions that are necessary or facilitate the application of general standards, as is the case of the labeling standards developed by the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL). However, although the CCFL has established as the country of origin the country where the last change in the nature of the product is made, at the moment it has not developed additional provisions that specify what is meant by such a change or also define the country of harvest.

The countries that subscribe to this CRD wish to express that the problem we face is that the generality of the provision on matters of origin has led companies to market products with labels where the country of origin is improperly declared as the country of origin of the company that only subjected a product such as saffron or vanilla as a spice to processes that did not substantially change the product and therefore therefore not declaring the place of origin where it was grown. In these cases, in order to provide information that specifies the authenticity of the origin of a product, particularly spice or culinary herb, we believe it is appropriate that the label includes the country of harvest on a mandatory basis, when the packaging for the final consumer is carried out in a third country.

2. Justification

The decision of the CCFL not to delve into this level of generality in labeling, leaves room for each committee to clearly establish what processes a product carries out and determine whether or not they generate substantive changes in its nature. Under this hypothesis, it is the Codex Committee for Spices and Culinary Herbs itself, which could propose to the CCFL, that given the generality established in the labelling standard, and given the physicochemical characteristics of the products covered by the Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs, it should be considered that some definitions cannot be made in a general way, rather, each committee must analyze the issue according to the particular specificities of each product to be standardized.

The Codex Committee for Spices and Culinary Herbs is an area where the approach to the issue of labelling is apparently essentially simple:

Mandate
(a) develop worldwide standards for dried and dehydrated spices and culinary herbs in whole, ground, split or crushed form

(b) To maintain the necessary consultations with other international organizations during the standard-setting process in order to avoid duplication.

However, it is necessary to review the template for the preparation of the standards that emanate from the CCSHC, particularly in detail, in the labeling section. This revision will have a relevant impact that will correct commercial practices that mislead the consumer with regard to the information on the labelled products they buy.

As we will analyze below, the processes to which spices and culinary herbs that are marketed packaged are subjected do not change their nature

On the other hand, transformation that changes the nature of the product is understood to be that operation or set of operations applied to a spice or culinary herb that significantly alter its nature, in such a way that the resulting product can no longer be identified only as a spice or culinary herb in its natural or traditionally processed state. such as, for example, when they generate:

- Changes in the essential chemical composition of the product (e.g. extraction of essential oils, oleoresins, distillation, controlled fermentation that generates a new chemical profile).
- They modify the traditional way of use as a spice (e.g., converting pepper into a standardized liquid extract for use as an additive or concentrated flavoring).
- They alter recognizable botanical identity (e.g., hydrolysis, chemical or thermal extractions that remove original fibers/fabrics).
- They convert the product into a distinct ingredient according to Codex standards (e.g. oregano essential oil, paprika oleoresin, vanilla extract: they are labelled and regulated as such, not as a powder/leaf "spice").

In which case, such by-products would fall under the purview of other Codex Committees, such as the Codex Committee on Processed Fruit and Vegetables (sine die).

3. Proposal

In the case of products regulated by the Codex Committee for Spices and Culinary Herbs, all applicable processes are merely mechanical or packaging and are not capable of causing changes in the nature of the product. The product remains the same from the time of harvest until it is put on the shelf, so the country of harvest is the country of origin. This means that it is not necessary for this type of product to include a specific field on the country of harvest on the labelling, but it is sufficient to properly apply the existing labelling provisions as far as origin is concerned, unless the products are packaged in a second country after harvest, so both provisions should be present on the label.

In view of the above, the following proposals are presented:

i) For the topics of the CCSHC Codex Standards saffron and vanilla, use the following definitions:

Country of origin: the sovereign State in which the product was obtained in its natural form (i.e. where primary agricultural production, harvesting or harvesting took place) or, where the food has undergone subsequent treatment that substantially changes its physical or chemical nature, the country in which the substantive treatment giving rise to the product as it appears on the labelling was carried out.

Country of harvest: the sovereign State in which the plant raw material from which the spice or culinary herb comes was collected or collected, which includes the following activities: cultivation and harvesting (mechanized or manual), harvesting, cleaning.

ii) Consider the revision of the template for the development of Codex Standards for Culinary Spices and Herbs in Chapter 8 LABELLING, with the following proposed additions:

8.2 Country of origin and country of harvest

8.2.1 Country of origin must be declared ⁽¹⁾

8.2.2 The country of harvest can be declared (optional) ⁽²⁾

Note 1: If the country of origin coincides with the country of harvest, the country of origin is declared as the country of origin, **and it is not necessary to indicate the country of harvest.**

Note 2: In those cases where the country of origin differs from the country of harvest given the definition of country of harvest, both must be declared.

In addition, the definitions included in this document can be used in the template for further discussion by the plenary: country of origin, country of harvest, and processing that changes the nature of the product

References:

- 1 REP17/ACC, para. 83 and Appendix VI.
- 2 REP22/SCH, para. 39 and Appendix III.
- 3 SPR22/ACC, paras. 94(i) and 96.
- 4 REP22/SCH, paras. 138-142. 2 REP24/SCH, paras. 97-10
- 4 REP23/FL, paragraph 17.