



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

Eighth Session

**INFORMATION ON THE USE OF THE TERM “COUNTRY OF HARVEST” IN THE LABELLING OF
SPICES**

(Comments of Australia, Canada, the European Union, Kenya)

Australia

Australia's comments on Agenda Item 2 - Matters arising from the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies, specifically 2.1 - Request for information on the use of “country of harvest” in the labelling of spices

Australia appreciated the opportunity to provide input on this issue in response to CL 2025/07-FL. To assist CCSCH8 to consider the responses to the CL, Australia offers the following observations about the comments received:

- The circular letter process highlighted this matter to the broader Codex membership. It has drawn out useful information from members and helped to address gaps in understanding.
- The majority of members that responded share Australia's view that mandatory country of harvest should not be required.
- For the products under consideration, and others considered by this committee, the ‘country of harvest’ and ‘country of origin’ are the same. The products must undergo substantial transformation in another country for the ‘country of origin’ to differ from the ‘country of harvest’. CCSCH does not develop standards for such highly processed products.
- Mandatory country of harvest labelling does not address the problem of fraudulent claims of origin, which is the main rationale for the proposal.

Australia considers it more appropriate to address the issue of food fraud horizontally in Codex, including how the issue may be effectively managed through traceability systems, and by oversight and enforcement by competent authorities.

The Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems is an ideal forum to consider this issue, and Australia draws the attention of the committee to two guidelines under development that both provide tools that can help countries to prevent and address food fraud:

- Draft guidelines on the prevention and control of food fraud.
- Draft principles and guidelines on traceability/product tracing within a national food control system (updating CXG 60-2006).

Work on these guidelines continues in the electronic working groups of CCFICS and Australia encourages members to take part in their development.

Canada

Canada's Observations and Response to CCFL49 on Country of Harvest Labelling

Based on the responses compiled in CX/SCH 25/8/2 Add.1, Canada offers the following observations to CCFL49 regarding the use of “Country of Harvest” (COH) in the labelling of spices, particularly saffron and vanilla.

Canada appreciates the opportunity to contribute to this important discussion. We reaffirm our support for Codex's mandate to promote fair practices in food trade and protect consumers from misleading information. Canada recognizes the concerns raised by several Codex Members and Observers and aligns with the majority view that mandatory COH labelling is not appropriate.

General Observation

Canada notes that a majority of respondents (13-member countries) do not support mandatory COH labelling, citing concerns about duplication, enforcement challenges, trade barriers, and inconsistency with Codex standards (CXS 1-1985). Canada shares these concerns and emphasizes that no science and/or evidence-based justification related to safety, quality or fair-trade practices has been provided to support a mandatory COH provision.

Canada notes that divergent views on COH labelling have persisted over multiple sessions. In 2021 at CCSCH5, conflicting opinions on this issue were noted and an EWG was established to further consider this issue¹. Canada notes that there was low participation in this EWG, with 5 Members who provided comments of 13 registered. Regarding the labelling of COH, 4 Members provided comments with 2 supporting mandatory declaration of COH, and 2 supporting optional declaration².

For CCSCH6, a CL was issued to gather comments on the saffron standard, and there were 4 responses related to this provision, again with divergent views³. In addition, a virtual working group took place prior to the plenary, with approximately 8 participants, concluding that “No consensus could be reached on the mandatory indication of the country of harvest, which is kept in square brackets for the Plenary.”⁴.

CCSCH6 discussed the issue, and while noting the divergent views and lack of consensus in the virtual working group, proposed to keep the text as proposed by the EWG with mandatory declaration of the country of harvest. There were reservations to this decision at CCSCH6⁵ as well as reservations at CAC45⁶.

Canada acknowledges that these discussions occurred during and/or right after the pandemic, when virtual meetings, heavy Codex schedules, and limited capacity likely contributed to low engagement and limited input. For example, the virtual working group for saffron was one of 5 virtual working groups that took place in advance of CCSCH6. This environment may have contributed to reduced number of comments to CLs and low participation in the both the EWG and the virtual working group prior to CCSCH6.

This is in contrast with the most recent comments to the CL⁷, containing 41 pages of detailed comments from 19 Member countries, 1 Member Organization, and 3 Observer organizations. The current comments, provided after time for thorough consideration and analysis, show that the majority of respondents do not support mandatory COH labelling,

Given the extensive deliberations across CCSCH, CCFL, CCEXEC, and CAC, Canada urges that any shift from optional to mandatory labelling provisions not be taken lightly but be approached with careful consideration, clear justification, and consensus. Furthermore, the Codex Procedural Manual requires that any deviation from general Codex provisions be fully justified.

Moving forward, Canada encourages a balanced, evidence-based approach that reflects the views of the broader Codex membership and supports practical, enforceable standards.

Thematic Observations

1. Country of Origin vs Country of Harvest

- Canada agrees with the respondents that noted COO and COH are often the same for spices under CCSCH standards, as further processing (e.g., grinding, packaging) does not change the nature of the product.
- Canada supports CCSCH's inclusion of a definition for “Country of Harvest” in its Glossary of Terms, as proposed by some Members, to clarify its optional use.

2. Clarifying “Change in Nature”

- Canada concurs with those Members that have the view that a clear understanding of what constitutes a “change in nature” is essential for determining COO.
- Canada agrees that the fundamental issue is about the inconsistent application of existing country of origin labelling provisions.

3. Fraud and Misleading Labelling

¹ REP21/SCH paras 88, 98

² CX/SCH 22/6/3

³ CX/SCH 22/6/3 Add.1

⁴ CRD02 to CCSCH6

⁵ REP22/SCH paras 33-36

⁶ REP22/CAC para 95

⁷ CX/SCH 25/8/2 Add.1

- Canada acknowledges, as do others, that misuse of COO declarations occurs (e.g., declaring packaging country as COO). However, Canada agrees with those Members that have the view that adding a COH requirement would not prevent such practices and could introduce new avenues for misleading labelling. Canada underscores that robust traceability and enforcement are more effective in addressing food fraud and misleading labelling than adding mandatory labelling requirements.
- Canada also notes the ongoing work at CCFICS on food fraud and encourages Members to participate in this important work. These guidelines focus on the prevention and control of food fraud and can be a valuable tool for competent authorities and food business operators.

4. Enforcement Challenges

- Canada shares the concerns raised by others regarding the lack of validated methods to verify COH and the burden this would place on enforcement systems.
- Canada supports strengthening traceability systems and enforcement mechanisms, as emphasized by work at CCFICS. We note the current work at CCFICS to update the guidelines and principles for traceability, including the introduction of fraud prevention into draft revisions, and encourage Members to participate and provide input.

5. Marketing and Promotion

- Canada agrees with Members who expressed the view that voluntary claims (e.g., “*Harvested in Madagascar*”, “*Grown in Iran*”) are the appropriate tool to promote origin-linked attributes, provided they are truthful and not misleading. Voluntary claims provide more flexibility to producers to highlight specific attributes, growing regions, or other qualities.

6. Trade and Regulatory Impacts

- Canada notes concerns raised in comments to the CL that mandatory COH labelling could:
 - Increase burden on food business operators and authorities
 - Create labelling inflexibility in dynamic supply chains
 - Risk inconsistencies across Codex texts
 - Confuse consumers and duplicate COO information

Conclusion

Canada appreciates the thoughtful contributions from Member countries and recognizes the shared commitment to enhancing transparency, traceability, and consumer protection in spice labelling.

Canada supports maintaining Country of Origin (COO) as the primary labelling requirement under Codex standards, with Country of Harvest (COH) clearly defined in the glossary for optional use. Clarifying what constitutes a “change in nature” is essential to ensure a consistent application of COO provisions and reduce ambiguity.

In reviewing the responses to the CL, Canada does not believe there is sufficient justification nor clear consensus to support establishing a new, precedent-setting mandatory requirement for COH labelling. In contrast, the comments to the CL raise a number of concerns that Canada shares, including the risk of risks duplicating existing requirements, complicating enforcement, and introducing trade and regulatory burdens.

Canada believes fraud prevention, and marketing decisions can be addressed through:

- Strengthened traceability and enforcement, aligned with CCFICS work on food fraud and traceability, and
- Voluntary, truthful origin claims that support marketing without misleading consumers.

Canada remains committed to leading a pragmatic, science-based approach that protects consumers, supports fair trade, and ensures Codex standards remain fit for purpose in a dynamic global marketplace.

The European Union

European Union Competence

European Union Vote

Standard for dried floral parts – dried saffron; country of harvest labelling

6. CAC47:

- (i) requested the Codex Secretariat to issue a Circular Letter (CL) to Members and Observers seeking potential solutions to the use of Country of Harvest (COH) in food labelling of spices, recognizing the concerns that had been expressed by Codex Members.
- (iii) invited CCSCH8 to also consider responses to the CL and make its own observations to CCFL49;

The European Union (EU) notes that the *General standard for the labelling of pre-packaged foods* CXS 1-1985 requires that the country of origin must be indicated only if its omission was misleading:

“4.5 Country of origin

4.5.1 The country of origin of the food shall be declared if its omission would mislead or deceive the consumer.

4.5.2 When a food undergoes processing in a second country which changes its nature, the country in which the processing is performed shall be considered to be the country of origin for the purposes of labelling.”

Spices are processed products derived from plants. Post-harvest processes such as removal of dust, sorting, classifying, matching, cutting up, storage, transport and packaging do not change the nature of the spices.

In the case of saffron, being a perishable commodity, drying must take place immediately after harvest. Thus, the country of origin and country of harvest is the same. It is the view of the EU that, in the case of saffron, grinding does not change the nature of the product and therefore does not affect the country of origin. In other words, the country of origin should remain the country where the saffron was harvested. To avoid ambiguity, this equivalence should be explicitly stated in the Codex standard: for saffron, the country of “origin” shall always correspond to the country of “harvest.”

For vanilla, the situation can be different as this spice may undergo processes, such as fermentation, in countries other than where it was harvested. These processes can alter the nature of the vanilla, meaning that the country of origin may differ from the country of harvest. Only in such cases, the indication of the country of harvest, in addition to the country of origin, should be mandatory.

Distinction between country of origin and country of harvest

Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables and most spices require the indication of the country of origin. Further, all spice standards include the provision of ‘country of harvest’, thus, offering the flexibility to make its labelling optional or mandatory. This shows that the concept of the country of harvest is well understood and should be mandatory in those standards and circumstances where there is valid reason to do so.

CCSCH7 considered CRD26 and noted the definition for “country of origin” as contained in the *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* (CXS 1-1985) (“when a food undergoes processing in a second country which changes its nature, the country in which the processing is performed shall be considered to be the country of origin for the purposes of labelling”) was generally broad and therefore applicable to all foods.

CCSCH7 further noted that there was no definition in Codex for “country of harvest”. However, the glossary of terms that CCSCH had developed to facilitate its work, included a definition for the term “harvest”: “the act or process of gathering agricultural crops.” Based on this, the “country of harvest is the country in which the gathering of the crops takes place”.

CRD26 further notes that whilst the country of origin and the country of harvest may be the same for many herbs and spices, these are two different terms. As such it will be beneficial for CCSCH to include in its glossary of terms definitions for country of origin and country of harvest as it specifically applies to spices and culinary herbs.

In the case of saffron, its quality characteristics vary considerably depending on the country where it has been cultivated. Therefore, the labelling provisions should be unequivocal on this piece of information in order to provide clear and reliable information to consumers.

Some operators may think that the treatment of saffron, including mixing saffron from different countries, can qualify to change the label even though this process does not change the nature of the product. This was the rationale behind CCSCH6’s recommendation for the standard for saffron to be adopted with the mandatory indication of the country of harvest and of country of origin in its labelling provisions.

Considering the above, The EU proposes the following definition for ‘country of harvest’ to CCSCH8: “country of harvest is the country in which the gathering/picking of the crops/plants takes place”.

Kenya

General Comment: Kenya recognizes the importance of transparent and accurate labelling in promoting consumer confidence, fair trade, and preventing fraud in the global spice trade. However, Kenya maintains that the existing provision on Country of Origin (COO) in the General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985) sufficiently addresses traceability and consumer information needs when properly implemented and enforced. Introducing a mandatory declaration of Country of Harvest (COH) may create unnecessary complexity and potential trade barriers, particularly for small and medium-scale spice producers and processors in developing countries.

In the context of spices such as vanilla and saffron, where value chains often involve multiple stages of processing and trade across borders, defining and enforcing “country of harvest” may prove difficult. Kenya therefore supports a flexible, non-mandatory approach to COH labelling — one that allows its use on a voluntary basis where it provides added value to consumers or helps to differentiate products, but without imposing additional regulatory burdens.

Kenya also emphasizes that any new labelling requirement must be consistent with Codex principles of practicality, non-discrimination, and facilitation of fair trade. The focus should instead be on strengthening mechanisms to prevent fraudulent origin claims and enhancing capacity for traceability and enforcement. Kenya supports further clarification and harmonization of definitions for “country of origin” and “country of harvest” through the work of the electronic working group and relevant Codex Committees, ensuring that any decision taken is inclusive, science-based, and trade-facilitative.