



## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

#### Forty-fifth Session

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## WORK FROM THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES (CCFFV) FOR ADOPTION OR APPROVAL BY THE COMMISSION

### Part 1 - Standards and related texts submitted for final adoption

#### Proposed draft standard for fresh dates

#### *Comments of Algeria and Morocco*

#### Algeria

Algeria's arguments and position relating to the draft Codex standard on fresh dates, scheduled for adoption at step (5/8) during the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint Commission (FAO/WHO) of the Codex Alimentarius (Agenda Item 4.4):

Algeria wishes to submit the following arguments and Algerian position for consideration by delegates at the 45<sup>th</sup> session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in relation to agenda item 4.4 concerning the draft codex standard on fresh dates, as follow:

#### I- Arguments:

- I- Algeria does not adhere to the designation "fresh dates: FRESH DATES" in the draft standard for fresh dates because it is not compatible with the reality on the field and scientific documents:
  - a. Initially, this draft standard qualified all dates as fresh and the only reason why members excluded dates with humidity <30% whose semi-soft dates (water content between 20 and 30%) is the possible overlap with the existing referenced Codex Standard (CXS 143-1985) and not because they are not fresh. However, this class of semi-soft dates has all the characteristics of a fresh fruit;
  - b. The term "fresh dates" will imply that dates containing water content of less than 30% are dry dates. And the delegations decided to use this term fresh dates to differentiate them from dry dates. This classification is not well founded since the codex standards differentiate between fresh and processed (dried) fruits and vegetables. Moreover, the scientific classification throughout the world adopts the classes of soft, semi-soft and dry dates (sometimes the semi-dry class as well). Knowing that semi-soft dates have intermediate characteristics between the two classes soft and dry, and are close, as the denomination indicates, to soft dates. Ignoring semi-soft dates and merging them with dry dates is incompatible with the reality of the field and science.
- II- The terms used and employed in the codex standards must be clear and precise. And they must be based on scientific research, which is, archetypal tool that allows this required precision;

- III- Consumers have the right to be informed about the different stages of maturity of dates in order to make an informed choice.
- IV- By consulting scientific articles and documentation, this term "fresh" is almost exclusively used in the Anglo-Saxon community, where the terms "fresh" and "soft" are often used to designate dates with a water content greater than 30%. In some scientific documents, this term "fresh" is attributed also to dates at the "tamer" stage (water content less than 30%) while scientific documents written in French almost exclusively use the term "soft dates" and in Arabic we never use this term "fresh" to designate only soft dates. As for the origin of the limit adopted (water content greater than 30%) it defines soft dates and it was proposed and approved by the international scientific community to designate soft dates;
- V- Remember that dates with water content greater than 30% already have a scientific and conventional name which is "soft dates" and dates with water content between 20 and 30%; semi-soft dates, these two categories are close and can easily merge as in the case of Tamer dates Deglet Nour which can have 32% humidity, for example;
- VI- The terminology for dates is based on the stages of harvesting, we have Bser or khalal dates, we have tamer dates and we have rutab dates which fully means "soft dates". The term "fresh" is an intrusive and confusing term and is the source of the debate;
- VII- The term fresh dates applies to the category of semi-soft dates since its characteristics correspond perfectly to the description of a fresh fruit as considered in the draft framework standard and by the glossary of terms used for fresh fruits and vegetables, produced by the said Committee because the semi-soft date:

Fresh fruits and vegetables whose physical and textural characteristics have not been changed or processed in any manner including by salting, freezing, cooking, juicing, sugaring, hydrating, smoking dehydrating or drying. They may undergo post-harvest practices to maintain freshness, shelf life and to facilitate transportation, storage and handling without affecting their raw nature as when harvested.

Fresh: this word has different meanings depending how and where it is used in the standard. The most common meanings are:

- Recently harvested, not preserved by any means and in a state of vigour.
- Not dull, stale, wilted or faded.

And

- Preserves its original appearance, and presents an appearance as close as possible to the product recently harvested and, having undergone no treatment intended to preserve it, and in full force;
- Is firm and ripe and whose flesh/pulp yields slightly to moderate pressure from the hand" or "Soft: supple, malleable, lacking in firmness".

- VIII- The distinction between processed and fresh dates at tamer stage is required. During the discussions of the previous session, to justify the exclusion of semi-soft dates from the present draft standards, the delegations had often referred to processed dates currently marketed being more present on international markets and not on fresh semi-soft dates;
- IX- Semi-soft dates (water content between 20 and 30%) are already penalised by the existing Codex Standard (CXS 143-1985) being considered as dry and dried and by the current draft standard being excluded from fresh dates. However, these standards were developed by the Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables and should include dried fruits and not those that are fresh or dry. For this reason, the distinction between the proposed draft standard and CXS 143-1985 should be based on whether or not the dates have been processed, not on their moisture content.

- X- The majority of imported dates are packaged dates that have undergone a parboiling and drying process and the margin of the trade in fresh dates is still marginal. And this draft standards will have a negative impact on the international trade of these unprocessed dates ie. Fresh dates which, referring to the glossary developed by CCFFV, after the harvest they may undergo post-harvest practices to maintain freshness, shelf life and to facilitate transportation, storage and handling without affecting their raw nature as when harvested.
- XI- It should also be noted that the quality of dates with water contents between 20 and 30% is degradable if it is considered dry and therefore left at room temperature. At water contents slightly above 20% it can dry out and above 25% it is perishable at room temperature and becomes unfit for human consumption, once exposed to the same ray as dry or dried fruits and vegetables. Indeed, their marketing requires the presence of a whole cold chain until the consumer;
- XII- Exporters have seen their products refused and returned because of the exposure of dates to consumers without packaging at room temperature alongside the dried fruits.
- XIII- If this draft standard is approved, the consumer will have very little chance of tasting fresh semi-soft dates. Also, the exporters will be obliged to process the fresh dates to be able to present it to the consumer.

## II- Position:

Considering the arguments above mentioned:

- **ALGERIA does not support the moisture content of 30% to 85%. ALGERIA proposes a minimum moisture content of 20%, if not,**
- **ALGERIA proposes to adopt the draft codex standard at step 5, not at step (5/8) for more discussions about the designation "fresh dates" and the minimum moisture content in the draft codex standard on fresh dates.**

### Morocco

Morocco expresses its reservations regarding the section on minimum maturity requirements, in particular with the range proposal for the moisture content of fresh dates, which is between **30 and 85%**.

This new interval was proposed during the work of CCFFV22 as an amendment to the draft standard to replace the three stages of maturity and their respective humidity levels knowing that the minimum initial humidity which appeared in this draft was up to 10%

Following discussions at CCFFV22, it was proposed to lower the minimum moisture content from **10 to 30%**. However, this proposal was not based **on any scientific data**.

The adoption of this moisture content interval **30 and 85%** in the draft standard **will exclude the majority of Moroccan varieties or cultivars from the scope of the draft standard. whose humidity level is less than 30% and which can even go down to 10%.**

Morocco's position is based on scientific studies published over more than 20 years. This work is available and can be made available to the relevant Codex Committee.

Furthermore, fresh dates with a moisture content less than 30% fully meet the definition of "fresh fruit and vegetables" in accordance with definitions used in the framework fresh fruit and vegetables codex standard. At the fresh fruit and vegetables definition, there is no reference to the moisture content but only the mention of technological treatments are excluded.

In view of the above and to avoid any overlap between the draft standard on fresh dates and the existing Standard for dates (CXS 143-1985), Morocco suggests not to **be based on the moisture content but on the application or not of the technological treatments.**

#### Position of Morocco:

Morocco considers that the draft standard requires more technical discussions and finalization work based on existing scientific data and **proposes its adoption at step 5.**