

# 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 FOOD LABELLING

Forty-sixth Session

Virtual

27 September - October 1 and 7, 2021

Opening Remarks

**Dr. Harpreet Kochhar, Associate Virtual (pre-recorded remarks)**

**September 27, 2021**

**Associate Deputy Minister, Health Canada**

**Theme of remarks: Importance of the role of Codex and the Codex Committee on Food Labelling in the global food safety system**

#### Introduction

- Madam Chairperson and distinguished delegates and observers.
- My name is Harpreet Kochhar and I am the Associate Deputy Minister of Health Canada.
- I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that as I speak to you today from the Ottawa/Gatineau region, I am on the unceded traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabeg (Ah-nish-in-a-bek) people.
- On behalf of the Government of Canada, it is my great pleasure and honour to welcome you to the 46<sup>th</sup> session on the Codex Committee on Food Labelling.
- Canada has had the distinct pleasure of chairing this committee since its inception in 1965 and it is one of our longest-standing and most significant international engagements in food and nutrition.
- This past year and a half has been like no other. We acknowledge the immense challenges and devastating impacts faced by so many people around the world through the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the challenges, we have learned to adapt and seek new ways of operating.
- Yet despite the challenges, the pandemic has fostered collaboration and innovation across disciplines, with everyone working together to find timely and creative solutions to complex problems. We have this opportunity, to build a stronger and more resilient world, where everyone has access to safe and nutritious food on a daily basis even in the face of numerous challenges.

- Holding this year's CCFL virtually permits the participation of more members, allowing for more national experts from countries around the world to contribute to Codex work.
- There are over 600 registrants from at least 76 countries and a number of international governmental and non-governmental organizations attending this year's session.
- Making decisions and choices about food is an important aspect of daily life. International labelling standards and guidelines developed by this committee empowers consumers to make important and informed decisions about the food we eat.
- Having spent many years in the food safety and regulatory environment, both at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and here as Associate Deputy Minister of Health Canada, one issue that is on the top of my mind is the effect our food choices have on our health.
- For this reason, I am pleased to see that this Committee has made progress on, and will continue to discuss the development of international guidelines for initiatives like front of package nutrition labelling. The outcomes of this work will help lay out the general principles to consider by those countries looking at putting in place this type of labelling as a tool to inform the consumer's understanding of the nutritional value of a food.
- Another significant health topic under discussion by CCFL relates to allergen labelling.
- Given the rise in prevalence of food allergens over the past 30 years, the work underway in CCFL in the development of guidance on clear and consistent precautionary allergen labelling, based on the best scientific advice available, is a critical component of food safety, helping consumers around the world to make safe food choices for their families and their health.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on food purchasing habits. Public Health restrictions and closures of in-person activities, or in many cases, restricted capacity limits in grocery stores and restaurants has dramatically changed how consumers shop and purchase food.
- Globally, we have seen a rapid shift towards online shopping and e-commerce.
- We observed, for example, farmers using digital technologies to sell their produce directly to consumers or restaurants, consumers are relying more on grocery delivery services, and restaurants are providing food via curbside pickup and delivery available via a website or a mobile app.
- With this rise in convenience, there is also a recognized potential risk to the health and safety of consumers due to unclear, ambiguous guidance on online labelling requirements.
- E-commerce food information requirements are likely more critical now than they ever were, especially for pre-packaged foods.
- I know that CCFL will also be considering the merits of a number of proposals for new work that the Committee may undertake in the coming years, including the use of technology in food labelling, trans-fatty acids, and others with the purpose of addressing international emerging and urgent health-related issues.

- The fact that the CCFL will be discussing these proposals and seeking opportunities for advancement during this meeting, underscores the importance of the work that you do.
- In closing, I would like to recognize the importance of Codex.
- The work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission continues to play a critical role in food safety around the globe. In fact, as the world becomes more complex due to technological advances, globalization, and evolving food production and supply systems, the importance of Codex's role is becoming increasingly crucial.
- I am convinced that a collaborative approach and consensus building process and the use of science and evidence as the basis for establishing Codex standards will ultimately result in meeting our collective mandate, ensuring food safety for all of us.
- Canada places a high importance on the work done by Codex; and, as all of you, we believe Codex is imperative to achieving our national food safety, public health, and consumer protection objectives.
- Given the importance of consumers having readily available information to support their choices, food labelling will continue to be relevant and important to all.
- Madam Chairperson, I wish you and the Codex Committee on Food Labelling a productive and successful 46<sup>th</sup> session.

**Ms. Mariam Eid (Lebanon), on behalf of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission**

Madam Chairperson of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling, representatives of FAO and WHO, Codex Secretariat, distinguished delegates,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you all to participate in the 46th session of this committee. And it is an honor to be able to address this opening session on behalf of the Chairperson of the Codex Commission Dr. Guilherme da Costa, and my two fellows Vice-Chairpersons Steve Wearne and Purwiyatno Hariyadi, who are taking part in this meeting.

The last time the Committee met was in May 2019. Since then, much has happened that has changed our world, and forced us to explore different ways to maintain the momentum of Codex standard setting work. I take this opportunity to express my happiness to see you all safe and my condolences to all those who have suffered from COVID-19.

Although the Codex Alimentarius Commission since 2019 has started to address issues such as labeling of non-retail containers, labeling of food packaging, labeling of allergens, and guidance on e-commerce,

It is clear that today these actions respond to the priorities of member states where the world continues to face an unprecedented threat from COVID-19 and many countries continue to take different measures in facing the pandemic, among which that this committee meets virtually.

I would like to point out that the world is counting more than ever on our work during this week to ensure fair trade and that safe food is readily available to everyone, everywhere.

Thank you for the efforts made in organizing this meeting and developing the agenda.

I hope that this week will be marked by the sense of collaboration and consensus and always be guided by science basics.

My best wishes to you, for a productive session .

Thank you for your attention