

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
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ORGANIZATION



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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

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REPORT OF THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST

*Cairo, Egypt
20 -23 January 2003*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The summary and conclusions of the Second Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East are as follows:

Matters for consideration by the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

The Coordinating Committee :

- Agreed to nominate the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for appointment as Regional Coordinator by the 26th Session of the Commission (para. 151).
- Agreed to request the Commission to initiate work on a draft Standard for Tehine (para. 71) and on draft Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees for the Near East (para. 118).

Other matters of interest to the Commission:

The Coordinating Committee :

- Raised the issue of timely distribution of Arabic documents and the use of Arabic language for the Codex documents and stressed the importance of translating documents of other Codex Committees into Arabic (para. 6).
- Recognised the advantage of increasing the frequency of the Commission Session to speed the process of adoption of Codex standards (para. 8).
- Recognized the relevance for the Near East region of the Melbourne Conference's recommendation on the exchange of information about potentially hazardous foodstuffs moving in international trade (para. 9).
- Emphasized that the purpose of the Trust Fund should be to facilitate the participation of developing countries in Codex meetings (para. 14) and stressed the need to establish criteria and rules for the disbursement of funds (para. 16).
- Supported the proposal of the Egyptian Government to recommend to the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues to consider Pesticide MRLs for Aromatic Plants Used as Beverages, in addition to spices (para. 19).
- Well received information on the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation and expressed its strong support to the expert committees and their importance to the work of Codex (para. 22) and stressed the importance of capacity building activities for food safety and health systems for developing countries and the need for Codex member countries to provide assistance to developing countries to strengthen their food safety surveillance and control systems (para. 24).
- Expressed its opinion on some activities included in the Draft Medium-Term Plan 2003-2007: on Activities 9 (Codex Action Plan on Risk Analysis) and 7 (Guidance on Prudent Use of Antimicrobial) (para. 44); on Activity 11 (review of Pesticide MRLs) (para. 45); on Activities 34 (Integration of Codex and OIE Standards) and 8 (Collaborative efforts to Minimize Duplication) (para. 46) and on Activities 23 (Collection of Information) and 15 (Establishment of sound national structure for Codex) (para. 48).
- Stressed the importance of traceability/product tracing as a food safety measure and for use in certain situations such as the verification of the origin of products (para. 53).
- Agreed that Egypt in collaboration with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and WHO would further elaborate the Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Street Vended Foods (para. 62).
- Returned to Step 2 the proposed draft Standards for Processed Chickpea (Humus) and for Processed Fava Bean (Foul Medemes) for further drafting and circulation for comments at Step 3 (para. 72).
- Well received the information on capacity building activities for food standards and regulations carried out by FAO and WHO (paras. 73-86).

- Exchanged information on progress made in food control and food safety issues including Codex standards and infrastructure (paras. 87-116) and on consumer participation in Codex work in the Near East region (paras. 119-126).
- Well received the discussion papers on Risk Assessment, Application and Use of HACCP system and on SPS and TBT Agreements (paras. 127-139).
- Agreed that the proposal on the Elaboration of a Regional Standard for Microbiological Levels in Foods should be subject to further study. It requested Egypt to coordinate a technical study group consisting of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates on the further development of microbiological specifications (para. 147).
- Agreed to consider a discussion paper on Mutual Recognition Agreements between Near East countries on import/export accreditation to be prepared by Jordan (para. 150).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Second Session of the Codex Regional Coordinating Committee for the Near East was held in Cairo, at the WHO Office for the Eastern Mediterranean Region (Kuwait Conference Hall) from 20 to 23 January 2003, at the kind invitation of the Government of the Arabic Republic of Egypt. The Session was chaired by Dr. Eng. Mahmoud Eisa, President of the Egyptian Organization for Standardization. It was attended by 90 delegates from 9 Member countries of the Region and participants from 3 Observer Countries and 7 International Organizations. The full list of participants is attached to this report as Appendix I.

2. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Representatives of the Directors-General of FAO and WHO and the Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission addressed the Committee and highlighted the importance of strengthening the participation of developing countries in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission; the high priority given to capacity building activities in food safety and quality standards and on food control in the region; and the need to further strengthen the collaboration with international organizations and relevant institutions. They stated that the recently established Trust Fund for the Participation of Developing Countries in Codex Standard-Setting Procedures was a timely and positive development for improving the quality and effectiveness of developing countries' participation in the work of Codex. They highlighted the impact of the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius. They also emphasized the need to take a holistic approach towards the reduction of illness and the fruitful collaboration of the WHO and FAO.

3. His Excellency Dr. Ali El Saeidi, Minister of Industry and Technology, welcomed the participants to the 2nd Session of the Committee and officially opened the Session. He stressed the importance of Codex Alimentarius as the main reference for food regulators and producers in the region. He highlighted the need to review and update food legislation, use modern technology, strengthen infrastructures and certification systems, improve communication within countries of the region, and strengthen the involvement of consumers and civil society in standards development.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (AGENDA ITEM 1)¹

4. The Coordinating Committee agreed to discuss two proposals from Egypt on draft Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees, and on Maximum Pesticide Residues Limits for Spices and Aromatic Plants under Agenda Item 10 and 2, respectively. With these modifications, the Committee adopted the Provisional Agenda as the Agenda for the Session.

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING FROM THE 24TH SESSION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND THE 49TH AND 50TH SESSIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (AGENDA ITEM 2)²

5. The Coordinating Committee noted matters arising from the 24th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2001) and the 49th (Extraordinary) (September 2001) and 50th (June 2002) Sessions of the Executive Committee. These matters included the general decisions of the Commission related to the Strategic Framework, Medium Term Plan and Chairperson's Action Plan, Meetings of the Commission; and Recommendations arising from the FAO Conference on International Trade Beyond the Year 2000 (Melbourne, Australia, 11-15 October 1999); Amendments to the Procedural Manual and Matters Related to Risk Analysis; and Matters Arising from the Executive Committee, including the Trust Fund for the Participation of Developing Countries in Codex Standard-Setting Procedures and the Use of Lactoperoxidase System in the Preservation of Raw Milk. In addition, the Committee considered the proposal of Egypt on the Maximum Pesticide Residues Limits in Spices and Aromatic Plants.

¹ CX/NEA 03/1

² CX/NEA 03/2; CX/NEA 03/2, Add. 1

6. The Committee raised the issue of timely distribution of Codex documents and the use of the Arabic language for the Codex documents and stressed the importance of translating documents of other Codex Committees into Arabic. With regard to the distribution of documents, it was noted that the Codex Secretariat was distributing documents to all Codex Contact Points, Ministries of Agriculture and Health and that documents were also distributed electronically. The Committee noted the decision of the 23rd Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission³ related to the language policies of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, subject to the availability of resources, applied only to the Sessions of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Executive Committee and Regional Coordinating Committees.

7. It was also noted that the Codex Secretariat was planning to translate all Codex texts into Arabic in the near future, as resources had become available for this purpose.

8. The Committee recognized the advantage of increasing the frequency of the Commission Sessions to an annual basis to speed the process of adoption of Codex standards.

9. In regard to the recommendation of the Melbourne Conference concerning the exchange of information about potentially hazardous foodstuffs moving in international trade, the Committee recognized the relevance of this recommendation for countries of the region as they have recently experienced this type of problem.

10. Clarifications were requested on the compulsory application and certification of the HACCP system. The Committee noted that the Recommended International Code of Practice – General Principles of Food Hygiene⁴ only recommended the use of the HACCP as food safety management system and did not make it obligatory. It was noted that the certification of the HACCP system was not contradictory to the aspects related to voluntary or compulsory application.

TRUST FUND FOR PARTICIPATION OF DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN CODEX STANDARD-SETTING PROCEDURES

11. The Committee noted that the 50th Session of the Executive Committee strongly supported the concept paper on the Trust Fund presented by WHO (CX/EXEC 02/50/4) and requested that FAO and WHO further develop the document related to funding structures as soon as possible so that it could be presented for consideration and comment to Coordinating Committee meetings. The Codex Executive Committee further requested that the document be revised on the basis of Coordinating Committee discussions so that it might be examined at the WHO Executive Board in January 2003, the extraordinary Session of the Commission in February 2003 and the World Health Assembly in May 2003.⁵

12. The Representative of WHO presented a summary of the status of the Trust Fund and recalled that when speaking of the Chairperson's Action Plan during the First Session of the Near East Regional Coordinating Committee, Dr. Tom Billy, Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, expressed his idea to improve the functioning and operation of Codex and in particular the participation of developing countries in Codex work. He informed the Committee that following the 50th Session of the Executive Committee, which supported the Trust Fund, the scope the Trust Fund was expanded to include not only participation in Codex meetings as originally intended, but also to cover certain capacity building activities; and to clarify that its scope cover not only food safety, but also certain food quality issues. The revised document will be examined by the Extraordinary Session of the Commission in February 2003.

13. The Representative of WHO informed the Committee that WHO was moving forward to identify donors and that Switzerland had recently made a pledge of 50,000 Swiss Francs to the Trust Fund. He expressed the hope that other donors would also support the initiative.

³ ALINORM 99/37, para. 232

⁴ CAC/RCP 1-1969, Rev.3 (1997), Amended 1999

⁵ ALINORM 03/3A, paras. 25-31.

14. The Committee emphasized that the purpose of the Trust Fund should be to facilitate the participation of developing countries in Codex meetings and that other activities should not be covered. It was also suggested that the Trust Fund should assist the involvement of consumer organizations in country delegations attending Codex meetings.

15. The WHO Representative clarified that the expansion of the scope of the Trust Fund would depend on the availability of funds and that the additional coverage was aimed at supporting activities, such as work on data collection, levels of contaminants, and other items directly related to the participation of delegates in Codex meetings in order to improve the quality of their participation. The expansion of the scope of the Trust Fund did not take away the responsibilities of FAO and WHO for providing capacity building to member countries in the area of food quality and safety.

16. In regard to the criteria and principles for the spending of the Trust Fund, the Committee stressed the need to establish criteria and rules for disbursement before releasing the funds in order to give priority to developing countries. The Committee was informed that the project was still in an early phase of formulation and that the establishment of criteria would depend on the size of the Trust Fund. The Trust Fund would be operated by WHO in conformity with WHO financial regulations and there would be a FAO/ WHO Consultative Group to provide guidance on the operation of the Trust Fund. Although reports would be made to Codex, the Commission would not administer the Trust Fund. Additional information had been made available for the Special (25th) Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (February 2003) that provided details on the project.

USE OF LACTOPEROXIDASE SYSTEM IN THE PRESERVATION OF RAW MILK

17. The 50th Session of the Executive Committee, while discussing the opportunity of revising the current Guidelines for the Preservation of Raw Milk by Use of the Lactoperoxidase System, invited Regional Coordinating Committees to consider the use of the system, the relevance of the current Codex Guidelines and the need for their revision. The Executive Committee asked the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene to consider whether the provisions restricting the use of the lactoperoxidase system in milk used for processing into products that would enter international trade should be retained and whether the current Guidelines should be revised. The Executive Committee also noted that the initial JECFA evaluation covered the process but that the chemicals used would require further evaluation as well as a risk assessment of the system itself in order to ensure an updated scientific basis for potential further work.⁶

RESIDUE LIMITS OF PESTICIDE IN SPICES AND AROMATIC PLANTS⁷

18. The Coordinating Committee noted the ongoing work of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues on the establishment of MRLs for spices and that the proposed use of monitoring data to establish Codex MRLs for pesticides should be limited to spices falling under the current Codex Commodity Group 028. The Committee also noted the proposal that the approach of using monitoring data could be expanded to other internationally traded commodities which comply with certain parameters such as: limited per capita consumption (less than 5% of the total diet); origin from developing countries; size of cultivation; number of farmers involved in production; the significance of its trade for developing countries; the presence of international trade problems; the presence of a monitoring programme; and an acceptable dietary risk.

19. Because the cultivation of aromatic plants used as beverages (herbal teas, etc) complies with the above parameters, the Coordinating Committee supported the proposal of the Egyptian Government to recommend to the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues to consider Pesticide MRLs for aromatic plants used as beverages, in addition to spices. The Representative of WHO supported the proposal that Codex could undertake work on aromatic plants used as beverages, but noted that the legal status of such products varied among member States

⁶ ALINORM 03/3 A, paras. 86-88.

⁷ CRD 2 (Maximum Pesticide Limits for Spices and Aromatic Plants - prepared by Egypt)

and informed the Coordinating Committee of the recently completed draft Code of Practice for the Cultivation of Traditional Medicinal Plants.

JOINT FAO/WHO EVALUATION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS AND OTHER FAO AND WHO WORK ON FOOD STANDARDS (AGENDA ITEM 3)⁸

20. At its 50th Session in June 2002, the Codex Executive Committee discussed progress on the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius and other FAO and WHO work on food standards and agreed that the evaluation should be included in the provisional agendas of all Regional Coordinating Committees.⁹ Prof. Bruce Traill, Team Leader of the Evaluation Team, introduced the item to the Regional Coordinating Committee. He summarised the procedure and the findings of the evaluation.

21. The evaluation was conducted by an independent evaluation team and supported by an independent expert panel. It was managed by the offices responsible for evaluation in FAO and WHO and not by the concerned technical units or the Codex Secretariat. A highly consultative process was implemented using extensive questionnaires, visits to 24 countries and the European Commission and discussions with a large number of partners and the Executive Committee of Codex. The recommendations of the report focused on four main areas for improvement:

- Greater speed in the Codex standard setting process and expert scientific advice;
- Increased inclusiveness of developing countries in the Codex standard development process;
- Codex standards which are of greater usefulness to Member Nations in terms of relevance to their needs and timeliness;
- More effective capacity building for development of national food control systems.

22. The Coordinating Committee expressed their strong support to the expert committees and emphasized the importance of their work to Codex. They underlined the need to find mechanisms, such as incentives and payments, to reward the experts for their work.

23. The OIE representative supported the importance of a strengthened collaboration and complementarity between Codex, OIE and IPPC. In this regard, the Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission informed the Coordinating Committee of the involvement of the Codex Secretariat in the OIE Working Group on Food Safety which resulted in the decision to conduct a comparative review of OIE and Codex standards to identify gaps and overlaps.

24. The Coordinating Committee stressed the importance of capacity building activities for food safety and health systems for developing countries and the need for Codex member countries to provide assistance to developing countries to strengthen their food safety surveillance and control systems.

OTHER MATTERS OF INTEREST FROM FAO AND WHO (AGENDA ITEM 4)¹⁰

25. In presenting document CX/NEA 03/4 the representatives of FAO and WHO informed the Committee of the work undertaken by the two organizations during the period 2000-2002, to provide scientific advice to their member countries and to the Codex Alimentarius Commission on matters related to food safety.

⁸ CX/NEA 03/3

⁹ ALINORM 03/3A, paras. 7-19.

¹⁰ CX/NEA 03/4

26. The WHO Representative recalled to the Committee the work of the FAO/WHO scientific advisory bodies, including JECFA for food additives, contaminants and residues of veterinary drugs and JMPR for pesticide residues. Codex and countries use recommendations of these bodies as the basis for considering risk management options. Given the growing importance of Codex standards, guidelines and other recommendations, FAO and WHO have undertaken several initiatives to improve the transparency and efficiency of these bodies. For example, conflict-of-interest declarations are now required of all recruited experts and consultants.

27. He drew attention to the rosters of experts that FAO and WHO have established and noted the need for experts from developing countries as well as women and younger scientists. He encouraged all interested persons to consult the FAO/WHO "calls for experts" that are available at the Web sites list in Annex 1 to CX/NEA 03/4.

28. Developing countries were also encouraged to consult the FAO/WHO "calls for data" which are available at the same Web sites and to provide any available data to the scientific advisory bodies. This will ensure that experts can consider the situation in developing countries during their evaluation.

29. The FAO/WHO project to review the principles and procedures used by JECFA and JMPR was highlighted as the SPS Agreement states that these should be taken into account in the assessments performed at the national level. Information on this project, including draft documents for comment, is available at the Web site of the WHO Programme on Chemical Safety (<http://who.int/pcs>).

30. The WHO Representative drew specific attention to two meetings of JECFA that might be of particular interest to the Committee. The fifty-sixth JECFA evaluated a number of mycotoxins, including aflatoxin M1, fumonisins, ochratoxin A and certain trichothecenes (DON, T-2 and HT-2). The other JECFA of interest was the fifty-seventh meeting which evaluated dioxins and dioxin-like PCBs. He noted that these compounds are considered persistent organic pollutants (POPs) and are subject to the Stockholm Convention to eliminate the production and use of POPs. As the convention contains a requirement to monitor the levels of POPs in relevant compartments, signatory countries will need to monitor POPs in certain fat containing foods as these are important indicators of environmental contamination and the main source of human exposure.

31. In regard to JMPR, the WHO Representative noted that new active substances could not be evaluated for several years because the agenda was already full through 2006. A pilot project has been proposed to improve the efficiency of evaluations through a work sharing system among different national and international bodies.

32. The Committee was informed of the action taken by FAO and WHO to respond to the request by the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) for sound scientific advice for the development of guidelines and recommendations on microbiological hazards in foods, and for answers to specific risk management questions raised by the CCFH at its 33rd and 34th Sessions concerning a number of pathogen-commodity combinations. A series of *Ad hoc* Joint Expert Consultations on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) were held in 2000-2002 to address the development of general guidelines on risk assessment of microbiological hazards; and risk assessment of specific pathogen-commodity combinations.

33. The Committee was informed that two draft guidelines are currently under active development and are expected to be finalized in the next few months. These include:

- FAO/WHO draft Guidelines for Hazards Characterization of Microbiological Hazards in Food and Water; and
- FAO/WHO draft Guidelines on Exposure Assessment for Microbiological Hazards in Food.

34. Concerning the work on specific pathogen-commodity combinations, the Committee was informed that the *Ad hoc* Joint Expert Consultations on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) completed the risk assessment of *Salmonella* spp. in broiler chickens and of *Salmonella Enteridis* in eggs and the risk characterization of *Salmonella*. The Committee was further informed of the work undertaken by JEMRA on *Listeria* spp. in ready-to-eat foods, on *Vibrio* spp. in seafood, and on *Campylobacter* spp. in broiler chicken.

35. The Committee was also informed on the outcome of the two meetings organized by FAO and WHO on the interaction between food safety risk assessors and risk managers as part of the risk analysis framework.

36. Concerning the safety assessment of foods derived from biotechnology, the Committee was informed of the series of expert consultations organized jointly by FAO and WHO to provide advice the *Ad hoc* Codex Task Force on Foods Derived from Biotechnology (referred to hereafter as the Task Force) in its effort to develop international guidelines and recommendations on the safety assessment of these foods. So far, 3 of such experts consultations have been organized in 2001-2002 and have addressed: (i) the safety assessment of foods derived from genetically modified plants including the use of the “substantial equivalence” approach as a starting point in the assessment of these foods; (ii) the allergenicity of GM foods; and (iii) the safety assessment of foods derived from genetically modified microorganisms. The outcome of these expert consultations was directly used by the Task Force in advancing its work on the development of the relevant guidelines and recommendations. At present, 3 draft guidelines have been advanced to step 8 and another one to step 5 of the Codex procedure. They will be examined by the 25th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

37. A fourth expert consultation is planned to be held in the fourth quarter of 2003 to address the safety assessment of GM animals, particularly fish.

38. The Committee was informed of the outcome of the joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on the Evaluation of Health and Nutritional Properties of Probiotics in Food held in 2001 and which evaluated the scientific information available and properties, functionality, benefits, safety and nutritional characteristics of probiotics. The outcome of the consultation was reported to the Codex Committee on Food Labeling and to the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses.

39. The Committee was also informed of the outcome of the First Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, held in Marrakech, Morocco, in January 2002 and of plans underway to organize the second Global Forum in 2004. In particular, the announced preliminary meeting called by FAO and WHO in February 2003 is expected to discuss the main theme and technical content of the second Global Forum, its funding, location and other important organizational issues.

40. The WHO Representative also discussed the FAO/WHO consultation on the health implications of acrylamide in food held in June 2002. He noted that, among the recommendations, the need for data on acrylamide levels in food in developing countries was identified. In this regard, a Web site has been established by FAO and WHO (<http://www.who.int/fsf/Acrylamide/research.htm>) to exchange information on completed and ongoing research. The Web site will include a section where researchers can register their projects to identify collaborators and/or support for acrylamide-related projects. Data, including levels of acrylamide in food, will also be collected through this Web site in preparation for the evaluation of acrylamide by JECFA, tentatively scheduled for February 2004.

41. Regarding risk communication on this issue, it was emphasised that given the current uncertainty both with regard to the toxic potential of acrylamide in humans and to the nature and levels of human exposure, it was premature to offer specific dietary advice to consumers. However, it was noted that if consumers were concerned about the reducing their risk of cancer, they should consider following the recommendation to eat more fruits and vegetables which has been consistently confirmed in a number of large scale epidemiological studies.

CONSIDERATION OF THE DRAFT MEDIUM-TERM PLAN 2003-2007 (AGENDA ITEM 5)¹¹

42. The Coordinating Committee was informed that preparations for the Medium-Term Plan 2003 – 2007 had begun shortly after the 23rd session of the Commission in 1999. In the process of developing the Plan, the Executive Committee had proposed a new structured approach with the establishment of an overall vision statement, a strategic framework described by objectives, and a detailed Medium-Term Plan that would meet these objectives. The vision statement and strategic framework had been adopted by the Commission at its 24th

¹¹ CX/NEA 03/5

Session, 2001, and the detailed draft Medium-Term Plan was being discussed by each of the Regional Coordinating Committees prior to its finalization by the Executive Committee and submission to the Commission in June/July 2003. The Secretariat noted that the Medium-Term Plan would also have to take into account the outcome of the Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of Codex, following consideration by the Special 25th Session of the Commission in February 2003.

43. In regard to Activity 1 (Guidelines for Risk Communication; Strategic Objective 2), the Observer from Consumers International stressed the importance of this activity, but stated that there needed to be structural arrangements for closer relations with consumers' associations and that risk communication with consumers should be in the form of recommendations based on surveys.

44. The Coordinating Committee requested that further consideration should be given to the duration of Activities 9 (Codex Action Plan on Risk Analysis) and 7 (Guidance on Prudent Use of Antimicrobials) and suggested that they should be harmonized.

45. The Coordinating Committee indicated that the budget associated with Activity 11 (Review of Pesticide MRLs) might be inadequate.

46. Under Strategic Objective 3: Promoting Linkages, the Coordinating Committee questioned whether or not Activity 34 (Integration of Codex and OIE Standards) was not a sub-activity of Activity 8 (Collaborative Efforts to Minimize Duplication).

47. Under Strategic Objective 5: Promoting Maximum Membership and Participation, the Observer from Consumers International recommended that Activity 29 (Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations) should be targeted to consumers' associations.

48. Under Strategic Objective 6: Promoting Maximum Application of Codex Standards, the Coordinating Committee stressed the importance of Activities 23 (Collection of Information) and 15 (Establishment of Sound National Structures for Codex).

49. The Secretary of the Commission thanked the Coordinating Committee for its inputs and stated that all of the comments made would be taken into consideration when finalizing of the draft Medium-Term Plan.

CONSIDERATION OF TRACEABILITY/PRODUCT TRACING (AGENDA ITEM 6)¹²

50. The document was introduced by the Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, who noted that the subject of traceability/product tracing had been raised in several technical Codex Committees as well as in the Codex Committee on General Principles and the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee had recommended that the matter be considered as having two possible aspects: as a food safety measure within the meaning of the SPS Agreement, or as a measure to pursue a stated legitimate objective under the TBT Agreement. The Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) was in the process of examining how information on traceability/product tracing might be transmitted between national authorities, and the Committee on General Principles was examining the use of traceability/product tracing as a risk management option under the draft Principles for Risk Analysis. In regard to this latter point, the Secretariat had been asked to prepare a paper, including inputs at the regional level on how traceability/product tracing should be further developed within Codex.

51. The Delegation of Switzerland briefed the Coordinating Committee on developments in CCFICS, in particular the establishment of a working group under the Chairmanship of Switzerland. This working group had met in August 2002 in Switzerland and had indicated that the CCFICS work on traceability/product tracing should address three main issues:

- Product identification, including nature of the product, processing conditions, etc.;

- Product information, including source of the product and distribution of the product on a “one step forward – one step back procedure”; and
- Linkages between these two.

52. The Delegation of Switzerland noted that following discussions of the matter at the 12th Session of CCFICS in December 2002, a follow-up meeting of the working group had been scheduled for September 2003.

53. The Coordinating Committee had little to add to the current debate, but did stress the importance of traceability/product tracing as a food safety measure and for use in certain situations such as the verification of the origin of products, for example gelatin..

PROPOSED DRAFT CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STREET-VENDED FOODS (AGENDA ITEM 7)¹³

54. The 49th Session of the Executive Committee approved the proposal of the First Session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for the Near East to commence work on a Code of Hygienic Practice for Street-Vended Foods, taking into account the work already undertaken in other Regions.

55. In introducing the document, the delegation of Egypt highlighted the importance of street food sector as its economic and social dimensions. He stressed the need to regulate and control the sector in order to ensure the safety of street-food products.

56. The Coordinating Committee was of the opinion that the issue of street food was very delicate and needed further study. Certain delegations were of the opinion that it was important to control street food vendors and provide them with condition and facilities to prevent food contamination, such as licenses, health certificates, running water, shelters, equipment, etc. Others said that the selling of street food was forbidden in certain countries and that the development of a Code could contribute to the spreading of the sector.

57. The Committee recognized that the training of food vendors was essential, and discussed on the responsibilities of consumers and vendors associations in organizing training activities. They stressed the importance to strengthen the collaboration of the two associations in developing and implementing training courses and providing information to the consumers.

58. The Representative of WHO highlighted the role of the street food in the culture of the countries. He stated that it was important to involve and consult vendors in the elaboration of the Code in order to improve their compliance with and to collect data in order to evaluate if and how specific street foods constituted a threat to human health.

59. The Representative of FAO underlined the contribution of street food vendors to the health status of people as it provides the nutritional needs at an affordable cost. He expressed his concern with regard to the licensing of street food vendors as it could lead to the disappearance of the sector and highlighted the difficulty to draw a line between the formal and informal sector due to the huge number of people involved.

60. The Codex Secretariat suggested revise the introduction and scope of the document to better reflect the different social and economic situation and the various realities of the street food vendors in the region and to expand the section on mobile street food vendors.

61. The Coordinating Committee said that it would have been useful to have information and data on how other countries deal with the sector. It was also suggested that the Code should encourage voluntary compliance, focus on popular traditional food, categorize street food according to risk; and highlight the importance of traditional food in the context of the changing of consumption patterns in the region.

62. The Coordinating Committee agreed that Egypt in collaboration with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and WHO would redraft the Code on the base of the above discussion and comments for further consideration at its 3rd Session.

STATUS OF THE PROPOSED DRAFT CODE OF HYGIENIC PRACTICE FOR STREET-VENDED FOOD

63. The Coordinating Committee returned the proposed draft Code of Hygienic Practice for Street-Vended Food to Step 2 for further drafting and circulation for comments at Step 3.

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARDS (AGENDA ITEM 8)

64. The Coordinating Committee at its First Session requested the Executive Committee for authority to proceed with the elaboration of draft standards for Processed Chickpeas (*Humus*) and Processed Fava Bean (*Foul Medemes*) and assigned this work to the Delegation of Jordan. The 49th Session of the Executive Committee approved both proposals on the understanding that the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables would be consulted after the draft had reached Step 5.

65. The Delegation of Jordan introduced both documents. Both texts were presented as Draft Regional Standards.

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR PROCESSED CHICKPEAS (HUMUS)¹⁴

66. The Coordinating Committee welcomed the draft, but was of the opinion that certain sections needed further elaboration. In particular, it was agreed that the approved food additives should be specifically listed and that the section on heavy metal contaminants needed to be revised, particularly as the levels for Lead (Pb) and Arsenic (As) seemed high. It was noted that the level proposed for Tin (Sn) was consistent with the levels approved by the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants for canned solid foods.

67. The view was also expressed that there was a need for more detailed specifications in the area of Food Hygiene, especially for the control of *B. cereus*.

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR PROCESSED FAVA BEANS (FOUL MEDEMES)¹⁵

68. The Coordinating Committee noted that the format of the Proposed Draft Standard was not consistent with the Codex format as specified in the Procedural Manual and that certain sections (Food Additives, Contaminants) were incomplete.

69. The Coordinating Committee noted that the standard provided for the use of certain additional foodstuffs (e.g.; lentil seeds) and was of the opinion that such additional ingredients should clearly be stated in the labeling in association with the Name of the Food.

70. The Delegation of Jordan, in response to a question, noted that the requirements for Fill of the Container (90% of the Water Capacity) was consistent with other Codex texts and was technically necessary. Also, that the provision concerning Drained Weight was consistent with the nature of the product when processed in water or brine.

PROPOSAL TO DEVELOP A CODEX STANDARD FOR TEHINE

71. In the course of the discussion on the proposed draft standard for Processed Chick Peas, the Coordinating Committee noted that reference was made to an international standard for Tehine (Sesame seed paste) and that such a standard did not exist. Delegations noted that Tehine was a product of considerable importance to the Region, also in terms of exports, and that there were a number of problems in ensuring the quality control of these products, especially the illegal use of Titanium Dioxide as a whitener. The Coordinating Committee agreed to request the Commission to authorize the elaboration of a Codex Standard for Tehine, and agreed that Jordan should coordinate the initial drafting of the standard with the assistance of Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates.

¹⁴ CX/NEA 03/8

¹⁵ CX/NEA 03/9

STATUS OF THE PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARDS FOR PROCESSED CHICKPEAS (HUMUS) AND PROCESSED FAVA BEANS (FOUL MEDEMES)

72. The Coordinating Committee returned the two Proposed Draft Standards to Step 2 for further drafting and circulation for comments at Step 3.

CAPACITY BUILDING FOR FOOD STANDARDS AND REGULATIONS (AGENDA ITEM 9)¹⁶

73. The Representatives of FAO and WHO made a short presentation of document CX/NEA 03/10, underlining the importance of enhancing the capacity of developing countries in the area of food safety and consumer protection. The presentation covered global, regional and national activities either carried out jointly or individually by FAO and WHO.

74. The Representative of FAO made special reference to the joint declaration of the 'Executive Heads' of FAO, WHO, OIE, WTO and WB, made in October 2001 at the WTO ministerial meeting in Doha, Qatar. The declaration committed their respective organizations to increase their support to capacity building in developing countries to facilitate effective participation in international standard setting work. He informed the Coordinating Committee that as a follow up to this declaration the five agencies have recently established a Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), based in WTO and managed jointly.

75. The WHO Representative noted the activities undertaken by WHO after the events of 11 September 2001 in the U.S. He noted that WHO had considered the food supplies systems in all countries to be vulnerable. A document dealing with food safety emergencies, which was due for release soon, urged Member States to put in place basic systems to address all food safety emergencies, including those posed by intentional contamination with chemical, biological and radiological agents. WHO was planning to assist in the development of food safety capacities to link in real time all relevant emergency focal points to assure efficient and rapid detection and response to food safety emergencies. This initiative built on existing WHO programmes to identify and respond to emerging epidemics of communicable diseases, such as those posed by the Ebola virus.

76. The WHO Representative of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office informed the Committee of the activities in the area of food safety. She clarified the WHO structure, with the main bulk of normative work being performed by its headquarters, and the technical capacity building activities being implemented by the Regional Offices.

77. The WHO Representative informed the Committee that other technical areas were involved in capacity building and directly benefiting food safety institutions or structures, such as laboratory services and communicable disease surveillance.

78. In response to a query by Saudi Arabia regarding the limited number (2) of regional courses given in the Near East region under the FAO *Umbrella Programme for Training on Uruguay Round and Future Negotiations on Agriculture*, the FAO Representative explained that these numbers were dependent on the availability and source of funding and the number of requests received from the countries of the region. In the next phase, which is still under negotiation for funding, consideration will be given to those regions that received less training in the first phase.

79. The Delegation of Saudi Arabia further requested FAO and WHO to ensure that information about planned training activities is disseminated more widely, in order to allow countries to attend where appropriate.

80. The Delegation of Egypt enquired about the availability of international standards for coffee, particularly for raw coffee used in instant coffee, and suggested that Codex develop a standard for this commodity, including a limit for Ochratoxin A (OTA). The Secretary of the Commission informed the Coordinating Committee that ISO standards existed for coffee and also for tea. Concerning OTA, the meeting was informed that JECFA had recently conducted a risk assessment of this mycotoxin, and that this should enable the CCFAC to establish MRL's for OTA in various foods. The Representative of FAO drew the attention to the negative impact of

¹⁶ CX/NEA 03/10

establishing a rigid standard for OTA in coffee on the economies of coffee producing countries, and the need to focus efforts on prevention of mold formation through training of stakeholders. The Delegation of Jordan confirmed the existence of an ISO standard for coffee, but indicated that this standard did not cover safety aspects such as mycotoxin levels.

81. Concerning the Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, and in reply to a query by the Delegation of the United Arab Emirates regarding the frequency of future Global Fora, the Representative of FAO informed the meeting that the participants of the first Global Forum recommended that future fora be held in those years when the CAC is not in session, i.e. every two years. He further informed that a preparatory meeting was scheduled for February 2003 to define the main theme and decide about funding arrangements and location.

82. The Delegation of Tunisia questioned the usefulness of stating at the end of the fora that the recommendations were not binding governments to action. He was informed that the main purpose of the Global Forum was to provide an opportunity for countries to exchange information and experiences on food safety issues, and that the informality of such an exchange should not be compromised.

83. The Delegation of Egypt commented on the fact that most of the reported FAO and WHO capacity building efforts seemed to focus on safety only and that no activities addressed the quality aspects of food. He was informed that although Codex work covers mainly health related aspects, some quality issues are being addressed. In addition, all the capacity building activities implemented by FAO do cover both quality and safety aspects as they relate to consumer protection.

84. The Delegation of Sudan reiterated the need for training of food producers in the application of GAP and GMP to prevent mycotoxin contamination of food and agricultural crops.

85. The Delegation of Jordan commented on the need for food-borne disease information and collaboration from countries of the region.

86. The Observer from Consumers International stressed the need for the involvement of consumer representatives in the capacity building work of both organizations, in order to empower consumers to take part in decision making processes related to food safety.

INFORMATION AND REPORTS ON THE FOOD CONTROL AND FOOD SAFETY ISSUES INCLUDING ACCEPTANCE OF CODEX STANDARDS AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE NEAR EAST (AGENDA ITEM 10)

87. The Coordinating Committee noted that this was a standing item in the Agenda of the Regional Coordinating Committees in which countries of the region were invited to provide the Committee with new or additional information on their national food control systems, food legislation and cooperation activities.

88. The following countries gave an account to the Committee in this regard:

EGYPT¹⁷

89. Food control in Egypt depends mainly on a number of authorities and ministries, which are:

- ***Ministry of Health and Population*** (Food Control Dept. – Laboratories of the Ministry of Health – Nutrition Institute).
- ***Ministry of Agriculture and Land Reclamation*** (Veterinary Services Authority – Animal Hygiene Research Institute – Animal Feeding stuff Laboratories – Pesticide Residue Laboratories)

- **Ministry of Industry and Technological Development** (Egyptian Organization for Standardization and Quality Control – Industrial Control Authority – Chemistry Administration)
- **Ministry of Foreign Trade** (General Organization for Export and Import Control)
- **Ministry of Supply** (Supply Investigation – Supply Inspectors – Consumer Protection Authorities)
- **Ministry of Electricity** (Atomic Energy Authority)

90. Control is based in each entity depending on the relevant competencies each of them.

91. There is coordination among these entities through identifying the tasks of each entity as follows:

- General Organization for Export & Import Control (Harbours).
- Egyptian Organization for Standardization & Quality Control (Alimentarius Standards – Standards).
- Supreme Committee for Food Safety, Ministry of Health.
- Food Complaints Committee, Ministry of Health

92. All ministries work in the framework of laws and regulations related to food control, relevant laboratories and control bodies.

JORDAN¹⁸

93. Jordan launched the New Risk-Based Imported Food Control System at Aqaba Port of Entry in May 2002 where food products were classified in 3-tier according to the health risk associated and incorporated the criteria of inspection into an electronic channeling system.

94. Implementation plan covered areas of issuing new Food Law and Public Health Law, third party accreditation and electronic certification, field portion sampling equipment, construction of a Food Inspection Center for refrigerated and frozen food cargo examination and portion sampling, refrigerated vehicles of transport, and Food Import Management Information database system.

95. Data obtained from food consignments from June- Dec 2002 were 3920, out of which 53% red channeled, 7.5% yellow channeled, 39% green channeled with 19 rejected food consignments.

96. Jordan believes that such a system is the only gateway towards a fair, transparent and equal based treatment in international trade environment, while maintaining scientifically-based, improved consumer safety and quality protection levels.

SAUDI ARABIA

97. The Saudi Arabian Committee for Standards and Specifications prepares, since its establishment by Royal Decree, the Saudi standard specifications in the field of foodstuffs. The number of Saudi Standard specifications reached more than 1800, out of which more than 530 are in the domain of foodstuffs.

98. These specifications are prepared through technical committees formed by the Codex Committee, which are:

- Food safety
- Meat, fish and their products
- Milk and its products

¹⁸ CRD 3 (Risk Based Approaches Risk Based Approaches for Control of Imported Food -The Jordan Experience)

- Cereals, greens and their products
- Sweets
- Fruits, vegetables and their products

99. The Committee Members are comprised of all bodies concerned, including the private sector, the consumers' sector and the foods inspection body. The development of the specifications is done in accordance with the expectations and advices of the representatives' sectors concerned. Specifications should be in harmony with the requirements and special circumstances of the Kingdom. The Committee aims at issuing specifications to be compatible with the international specifications and standards, including those of the Codex Alimentarius Committee.

100. The inspection bodies on foodstuffs, according to their specialization, are committed to the Saudi Arabian standard specifications. The bodies that undertake the inspection on foodstuffs are:

- The Ministry of Commerce - imported foods, operating through more than eight inspection laboratories, disseminated in the different outlets of the Kingdom.
- The Ministry of Agriculture - live animals and plants
- The Ministry of Health - special foods and children's foods
- The Ministry of Municipal Affairs - inspection of exposed foodstuffs within the Kingdom's markets

SUDAN

101. There are various legal texts governing and ensuring the control of food commodities:

- Food Code of 1973 and its Regulations (Ministry of Health)
- Code of the Sudanese Standardisation Authority of 1992, revised in 1999
- Law on Health Quarantine (or Detention)
- Law on Agricultural Quarantine (or Detention)
- Law of the National Authority on Pesticides
- Control list and local circulars

102. There are also laboratories specialized in food control and analysis:

- Laboratories of the Standards Authority
- Laboratories of the Ministry of Health
- Food research laboratories
- Veterinary laboratories
- Central laboratory for pesticides
- Laboratories of the Research Council and Industrial Consultative bodies

103. The Standards Authority is responsible for the control and analysis of food commodities imported through the country's borders and checks that these conform with Sudanese or Codex quality standards. These quality procedures at the borders take place in the presence of the senior customs officer or his deputy. The food quality inspectors carry out inspections in the field and take samples for analysis in the government laboratories. Products are held under the supervision of the authorities concerned, until the analyses have been completed and an appropriate decision taken.

104. With regard to consumer protection, there has been the creation of an Association of Consumer Protection and a special Prosecution Office for the Protection of Consumers.

105. On-site control and inspection of food is done by the competent authorities and they include:

- Provincial authorities
- Standardisation Authority
- Prosecution Office for the Protection of Consumers
- Health, agricultural and veterinary authorities
- Other commissions including the Consultative Committee on Food Control (under the aegis of the Ministry of Health)

106. Sudan has been a member of the Codex since 1966. The Sudan's National Codex Committee is composed of all competent authorities and all the regions (17) are represented; the Codex Contact Point is the Sudanese Standardisation Authority.

TUNISIA

107. The general framework for food control in Tunisia is governed by Law 92-117 on the general protection of the consumer (not specific to food). This Law sets out the general framework for interventions and the intervening parties (belonging to several departments). This Law has also led to the establishment of the National Council on Consumer Protection.

108. The main departments involved in food control are:

- The Ministry of the Interior and Local Development (through the municipalities)
- The Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Traditional Industries (in particular for the promotion of quality and the repression of fraud)
- the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Water (veterinary administration, quarantine and other control plant products)
- The Ministry of Public Health (Department for the Protection of Health and the Environment)

109. The Ministry of Industry and Energy is involved in the process through the National Institute of Standardization and Industrial Property and through the specialized technical centres at the service of food industries sector since they are active in the promotion of quality. Important in this connection is the technical centre for food industries which supports the national programme for the upgrading of the industry and the promotion of the HACCP system. The Ministry is also in charge of the Central Laboratory of Analysis and Testing, which is a control support tool.

110. Also worthy of mention is the control effected by the specialized services of the Ministry of Public Health's Department for the Protection of Health and the Environment, whose actions are determined by the provisions of the law on consumer protection but also by the Ministry's own stipulations which are preventative in purpose. The Ministry operates through its central administration and 24 regional directorates corresponding to the administrative organization of the country. Control is carried out by senior experts for the protection of health, technicians, doctors, veterinarians and pharmaceutical chemists. Control is by inspection and by laboratory analysis (public health laboratories throughout the country). However, the Ministry of Public Health is not involved in food control at borders, with the law assigning this function essentially to the Ministries of Agriculture and Trade.

111. The control services of the other departments are similarly organized to the above mentioned, namely the regional directorates that employ the same methods of inspection and laboratory analysis.

112. With all these inspectors (and others with more prescribed roles), Tunisia has equipped itself the National Health and Environmental Control Agency which is capable of coordinating all the inspectors and taking horizontal food safety action. This agency operates according to the precept of risk analysis through the separation of risk management (the inspectors' activity) and of risk assessment and communication (the agency's activities). Tunisia's experience in formulating a national control strategy coordinated by the agency was presented at the workshop that preceded this meeting.

113. All these structures are an integral part of national efforts to reinforce food safety in Tunisia.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

114. The control procedures and safety of food is applied through a municipality in each Emirate (the United Arab Emirates consists of 7 Emirates). There is a national committee under the name of *The National Committee for Food Safety*, chaired by the General Secretariat of Municipalities which is the coordinating authority that implements and follow up the decisions made by the National Committee. The members of the National Committee are from the following entities: Food Control Bodies in each Emirate, Emirates Authority on Standards, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Fishery, and Ministry of Economy and Trade.

115. The hygiene procedures and conditions of imported and locally manufactured food are applied in accordance with the Gulf Standards or the Emirate national standards if the former is not available.

116. The National Committee for Food Safety in coordination with the General Secretariat of Municipalities designs a strategic plan for controlling the safety of imported and locally manufactured food. The control bodies in each municipality apply this plan which includes the following:

- Confirming and ensuring the control procedures on imported food according to relevant and approved Gulf Standards
- Raising the health specifications of locally manufactured and locally marketed food through Risk Assessment Programme
- Changing from the traditional inspection method to risk assessment method
- Developing a Hygiene Practices Guide to ensure the safety of marketed food within the United Arab Emirates
- Raising awareness among the users and educating the public about the basis of food hygiene and safety.

DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR CODEX CONTACT POINTS AND NATIONAL CODEX COMMITTEES FOR THE NEAR EAST¹⁹

117. The delegation of Egypt presented a proposal for the development of Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees for the Near East. They stated that a strengthened system of Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees would be very beneficial for the region and that Egypt would be ready to share its longstanding experience and provide assistance to help other countries to set up their Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees.

118. The Coordinating Committee supported the proposal of Egypt and agreed to request the Commission to initiate work on the Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees for the Near East.

¹⁹ CRD 1 (Working Documents on Guidelines for the Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees in the Near East - prepared by Egypt)

**CONSUMER PARTICIPATION IN CODEX WORK AND RELATED MATTERS
(AGENDA ITEM 11)²⁰**

119. The Delegation of Egypt presented the background to consumer participation in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, noting the highlights of consideration being given to consumer protection in the United Nations Conference on Food And Agriculture (1943), the United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/39/248 establishing the UN Guidelines on Consumer Protection (1985), and in the International Conference on Nutrition (1992). The Delegation noted that consumer organizations had been represented in the Commission since 1965.

120. The Delegation reported that in Egypt there were over 60 associations representing consumers. The National Council for Consumer Protection had been established and consumer associations were represented on the National Codex Committee. The Egyptian Organization for Standardization had established a unit for consumer protection (covering all products) and worked closely with the related ISO Committee on Consumer Policy (COPOLCO).

121. The representative of the Arab Federation of Consumers (AFC) indicated that membership of his organizations included 14 national consumer organizations in the Arab world. They are located in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. In addition, the national consumer organizations of Libya and Oman have the status of observer in the AFC. He also stated that national consumer associations are represented in the national committees and councils entrusted with the development of food standards and regulations in all member countries of the AFC. As an example in Jordan the representative of the national consumer organization is a member of the Executive Board of the Jordanian Standards and Metrology Organization and in all technical committees in charge of developing draft food standards and regulations. They are also members of technical committees directly entrusted with food safety issues such as BSE, pesticide residues and others. The latest food control legislation in Jordan provides for consumer organizations to participate in all decisions related to food control and food safety.

122. The Delegation of Sudan noted that there was a national association for the protection of consumers which was a voluntary non governmental organization and was represented in most of the provinces. Its headquarters was located in the Sudanese Standards Authority. It participated in the national Codex Committee. In addition, the Ministry of Justice had established a special prosecution office for the protection of consumers.

123. The Delegation of Tunisia stated that the national Organisation Tunisienne pour la Défense du Consommateur (ODC) has been represented in different authorities as well as in the National Codex Committee, which was set up in November 2000 and was very active. This organization is also a member of the Council for the Defense of Consumers.

124. The Delegation of Saudi Arabia stated that the Kingdom was considering the establishment of a national consumers' association and that standards take into account the protection of consumers. The Delegation stated that it was difficult to see how consumers could be involved in the legislative process of standards preparation as they did not have the technical and scientific capabilities required.

125. The Observer from Consumers International stated that consumers' participation in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was important at both the international and national level. The Observer called for a quantitative evaluation of the participation of consumers, including their permanent membership in National Codex Committees, noting that participation varied from one county to another. The Observer stated that consumer organizations needed to be independent of government structures in order to ensure their credibility, and that such independent consumer associations should be represented on standards-setting bodies. In the view of the Observer, the ability of national consumer associations in the Region to undertake independent testing of products (as was done in some developed countries) was highly desirable.

²⁰

CX/NEA 03/11; Codex Circular Letter CL 2002/28-NEA.

126. The Delegation of Saudi Arabia expressed its reservation about some of the statements made by the Observer of Consumers International, stating that the scientific background required for standards setting was not normally available in consumers' associations.

CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN DISCUSSION PAPERS (AGENDA ITEM 12)

127. The Coordinating Committee recalled that at its First Session, it had agreed that discussion papers should be prepared on certain subjects of critical importance to the countries of the Region.

A. RISK ASSESSMENT²¹

128. The Representatives of FAO and WHO stressed that Risk Assessment had become of critical importance for the control of food safety problems by ensuring the scientific basis risk management decisions such as the setting of food standards. FAO and WHO were working on the development of advice on risk analysis, including risk assessment, to assist developing countries to understand and use this approach to food safety. He stated that risk assessment was itself divided into several components, including hazard identification, hazard characterization, exposure assessment and risk characterization. The scientific expert panels of FAO and WHO provided information on hazard characterization and exposure assessment and published these in the reports of JECFA, JMPR and other expert bodies. However, exposure assessment at the international level was based on broad assumptions concerning dietary patterns, and that it was at national level where governments could do most to develop their own understanding of risk assessment by combining the JECFA etc., findings with national exposure patterns. The generation of national data would also contribute to the international risk assessment process.

129. The Representative of WHO stressed that while hazard characterization need not be repeated, exposure assessments should be done at the national level and could be based on a variety of information ranging from theoretical (such as the FAO Food Balance Sheets) to more precise data on intake estimates through Total Diet Studies. He noted that a Workshop on Total Diet Studies had been planned for the Region. He also noted that national data were important in standards setting in the risk management phase of risk analysis.

130. In response to a question from the Delegation of Egypt about the use of epidemiological data, it was indicated that these data were used in risk assessment where possible. The Delegation of Tunisia indicated that epidemiological data were being used in its studies on the risk assessment of mycotoxins. The Secretary of the Commission pointed out that epidemiological data on thyroid cancer carried out after the Chernobyl accident had been very useful in revising the risk assessment for radioactive iodine (¹³¹I).

131. The Delegation of Egypt also noted that studies in Egypt had shown that the data on food balances did not reflect the true situation with regard to actual consumption patterns.

132. The Delegation of Jordan stated that microbiological risk assessment required particular study in the Region and stated that the Jordan Institution for Standards and Metrology had established a study group on this subject.

B. APPLICATION OF THE HACCP SYSTEM, INCLUDING IMPORTED FOOD ITEMS²²

133. The Delegation of the United Arab Emirates presented the paper, stating that within the strategic plan of the food control administration the current inspection system was being changed to conform to HACCP principles through modifying the traditional system and concentrating on identifying hazards at each processing step. The Delegation stated that the most important issue was having highly qualified inspectors, and that the administration had embarked on a major training programme in this regard.

134. The application of the new system was being carried out through the following tasks:

²¹ CX/NEA 03/13 (Prepared by the Codex Secretariat).

²² CX/NEA 03/14 (Prepared by the United Arab Emirates).

- Approving private companies for training and consultative services on HACCP
- Educating specialists and experts concerned about the system
- Preparing basic requirements and guidelines for HACCP
- Applying the basic requirements at food factories before implementing the HACCP system
- Establishing HACCP guide for each factory and having it approved by specialist committees
- Continuous audits

135. In the first year of application of the new system, 7 high-risk factories applied the HACCP system and 20 factories had completed the preparation of HACCP Manuals. Hygienic standards in the factories applying the system had shown a net increase of factories being rated as “Excellent” or “Very Good” (73% as opposed to 52% in 2001). Also, there had been a clear reduction in violations especially in the areas of equipment and maintenance, and personal hygiene.

136. The Delegation recommended that it was important to have regional guidelines that would help countries of the Region adopt the HACCP system; to conduct training sessions, workshops and symposiums to ensure equality among the regional food industries; consolidating efforts for collaboration through the Regional Coordinating Committee; and making efficiency of the inspection system a priority for countries of the Region.

137. The Delegation of Jordan stated that this was a model experience that could be used by all countries of the region, especially for enhancing the inspection services of the central food control authorities. The Delegation of Egypt stated that this was a pioneering development and noted that in Egypt a similar system was being implemented for food catering establishments, especially hospital caterers. The Delegation of Tunisia stated that the Technical Centre was responsible for implementing a similar programme for Food Industries, including training.

138. The Observer from Consumers International stated that the use of the HACCP system for food safety did not preclude consideration of other quality issues of importance to consumers, and did not exclude the need for qualified laboratories. The Observer stated that the auto-control procedures implied under the HACCP system should be verified by external accredited laboratories. The Delegation of the United Arab Emirates noted that the administration could not delegate accreditation to private bodies.

C. IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION OF THE SPS AND TBT AGREEMENTS²³

139. The paper was introduced by the Codex Secretariat, who stressed the outcome of the Doha Ministerial Declaration of November 2001, in particular the statements recognizing the special needs and interests of developing countries, the provision of technical assistance, capacity building, and special and differential treatment so as to integrate these countries more fully into the WTO system. The Joint Declaration of the Executive Heads of FAO, WHO, OIE, WTO and the World Bank (see also Agenda Item 9) was also highlighted.

WORKING PAPER ON THE ELABORATION OF A REGIONAL STANDARD FOR MICROBIOLOGICAL LEVELS IN FOODS (AGENDA ITEM 13)²⁴

140. The Delegation of Egypt presented its working paper on a proposal to elaborate a regional standard for microbiological levels in foods. The Delegation pointed out that the proposal was based on existing sub-regional standards and national standards and used the methodology first recommended by the International Commission for Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) for two- and three-class sampling plans.

²³ CX/NEA 03/15 (Prepared by the Codex Secretariat).

²⁴ CX/NEA 3/16

The proposed sampling plans and specifications would establish criteria for pathogens and/or indicator organisms in a wide range of products, including:

- Dairy products
- Foods for infants and children and certain categories of dietetic foods
- Meat, poultry and their products
- Fish and shellfish
- Egg products, margarine and nut butters
- Tomato products, salads, vinegar and spices
- Cereals and cereal products
- Vegetables and fruits
- Jelly and jam products
- Chocolate and candy products
- Ingredients for food industries
- Drinking water, beverages, fruit juice, tea and coffee; and
- Canned foods and ingredients for canning.

141. The Representative of WHO stated that under the SPS Agreement, sound scientific risk assessment was needed to underpin the establishment of food safety standards, and this new requirement had changed the approach being used for the establishment of microbiological criteria. He noted that the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene had requested FAO and WHO to develop a scientific approach to microbiological risk assessment so that science-based criteria could be developed where needed. This included consideration of pathogenicity, dose response and exposure assessment. Because of the cost involved in accumulating the necessary data and expertise, only a small number of pathogen/commodity combinations had been examined so far. The Codex Committee on Food Hygiene would be examining these risk assessments at its 35th Session (27 January – 1 February 2003). The Representative of WHO was of the opinion that it would be premature to begin work on microbiological specifications until the advice of the CCFH was known.

142. The Representative of FAO supported the views of WHO, and pointed out that the classical method for the establishment of microbiological specifications was no longer supported. It was noted that end-product testing was considered as being unreliable and ineffective for food safety control and that much greater stress was being placed on in-process controls through systems such as HACCP.

143. The Secretary of the Commission stated that the Commission had adopted Principles for the Establishment of Microbiological Specifications for Foods (CAC/GL 21-1997). These principles indicated that microbiological criteria should only be established where there was a definite need, where the application was practical, and that the criterion was meaningful for consumer protection based on either epidemiological evidence or as a result of a risk assessment. He was concerned that the development of such a broad range of criteria unsupported by risk assessment could lead to a waste of human and financial resources in the laboratory and inspection services and not produce any net increase in consumer protection.

144. The Delegation of Jordan supported the view that a system should be established depending on the degree of risk, as it was not possible with current resources to apply all of the specifications indicated on such a range of commodities. The Delegation suggested that regional standards should be based on international standards and not vice-versa.

145. The Delegation of Saudi Arabia thanked Egypt for its work, and noted that many of the criteria had been based on the standards developed by the Gulf Cooperation Council. Nevertheless, the Delegation stated that the application of such standards must show a certain degree of flexibility and that stress should be placed

on the application of Good Manufacturing Practices and HACCP. However, the Delegation was also of the opinion that the countries of the region faced a special problem because of the high proportion of imported foodstuffs. He suggested that more time was needed to study the proposals and recommended the establishment of a special study group.

146. The Delegation of the United Arab Emirates stated that full consideration should be given to the use and impact of the HACCP system.

147. The Coordinating Committee agreed that these proposals should be subject to further study because there was a need expressed by the countries of the region for the establishment of microbiological specifications. It requested Egypt to coordinate a technical study group consisting of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates on the further development of microbiological specifications.

OTHER BUSINESS AND FUTURE WORK (AGENDA ITEM 14)

148. The Observer from Consumer International raised the issue of protecting the consumers of the region against the addition of unlawful components in meat products and also other products where animal products such as gelatin, were used. The Observer recommended the use of histological tests or product tracing to ensure that the products were derived from animal that were in accordance with the legitimate expectations of consumers.

149. In regard to its future work, the Coordinating Committee noted that it would discuss the following matters at its next session, in addition to any specific items referred to Regional Coordinating Committees by the Commission or the Executive Committee:

- Proposed draft standards for Processed Chickpeas (*Humus*) and Processed Fava Beans (*Foul-Medemes*);
- Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Street-Vended Foods;
- Proposed Draft Standard for Tehine (if approved by the Commission);
- Proposed Draft Regional Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees (if approved by the Commission);
- Information exchange on food control and food regulations in the Region;
- Information on capacity building activities in the Region; and
- Matters from FAO and WHO, including the operation of the Trust Fund for participation of Developing Countries in Codex Standard-Setting Procedures

150. The Coordinating Committee agreed also to consider a discussion paper on Mutual Recognition Agreements between Near East Countries on Import / Export Accreditation to be prepared by Jordan.

NOMINATION OF COORDINATOR (AGENDA ITEM 15)

151. All of the Countries of the Coordinating Committee supported the nomination of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for appointment by the 26th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission as the Regional Coordinator for the Near East.

152. The Coordinating Committee expressed its highest appreciation to the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for the role that it had played in establishing the Coordinating Committee and guiding its work over the past four years. It expressed its special appreciation to Eng. Dr. Mahmoud Eisa, President of the Egyptian Organization for Standardization for his role as Chairperson of the Committee and the first Coordinator for the Region.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT SESSION (AGENDA ITEM 16)

153. The Secretary of the Commission noted that the next session of the Coordinating Committee would be held in approximately two years' time in Jordan, the precise date and place to be decided between the Codex Secretariat and the Host Country. He indicated that the timing of the meeting would take into account the period of the Haj and Eid al'Adha.

SUMMARY STATUS OF WORK

Subject matter	Step	Action by	Document Reference in ALINORM 03/40
Nomination of Regional Coordinator	-	26 th CAC	para. 150
Proposed Draft Code of Practice for Street-Vended Foods	Step 2	Egypt 3 rd CCNEA	paras.62-63
Proposed Draft Standard for Processed Chickpeas (<i>Humus</i>)	Step 2	Jordan 3 rd CCNEA	para. 72
Proposed Draft Standard for Processed Fava Beans (<i>Foul-Medemes</i>)	Step 2	Jordan 3 rd CCNEA	para. 72
Proposed Draft Standard for Tehine	Step 1	26 th CAC Jordan 3 rd CCNEA	para. 71
Proposed Draft Regional Guidelines for Codex Contact Points and National Codex Committees	Step 1	26 th CAC Egypt 3 rd CCNEA	para. 118
Residue Limits of Pesticides in Spices and Aromatic Plants	-	35 th CCPR	paras. 18-19
Joint FAO/WHO Evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Other FAO and WHO Work on Food Standards	-	25 th CAC	paras. 20-24
Consideration of the Draft Medium Term Plan	-	Codex Secretariat 26 th CAC	paras. 42-49
Consideration of Traceability/Product Tracing	-	18 th CCGP	paras. 50-53
Discussion paper on Mutual Recognition Agreements between Near East Countries on Import / Export Accreditation	-	Jordan 3 rd CCNEA	para. 150
Information and reports on Food Control and Food Regulations in the Near East	-	Governments 3 rd CCNEA	paras. 87-114 and 149
Information on Consumer Participation in Codex Work in the Near east	-	Governments 3 rd CCNEA	paras. 119-126
Information on Capacity Building Activities in the Region	-	FAO/WHO 3 rd CCNEA	paras. 73-86 and 149
Matters from FAO and WHO, including the Operation of the Trust Fund for Participation of Developing Countries in Codex Standard-Setting Procedures	-	FAO/WHO 3 rd CCNEA	para. 149

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