

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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World Health
Organization

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Agenda item 6

CX/NE 25/12/7

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR THE NEAR EAST

Twelfth Session

Muscat, Oman

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CODEX WORK RELEVANT TO THE REGION

*Prepared by the Coordinator for the Near East (Sultanate of Oman)
in collaboration with the former Coordinator (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)*

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1. The Near East region has long recognized the critical role of Codex Alimentarius in protecting consumer health and promoting fair practices in food trade. Regional priorities often reflect the agricultural products, dietary patterns, and food safety challenges specific to the area.
2. During the Eleventh Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE11), Members of the Region identified the following issues as particularly relevant to Codex work areas where countries of the region continue to face challenges:
 - (i) Establishing maximum levels (MLs) for aflatoxins in peanuts.
 - (ii) Addressing the challenges related to minimum moisture content for fresh dates
3. Resources were mobilized to address some of these priorities, through members' input and through data collection efforts coordinated by regional Codex initiatives. One of the examples of these Codex initiatives, is the Arab Codex Initiative, implemented by the Arab Industrial Organization, Standardization and Mining Organization, a regional inter-governmental organization in charge of harmonization of food standards in the Arab region, as well as efforts of coordination of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Standardization Organization (GSO) through its Codex Sub-Committee to Technical Committee 5 (TC5).
4. This document highlights Codex standards and ongoing work of relevance to the Near East region.
5. It is drafted in such a way to guide discussions at the Twelfth Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Near East (CCNE12), with the aim to consider the information presented and discuss the issues as proposed; to assess whether matters identified at CCNE11 remain relevant and provide further input. It also aims to guide discussions related to the identification of additional Codex work of interest to the region and to prioritize the issues of greatest importance and ensure regional views are effectively transmitted in Codex discussions.
6. Identification of concrete actions and collaborative approaches based on the priorities and interests of Member Countries will be pursued.

CODEX TEXTS AND WORK OF INTEREST TO THE REGION

Standard for olive oils and olive pomace oils (CXS 33-1981)

7. CAC47:
 - i. adopted, at Step 5/8, the revised Standard for olive oils and olive pomace oils (CXS 33-1981), with an amendment to Section 3.2.3 4 α -Desmethylsterols composition (% total 4 α -desmethylsterols), footnote (b) to replace "it may be considered" to "it is considered" and noted the reservations of Algeria and the Syrian Arab Republic;
 - ii. agreed to initiate work, on data collection, on Section 3.2.3 footnote (c) (decision tree), that would allow CCFO to make a decision on its applicability to all authentic olive oils;

- iii. agreed to request the Codex Secretariat to issue a CL for data collection on the applicability of the decision tree as defined in footnote (c) taking into account the framework as defined in paragraph 49;
- 8. CCNE Members are encouraged to respond to the Circular Letter (CL) on data collection regarding the applicability of the decision tree referenced in Section 3.2.3, footnote (c), of the Standard for olive oils and olive pomace oils (CXS 33-1981), in accordance with the framework outlined in paragraph 49, to support CCFO's decision-making.
- 9. A CRD developed by the Syrian Arab Republic¹ highlights the need for a coordinated regional effort to generate scientific data on the applicability of Section 3.2.3 footnote (c) of the Codex Standard for Olive Oils and Olive-Pomace Oils (CXS 33-1981). Syria expressed concerns that the current parameters, particularly those related to $\Delta 7$ -stigmastenol and Δ ECN42, could wrongly classify up to 40% of authentic Syrian olive oils as non-authentic, despite being genuine products. The document underlines the economic risks this poses for Syria and possibly other regional producers, and calls for a structured plan for data collection covering key cultivars and agro-climatic zones across CCNE countries. It also recommends establishing a regional initiative, supported by FAO, AIDSMO, and other partners, to consolidate data in a regional olive oil composition database, strengthen laboratory capacity, and ensure that Codex provisions adequately reflect regional variability in olive oils.
- 10. CCNE Members are encouraged to consider supporting this initiative by e.g. providing national data, engaging their laboratories in analysis, and participating in coordinated efforts to ensure that authentic regional olive oils are fairly represented in Codex decisions.

Extrapolation of MRLs to camelids

- 11. At its 27th Session, the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods (CCRVDF27) revised its risk-analysis principles to allow for the extrapolation of MRLs to camelids, a major step forward for CCNE members where camel products are central to food safety and trade. This progress built on a discussion paper introduced at CCRVDF26 (February 2023, Portland, USA) by Jordan, Morocco, AIDSMO and IUFoST, which highlighted the need for Codex clarity on the status of camels within the ruminant grouping, requested JECFA advice, and called for regional collaboration to generate data.
- 12. CCFFV27 emphasized the importance of starting a practical application of such MRL derivation, with the aim of considering future adjustments based on experience gained.
- 13. Members are encouraged to contribute to this effort, to support data generation and coordinated submissions so that Codex MRLs for camel meat and milk fully reflect the realities of Near East production systems.

Proposal for the development of a standard for pasteurized camel milk

- 14. CAC47 recommended that the UAE (as the proponent of the proposal) and New Zealand (as host country of CCMMP) work together as outlined in paragraph 260(b) of the CAC47 report, to conduct a gap analysis and further review the new work proposal, so that a CL could be issued in a timely manner to seek inputs from interested Members and Observers on the need for, and possible extent of new work on camel milk, with the view that the proposal on camel milk would be subject to critical review by CCEXEC89 and consideration by CAC48.
- 15. CCNE Members are encouraged to respond to the Circular Letter CL 2025/50-CAC on camel milk to support its review by CCEXEC89 and CAC48.
- 16. CCNE Members are also invited to identify any relevant data that could further support the update of the gap analysis carried out by the Chair of the Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP), the International Dairy Federation (IDF) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

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

- 17. CAC47 requested the Codex Secretariat to issue a CL to Members and Observers seeking potential solutions to the use of country of harvest in food labelling of spices, recognizing the concerns that had been expressed by Codex Members; and established an EWG, reporting to CCFL, jointly chaired by Iran and Canada and co-chaired by India and Madagascar.
- 18. As the deadline for the CL was May 2025, CCNE Members are encouraged to actively participate in the EWG and related future work on COH.

¹ NE12/CRD04

Standards for Fresh Dates

19. At its 23rd Session, the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV23) completed deliberations on the Draft Standard for Fresh Dates (at Step 7). The Committee agreed to delete the minimum moisture content requirement, while retaining a maximum of 85%, clarifying that “freshness” should not depend solely on water content. CCFFV23 also agreed to retain the 1% tolerance for decay in the “Extra” Class, despite some reservations, emphasizing its practicality and consistency with international trade practices. The Committee further simplified sizing provisions to reflect trade realities and confirmed that provisions on food labelling and additives had already been endorsed by the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) and the Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA). On this basis, CCFFV23 decided to forward the Draft Standard for Fresh Dates to CAC48 for adoption at Step 8
20. This outcome was underpinned by an important contribution of Near East delegations, through an Expert Working Group convened under the Arab Codex Initiative and led by the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO). The group mobilized experts from 13 Arab countries to gather and analyze scientific and trade data on moisture content and other parameters. Their findings provided an evidence base for the Committee’s discussions on moisture levels, ensuring that the final standard reflects the diversity of date cultivars produced and traded across the Near East and North Africa.
21. Members are encouraged to support the adoption of this standard at CAC48, as it reflects the region’s collective position, safeguards the interests of Near East date producers, and ensures that international standards remain inclusive of the region’s production and trade realities.
22. Members are encouraged to consider establishing similar collaborative initiatives on an ongoing basis, to address regional priorities that require data collection and timely submission in response to Codex requests.

Ongoing standard setting work of relevance to the region

23. Table 1 provides a non-exhaustive overview of other topics of special interest to Members in the region.

Table 1: Non-exhaustive list of ongoing Codex work of special interest to CCNE

COMMITTEE	TOPICS OF SPECIAL INTERESTS TO THE NEAR EAST REGION	COMMENTS
CCFFV	Draft standard for fresh curry leaves	CCFFV23 revised the draft standard for fresh curry leaves by relocating tolerance requirements from “Extra” Class to Class I, clarified the process for handling food additive provisions, and agreed to forward the draft to CAC for adoption at Step 5/8, pending endorsement of labelling and additive provisions by CCFL and CCFA.
CCCF	Priority list of contaminants for evaluation by JECFA	Members are called to continue the identification of chemical contaminants of priority to the region, requiring CCCF guidance.
	Review of the code of practice for the reduction of acrylamide in foods (cxc 67-2009)	CCCF agreed to re-establish the EWG, led by India with Qatar and Saudi Arabia, to continue developing the draft revisions and related documents, and requested the Codex Secretariat to issue a circular letter to collect information on effective local or regional acrylamide mitigation measures.
CCFA	Discussion paper for new work on development of guidelines for food safety assessment of cell culture media components in cell-based food production	CCFA55 agreed to establish an EWG, chaired by Singapore and co-chaired by China, the Republic of Korea, and Saudi Arabia, working in English, to discuss and improve the project document for developing a guideline on conducting food safety assessments of cell culture media components used in the production of cell-based foods

CCFA	Standard for baker's yeast	CCFA55 noted that several technical issues required further consideration and clarification, and therefore the draft was not ready to advance in the Step process. CCFA55 agreed to return the proposed draft standard to Step 2 for redrafting and to re-establish an EWG, chaired by China and co-chaired by France and Türkiye, working in English, to: (i) redraft the standard for baker's yeast based on session discussions and written comments received, and (ii) prepare a suitable proposal for amendments to the GSFA, if necessary, for consideration at CCFA56.
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CONCLUSIONS

24. The above-mentioned Codex work of relevance to the Near East region reflects both what are considered to be traditional commodities (such as dates, olive oil, saffron, and camel milk) and emerging issues (including novel foods, acrylamide mitigation, and food labelling). These matters are directly linked to food safety, public health, and trade opportunities for the region.
25. Members and observers from the region have had an increased participation in the development of Codex standards of relevance to the region, but more efforts are warranted to support stronger regional participation, added coordination and enhanced contribution to standards under development as well as proposals of new/updated Codex texts of relevance to the region. Active and coordinated engagement helps ensure that Codex standards reflect the realities of Near East production and consumption.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. CCNE12 is invited to:
 - (i) consider the above information and discuss the issues as proposed;
 - (ii) consider if the matters identified at CCNE11 are still relevant and provide further information accordingly;
 - (iii) identify Codex work relevant to the region not included in the document;
 - (iv) prioritize the issues of greatest interest to the region and consider means to ensure the views of the region are transmitted in the related discussions; and
 - (v) consider mobilizing resources to maintain coordinated approaches for identifying regional issues and for generating and submitting data in response to Codex calls.