

CODEx ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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CODEx COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS

Eighteenth Session

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Bangkok, Thailand

EVALUATION OF THE CODEx COMMITTEE ON CONTAMINANTS IN FOODS (CCCF) 2020-2023

(Prepared by the Host Country Secretariat)

1. Background

Over the years, the Codex Secretariat has introduced satisfaction surveys after each session of Codex committees, including the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF), as a mechanism to improve the performance of the Host Country Secretariat in organizing meetings, including the performance of the Chair of the Committee in preparing for and conducting the meeting and the Codex Secretariat in supporting both the Chair and the Host Country Secretariat.

In addition, following the Strategic Plan 2020-25, monitoring surveys have been conducted since 2021 to measure the use and impact of Codex texts. In this framework, a specific survey took place in 2022 on the *General Standard for Contaminants in Food and Feed* (CXS193-1995), and a summary of the key findings of this survey is included in Appendix 2 for information.

Satisfaction and monitoring surveys account for different aims; satisfaction surveys account for the performance of CCCF in developing standards for contaminants (based on the performance of the Codex/Host Country Secretariats, CCCF Chairs, etc.). In contrast, the monitoring surveys account for the performance of the standards themselves in terms of whether they are fit for purpose and therefore being applied by Codex members, including uptake in national regulations.

The findings of the monitoring survey are presented for information vis-à-vis the overall use/uptake of provisions in CXS193 related to maximum levels (MLs) and guideline levels (GLs) by Codex members.

The focus of this exercise is the assessment of the findings of the satisfaction surveys carried out for several years following the completion of CCCF sessions, as shown in Appendix 1. For example, what the Host Country Secretariat has done or will do to improve some issues arising from these findings, and what else could be done based on the advice of Codex members and observers.

To improve how CCCF works and better understand its work, the Host Country Secretariat analyzed the satisfaction survey results, summarized the monitoring results of using CXS193, and presented its findings.

2. Scope

This document presents the key findings of the results achieved and how the Host Country Secretariat has organized the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) over the past few years. It provides transparency to all participants, ensuring everyone clearly understands our collective progress and performance. By sharing these insights, the Host Country Secretariat aims to foster open dialogue and continuous improvement in working together.

The findings are based on satisfaction surveys conducted among 267 delegates (member countries and observer organizations) and interviews with the Host Country Secretariat and the Codex survey on the use and impact of Codex texts. The Host Country Secretariat has therefore reviewed:

2.1 Satisfaction surveys following CCCF sessions (Appendix 1)

- CCCF14 (virtual only 2021)
- CCCF15 (virtual only 2022), no post-meeting survey was conducted
- CCCF16 (Netherlands 2023)
- CCCF17 (co-host Panama 2024)

2.2 Monitoring survey on the use and impact of Codex standards (i.e., *Codex Standard for Contaminants in Food and Feed* (CXS193-1995) (2021) (Appendix 2)

3. Mandate of CCCF

The mandate is presented below so that Codex members and observers better understand the role and deliverables of CCCF:

- (i) to establish or endorse permitted maximum levels (MLs), and where necessary, revise existing guideline levels, for contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed;
- (ii) to prepare priority lists of contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants for risk assessment by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives;
- (iii) to consider and elaborate methods of analysis and sampling for the determination of contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed;
- (iv) consider and elaborate standards or codes of practice for related subjects; and
- (v) to consider other matters assigned to it by the Commission in relation to contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed.

4. Structure of the document

This document consists of two sections.

- Appendix 1 provides insights into how the Host Country Secretariat prepares and organizes the sessions.
- Appendix 2 reviews the results of performance of CXS193.

Conclusions

See Appendices 1 and 2.

Recommendations

Satisfaction surveys (CCCF meetings)

Codex Members and Observers are invited to **review** the findings of this evaluation as presented in Appendix 1 and share their thoughts with the Host Country Secretariat on (i) whether the improvements that have been or will be implemented are satisfactory and (ii) whether there is room for further improvements. This feedback is valuable in ensuring that the Committee continues effectively serving its purpose.

Monitoring surveys (CXS193-1995 - 2021)

Codex members and observers are invited to **note** the findings of this evaluation as presented in Appendix 2. The complete information and outcomes of this survey are available in the report of the survey.

Request for input

Satisfaction surveys (CCCF meetings)

Based on the information provided in Appendix 1, Codex members and observers are kindly invited to provide input on the following points.

Input should be sent to the Host Country Secretariat info@codexalimentarius.nl with a copy to the Codex Secretariat (codex@fao.org) by no later than **two weeks before** the plenary session so that the Host Country Secretariat can compile and assess the comments and submit them for consideration by CCCF:

- (i) **Effectiveness of the organization of CCCF meetings:**
Are there improvements that the Host Country and Codex Secretariat should consider in addition to those that have been or will be implemented by the Host Country Secretariat as indicated in the boxes in Appendix 1?
- (ii) **Use of the surveys following completion of CCCF meetings:**
 - (a) Are the questions clear and relevant?
 - (b) Are there additional questions that should be included in future surveys?
 - (c) How can participation in future surveys be improved?
Indicate what could be done by the Host Country Secretariat or the Codex Secretariat.

(iii) **Relevance of this evaluation:**

Are the insights provided in this paper useful and relevant?

(iv) **Frequency of the evaluation:**

Should this evaluation be conducted again, and if so, how often would it be appropriate?

(v) **Transparency and communication:**

(a) Is the level of transparency provided sufficient?

(b) How can communication about progress (i.e., logistics of the meeting preparation and conduct of plenary meetings) be improved?

APPENDIX 1
CODEX SURVEYS FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF CCCF SESSIONS
(For consideration and to support further input, if any,
on improving work processes in CCCF)

Organizing CCCF

1. Level of satisfaction:

- 1.1 Registration system:** 98% agreed/strongly agreed that the **registration system** worked well. Suggestions were to mention data on pre-sessions and report adoption in the first invitation letter for flight booking purposes, as well as to have better information on online registration versus physical registration.

Improvements made: Earlier communication of times and subjects for physical and virtual pre-sessions and the time of the final adoption. This has been done by communication through the letter of the chair.

- 1.2 Virtual sessions 2020 and 2021:** 85% agreed that the period was a good balance of day pre-sessions, plenary, and adoption. Comments indicated there were too many group pre-sessions before the plenary session (online), and 1½ days of pre-session meetings is quite long; 3 weeks is too long. Some issues would be nice to have only in the plenary.

The Zoom platform and webcasting (YouTube) were easy to access and worked well. 80% of participants were Satisfied and very satisfied. Some participants wanted more interventions/contributions online, and there were connectivity problems in member countries and unclear start/break times.

Improvements made: The next CCCF will be hybrid based on learnings from the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CCMAS), Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). Test links will be sent to member countries 30 minutes before the start so they can prepare their internet connection and system.

- 1.3 Physical sessions 2022 and 2023:** The time allocated for each session during the plenary was rated appropriate, as 93% agreed and strongly agreed. Suggestions include having shorter breaks to allow more space for discussions.

Improvements made: The Host Country Secretariat will follow the times according to the schedule and clearly communicate if the times change. Yet the Secretariat is also bound to the set-up time schedules because of obligatory breaks for our interpreters and meeting set-up.

- 1.3 Pre-meetings:** 70% regarded these as useful. 30% indicated that the physical meetings held on Sunday were communicated very late, and the Virtual Working Groups held prior to the plenary meeting were a bit rushed. Not everyone could participate, and some participants thought the meetings were optional, yet decisions from these VWGs were taken up in the plenary sessions.

Improvements made: The Host Country Secretariat aims for clear and timely communication on pre-meetings, clarifying the intent and the timing. Decisions are only made in plenary; pre-meetings are there to aid the discussions in plenary and to provide information relevant to the working field of CCCF. If proposals in working documents are changed, this can only be done using a Conference Room Document (CRD).

5. Working documents

- 2.1 Distribution of working documents:** 74% satisfied, 11% neutral, 2% dissatisfied.
- 2.2 Information on the Codex website: 92% satisfied and very satisfied.** Negative comments mostly referred to the late delivery of working documents.

Improvements made: The CCCF Chair and EWG Chairs communicate more frequently about work progress. The CCCF chair also provides suggestions to enhance the efficiency of the EWG work if needed.

The timely publication of working documents on the Codex website depends largely on the authors. Therefore, the Host Country Secretariat requests that authors adhere to the deadlines by sending reminders. The Codex Secretariat needs to edit the documents after receipt. Only after this can the document be translated and placed on the Codex website. Due to all the steps involved, it remains challenging to deliver documents on time.

For EWGs working on proposals for MLs, where calls for data are requested, a timeline of 2 years has been granted for their work. This allows sufficient time for data processing and provides more opportunity to prepare a document in time for the meeting.

2.3 The quality of working documents was rated very good, as 98% of the participants were satisfied and very satisfied.

The countries' comments are published on the website as Conference Room Documents (CRDs) shortly before the meeting. Hence, it requires a lot of effort for the delegates to find the comments for each agenda item.

Improvements made: The Host Country Secretariat will explore structuring the CRDs by agenda item instead of comments from each country (as was done for previous CCCF sessions). If it is not possible, the Host Country Secretariat aims to provide an overview of which CRDs are relevant to which agenda item.

6. Inclusion

Around 65-70 member countries participated in the physical meetings in The Netherlands and Panama. This number was higher during the virtual meetings in 2021 (85) and 2022 (92). An observation is that there are fewer participants from member countries in Africa than in other regions. It was mentioned once that African countries had a visa challenge to participate in Panama.

Improvements made: The Host Country Secretariat will organize a hybrid meeting at the next CCCF. The Host Country Secretariat aims to co-host sessions in different regions worldwide to ensure equal participation regarding time zones. In 2026, it is explored to co-host with a country in the African/Near East region.

7. Management

Chair's ability to facilitate debate, summarize, and conclude discussions: 98% of participants were satisfied & very satisfied during the four meetings. Few suggestions were received: ensure more online participation, the conclusions shared on the screen were presented too short. Only during the first virtual meeting in 2020, there was a need for a broader discussion and an opportunity for everyone to talk.

Improvements made: The conclusions have been shared longer on screen since 2023.

The **management of the Codex Secretariat was rated** positively with 97% as well its support to the chair was appreciated. Generally, the comments by the Secretariat were succinct and added much clarity. The suggestions: it was sometimes challenging to see which text changes were added in real-time for adoption. It was also perceived there was an inconsistent approach in advance of report adoption to accept comments from some delegations and not from others.

Improvements made: The Chair will be more mindful when comments are made in plenary and will follow up to ensure they have been adequately addressed. Codex members are invited to raise their concerns during the meeting if they feel their comments should be incorporated. If changes are not incorporated, the reasoning behind it will be provided.

A general comment was made that issues should be escalated timely in case countries cannot participate or have challenges.

Improvements made: The Host Country Secretariat is responsible for responding as soon as possible. The updated Information for delegates will include information on how to communicate with the Host Country Secretariat if issues arise.

8. Facility and service of meeting rooms

85% of the participants were satisfied & very satisfied, and the main comments were on:

- insufficient power plugs,
- temperature of the meeting room
- insufficient seating
- not ready on Sunday (Panama)
- more desk space needed
- request for discounts of hotels near the venue

Improvements made: These comments will be taken into account for the next CCCF session. During the long lunch breaks, delegates are normally invited to have lunch at a venue of their own choice. It is courtesy of the Thai government that at CCCF18, lunches will be available to all delegates close to the venue.

9. Quality of interpretation

95% of the participants were satisfied & very satisfied. No changes were made.

APPENDIX 2
CODEX SURVEY 2022
MONITORING THE USE AND IMPACT OF CODEX STANDARDS
Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025
Goal 3: Increase impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards
(For information)

The Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods maintains the *General Standard for Contaminants in Food and Feed* (CXS 193-1995), which contains maximum levels (MLs) and guideline levels (GLs), including cross-references to relevant codes of practice. Until now, the Codex Alimentarius Commission has adopted 220 MLs and 45 GLs for 18 contaminants.

Level of satisfaction with the progress of outcomes

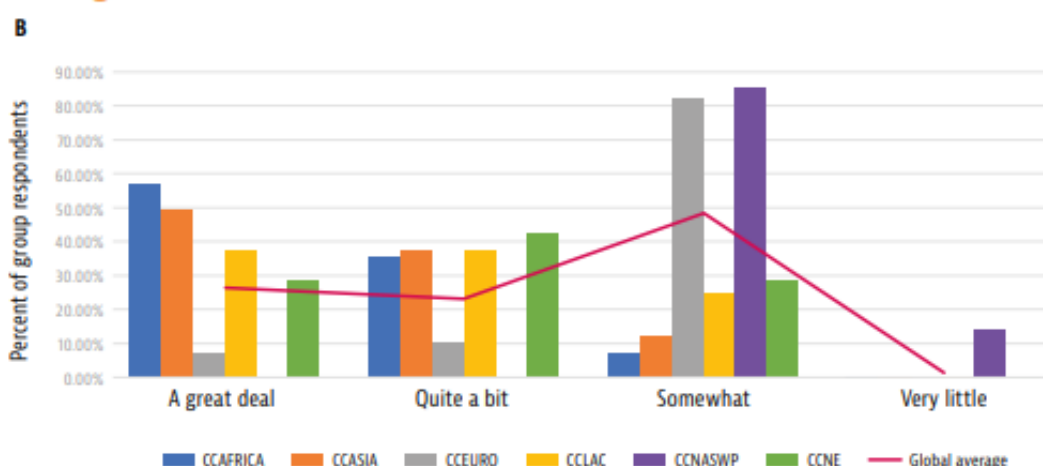
The survey (2020) also specifically evaluated CXS 193-1995. Key conclusions regarding the use and impact of this specific Codex text were as follows¹:

- *Relative to other individual Codex texts, there appears to be a higher general level of satisfaction with this standard concerning format and structure, language, and method of dissemination of the standard.*
- *Delegations from specific regions indicate that ‘a great deal’ of new knowledge has been gained (Codex Coordinating Committees for Africa (CCAFRICA), Asia (CCASIA), Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC)), delegations from the Codex Coordinating Committees for Europe (CCEURO) and North America and Southwest Pacific (CCNASWP) gained ‘somewhat’ knowledge (see figure 22).*
- *Overall, this standard had an average rating of ‘extremely useful’ for level of satisfaction with format and structure, language, and dissemination of Codex texts.*
- *When comparing Codex texts, Member responses are more variable when considering the usefulness of this standard in meeting their respective countries’ priority food safety and quality needs.*
- *Relatively, there was a higher degree of additional knowledge gained from this standard compared to other Codex standards.*

Outcomes:

- 97% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed with the level of satisfaction with the progress of the outcomes of CCCF.

FIGURE 22 Degree that new knowledge from *General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed* (CXS 193-1995) has been gained



¹ The report of the Codex survey carried out in 2022 on the use and impact of Codex standards (including the *Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed* (CXS 193-1995)) is available at: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/items/420117b9-16a3-4965-b5ee-85cf91a54eef>

