



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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World Health
Organization

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEx ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Forty-seventh Session

WORK OF THE CODEx COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS (CCFICS)

1. The Commission is invited to adopt the draft guidelines submitted for adoption at Step 5 as listed in **Part 1** of this document. If adopted, the draft guidelines will be advanced to Step 6 for further comments and consideration by CCFICS28.
2. The comments received regarding the text from CCFICS27 submitted for adoption are contained in CX/CAC 24/47/11 Add.1.
3. The Commission is furthermore invited to approve new work proposals from CCFICS27 as listed in **Part 2** of this document and compiled in Annex I, Annex II Annex III and Annex IV. The Commission is invited to consider these proposals in the light of its *Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025* and the *Criteria for the establishment of work priorities* and *Criteria for the establishment of subsidiary bodies of the Codex Alimentarius Commission*.
4. The critical review of these texts will be conducted by the 87th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC87).

Part 1 – Standards and related texts submitted for adoption at Step 5

Standards and related texts	Reference	Job No.
Draft guidelines on the prevention and control of food fraud	REP24/FICS, Paragraph 61, Appendix II	N06-2021

Part 2 – Proposals to undertake new work or revise a standard

Text	Reference and project document
New work on developing guidance on appeals mechanism in the context of rejection of imported food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REP24/FICS, Paragraph 86, Appendix III • Annex I of this document
New work on developing guidance on the standardization of the representation of sanitary requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REP24/FICS, Paragraph 91, Appendix IV • Annex II of this document
New work on revision to the <i>Principles and guidelines for the exchange of information between importing and exporting countries to support the trade in food</i> (CXG 89-2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REP24/FICS, Paragraph 100, Appendix V • Annex III of this document
New work on the development of principles for the digitalisation of National Food Control Systems (NFCSSs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • REP24/FICS, Paragraph 103, Appendix VI • Annex IV of this document

PROJECT DOCUMENT

GUIDANCE ON APPEAL MECHANISM IN THE CONTEXT OF REJECTION OF IMPORTED FOOD

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF PROPOSED GUIDANCE

The purpose of the work is to provide guidance to competent authorities of importing and exporting countries and industry on the procedure and mechanism of appeal in the situation of rejection of the imported food in order to ensure food safety and fair practices in the food trade. It will be an amendment and/or annex to *Guidelines for Food Import Control Systems* (CXG 47-2003) (and possible amendment to *Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejections of Imported Foods* (CXG 25-1997).

The scope of the guidance is to develop procedures that may be followed in case a food consignment is rejected by the importing country and the importer, or exporter, or exporting country wish to file appeal against the decision of rejection. This includes considerations on when it may be appropriate to appeal, the communication of decision of rejection, appeal to importing country, consideration of the appeal by importing country and communicating the decision on the appeal. This would also include the opportunity for review of official decisions on consignments, as per CXG 47-2003.

2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS

The main objective of food control authorities is to protect public health and to prevent economic loss and trade disruption, thereby ensuring reliable global food supply chain. Border rejection of consignments is one of the critical issues faced by exporters and sometimes rejection could be due to reasons other than food safety. Destruction, Discarding or alternative (non-food) use of food that is safe and nutritious for human consumption, on account of rejection of consignment, may also fall in the category of food loss.

Although each individual case may represent a huge economic cost and food waste for the involved exporters, the main problem associated with border rejections is still the overall loss of trust and confidence by buyers in the safety and quality of the produce delivered by exporting country. Any final decision on the rejection of the food consignment by importing country need to be taken in a transparent manner by providing ample opportunity to relevant stakeholder.

The Codex *Guidelines for Food Import Control Systems* (CXG 47-2003) requires under paragraph 29 that there should be an appeal mechanism and/or opportunity for review of official decisions on consignments. The existing Codex text (CXG 25-1997) provide general guidance on exchange of information between countries during rejection of imported food, however, specific guidance on appeal mechanism during rejection is not available. The possibility of reducing food loss with the availability of such guidance also has the potential to contribute to other SDGs, including the Zero Hunger goal (SDG 2), which calls for an end to hunger, the achievement of food security and improved nutrition, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. Therefore, the proposed work, on guidance on appeal mechanism in the context of rejection of imported food, is a timely endeavour.

3. THE MAIN ASPECTS TO BE COVERED

The work will include development of guidance on appeal mechanism in the context of rejection of food consignment by importing country with a goal to provide opportunity to relevant stakeholders to present their case and decisions are taken in transparent manner without any compromise with food safety and fair trade. The guidance may include the following elements: Preamble, Purpose, Definition, Principles, Process Steps. The existing CCFICS text will be examined and reviewed to avoid the duplication of the text.

4. AN ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES GENERAL CRITERION

The proposed work will facilitate trade of safe food while ensuring that decision on rejection of food consignment are taken in transparent manner by providing due opportunity to relevant parties to promote fair trade.

CRITERIA APPLICABLE TO GENERAL SUBJECTS

a) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade

Some of the countries in their legislation have the provisions of appeal against the decision of rejection of imported food consignment. Development of Codex guidance in this area would help in achieving harmonization at global level.

b) Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of work

Refer to scope of work above.

c) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body (ies)

Not applicable

d) Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardisation

Guidance on appeal mechanism will bring transparency and uniformity in decision making process of rejection of food consignment.

e) Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue

Rejection of food consignment is a major socio-economic burden, particularly in developing countries and any wrong decision of rejection may lead to food loss.

5. RELEVANCE TO CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The proposed work is directly related to the purpose of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, according to its statutes, to protect the health of the consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. Further, the work relates to the first Strategic Goal of the Codex Alimentarius Commission's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 to "address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner", and is consistent with Objective 1.1 "identify needs and emerging issues". This guidance is relevant to the needs of the Members and will improve the ability of Codex to develop standards relevant to the needs of its members. It is also consistent with Objective 4.2 "Increase sustainable and active participation of all Codex Members" through participation in the work of CCFICS and the related working groups.

6. INFORMATION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROPOSAL AND OTHER EXISTING CODEX DOCUMENTS

Based on the review of existing Codex text it is observed that the *Codex Guidelines for the exchange of information between countries on rejection of imported food (CXG 25-1997 Revised in 2016)* contains guidance on basic information exchange between countries on rejections of imported food where the reason for the rejection is related to food safety and fair practices in food trade and specifies a standard format for such information exchange. The proposed guidance will specify the procedure for appeal by relevant parties & its consideration by importing country, once information exchange on rejection of imported food in terms of CXG 25-1997 has been done by the importing country to relevant parties. Therefore, the proposed guidance will elaborate on the appeal mechanism as specified in CXG 47-2003.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY REQUIREMENT FOR AND AVAILABILITY OF EXPERT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Not required.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY NEED FOR TECHNICAL INPUT TO THE STANDARD FROM EXTERNAL BODIES SO THAT THIS CAN BE PLANNED FOR:

Not required at this stage.

9. COMPLETION OF THE NEW WORK AND OTHER CONDITIONS

Subject to the Codex Alimentarius Commission approval at its 47th Session in 2024, it is expected that the new work can be completed within two or three sessions of CCFICS.

PROJECT DOCUMENT

GUIDANCE ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF SANITARY REQUIREMENTS

1. PURPOSE OF PROPOSED STANDARD

The purpose of the work is to develop a guidance document that will provide information and how countries can simplify and standardize the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements included in official certificates, based on ontology methods. Harmonized syntax and semantics would turn the negotiation for a new certificate, and the update of an existing one, into a very objective activity. Also, it will turn the e-CERT implementation easier, because digital verifications can be implemented and automatized into processes and an accurate language is very important to avoid confusion on what is intended to achieve. The guidance would not be mandatory and are not specific for electronic documents.

The following activities are proposed:

- Assess and refine the pilot results: validate the theoretical and methodological foundations and results.
- Gather information: Identify and reference any existing and relevant documents, guidelines, and regulations related to the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements in official certificates, including any existing standards or best practices.
- Explore new possibilities: understand how existing and future Codex guidelines can incorporate a section with an ontology-like structure to represent guidance knowledge in a structured format.
- Develop the guidance:
 - Use examples from the pilot results to demonstrate how to use the methodology and demonstrate the results of simplification and standardization.
 - Provide key direction on how to analyze and simplify an existing attestation/statement, and how to create a simple, accurate, and clear new attestation/statement when needed.
 - Provide key direction on creating ontologies and taxonomies to organize the representation of sanitary requirements in attestations or statements included in official certificates into a hierarchical classification system based on their characteristics, such as the type of requirement, the hazard, or the level of risk it represents.
 - Provide key direction on how to implement and maintain the taxonomy and ontology into the relevant systems, processes, or tools.

2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS

Countries are facing challenges to implement electronic certification systems. The OECD paper entitled *Electronic Sanitary Certificates for Trade in Animal Products (2023)* identified that “*At present, there is no “one” international standardised sanitary certificate schema for all countries that can facilitate the standardised exchange and processing of e-sanitary certificates*”.

Creating an XML file for electronic certification embedded with information that is presented on paper is not difficult. The challenge, and the real watershed, is to create digital and automated processes that will improve safety at the same time that reduces unnecessary processes at borders.

Digital transformation seems a buzzword nowadays, but the truth is that it can only be achieved with new processes and new tools, designed with a digital mindset, using and reusing public and private data as appropriate and as needed throughout the supply chain.

The standardization proposed will support establishment of a more digital mindset among countries for the the attestations or statements included in sanitary certificates, making the journey to the electronic certification easier and faster. The lack of schema highlighted by OECD can be at least minimize, or even solved.

3. THE MAIN ASPECTS TO BE COVERED

The proposed work is intended to provide guidance to countries in simplifying and standardizing attestations and statements, when required in official certificates. The proposed work will also use the results of the pilot project to demonstrate how this simplification and standardization could lead to a broader, structured taxonomy of statements/attestations that could facilitate greater eCert adoption and use.

The guidance will encompass definitions, methods, tools, and processes designed to simplify and harmonize representation in a manner accessible to non-experts in ontology and related techniques. This approach will enable easy adoption for those new to these concepts. It will also guide countries through a seamless transition

from the current (as-is) to the desired (to-be) scenario, remove ambiguities and establish univocal relationships between the natural language text of the requirement and its translation into triples.

Furthermore, the guidance will detail the use of attributes to represent variables of a requirement that may differ based on location, procedure, or any other variation, such as a fixed value or a temperature range.

4. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES

The proposal is consistent with the criteria as follows:

General Criterion: Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries.

The proposed new work will enable a more organized and systematized approach to sanitary requirements, that can be applied from production to certification of plant and animal products. This holistic structure will leverage controls allowing automated checks to be performed by autonomous systems. Better processes lead to better results, and in this case, deliver a safer product for consumption.

Criteria applicable to General Subjects

a) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade

The development of the proposed standard would assist in achieving harmonization at global level, facilitate the agreement of requirements and also the control of their compliance by the national authority.

b) Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work

Refer to scope of work above.

c) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies)

Similar work was performed for other areas, like WCO and WHO as explained in the Introduction above.

d) Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardisation

The deliverables of the working group will be proposed as a new standard.

e) Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue

Manage hundreds of certificate models may lead to errors and inefficient processes and controls. Countries are having difficulties to implement electronic certification systems mainly related to the incorporation of the e-CERT document into the existing processes. The standardization will enable that new processes may be designed and implemented based on data collection and reuse, private-public interoperability and track and trace strategies.

5. RELEVANCE TO CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The project proposal outlined above relates to the Codex Alimentarius Commission's Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 in several ways:

1. Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food safety and quality issues: The proposal aims to standardize representation of sanitary requirements in the attestations or statements included in official certificates, and develop a global standard for sanitary requirements that can be digitally processed, which would contribute to international food safety standards and facilitate trade.
2. Ensure the application of risk analysis principles in the development of Codex standards: By creating a standardized, digitally processable set of sanitary requirements, the proposal would allow for improved risk analysis and data-driven decision-making.
3. Facilitate the effective participation of all Codex members, particularly developing countries, in the standard-setting process: The proposed standardization of sanitary requirements would simplify the process for all countries, making it easier for developing countries to participate in trade negotiations and comply with international food safety standards.
4. Implement effective and efficient work management systems and practices: The proposal focuses on creating a harmonized and semantic standard for sanitary requirements, which would lead to more efficient work management systems and practices in the context of sanitary certificates and e-CERT implementation.
5. Strengthen communication and promote the use and understanding of Codex standards and related texts: By standardizing the sanitary requirements, the proposal would make it easier for countries to

communicate, understand, and implement Codex standards in their trade agreements and certification processes.

6. INFORMATION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROPOSAL AND OTHER CODEX DOCUMENTS

The proposed standard creation will help to address the objectives presented by the documents below.

1. *Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates* (CXG 38-2001)
2. *Principles for Traceability/Product Tracing as a Tool within a Food Inspection and Certification System* (CXG 60-2006)

7. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY REQUIREMENT FOR AND AVAILABILITY OF EXPERT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Taxonomy and ontology experts are required to establish the base on what the project will be implemented. The project aims at standardising the representation of existing knowledge without adding any new knowledge and it demands a multidisciplinary team. Depending on the achievements, additional expert advice from the FAO or WHO, may be sought should need arise.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY NEED FOR TECHNICAL INPUT TO THE STANDARD FROM EXTERNAL BODIES SO THAT THIS CAN BE PLANNED FOR

Technical input will be necessary from external consultants and domain experts in order achieve the best possible results.

9. PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF THE NEW WORK, INCLUDING THE START DATE, THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION AT STEP 5, AND THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION BY THE COMMISSION; THE TIMEFRAME FOR DEVELOPING A STANDARD SHOULD NORMALLY NOT EXCEED FIVE YEARS

Subject to the Codex Alimentarius Commission approval, it is expected that the new work can be completed within two or three sessions of CCFICS.

PROJECT DOCUMENT**PROPOSED REVISION TO THE *PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION BETWEEN IMPORTING AND EXPORTING COUNTRIES TO SUPPORT THE TRADE IN FOOD* (CXG 89-2016) – TO DEVELOP PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES TO HARMONISE THE USE, DEVELOPMENT, AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ESTABLISHMENT LISTINGS****1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED STANDARD**

The purpose and scope of the standard is to guide the Competent Authority(ies) (CA) of a National Food Control System (NFCS) in situations where the use of establishment listings are considered justified by risk for the exchange of information.

Guidelines and Principles should facilitate harmonized, streamlined, and timely information sharing when such lists are justified. This should ensure that information is required only once and decrease the requirement for burdensome data gathering, contribute to saving time and money, ensuring updated information is readily available for trading partners, and consequently facilitate trade in safe food.

The work is proposed to be an annex to the *Principles and guidelines for the exchange of information between importing and exporting countries to support the trade in food* (CXG 89-2016), and may require minor consequential amendments. This work would aim at harmonising the use (the drivers), development (content and format) and implementation (mechanisms including digitalization) of establishment listings.

2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS

Most trade in food occurs without countries requiring an exchange of information on their NFCS. However, in recent years, there has been an increase in the information demands to gain confidence in the trade of food and food stuffs. Competent Authorities (CA) gather this information using various tools, such as audits, import testing, questionnaires, certificates and establishment and product listings.

The listing requirements can be extensive, and are often resource demanding, entailing increased costs for CAs and food business operators (FBOs) in exporting countries. The information to be provided and the submission processes vary with the requesting CA and may include information requirements varying from regulatory oversight to production and processing information for individual products.

Additionally, there are difficulties in keeping government to government reporting lines intact and keeping lists up to date. Outdated listing information might lead to potential problems at the border, again leading to unnecessary barriers to trade. Different formatting of the lists (forms) also results in work intensive difficulties when providing information. The current situation is labour-intensive for both exporting and importing countries as many listing portals operate in isolation of exporting countries' systems.

Updating lists and delisting can also be challenging, resulting in outdated information which lead to potential problems at the border, again leading to unnecessary barriers to trade.

Developing Codex principles and guidelines for establishment listings, should not result in increased requirements for such lists. On the contrary, the purpose is to facilitate harmonized, streamlined, and timely information sharing when such lists are justified. This should decrease the requirement for burdensome data gathering, contribute to saving time and money, ensuring updated information is readily available for trading partners, and consequently facilitate trade in safe food.

Furthermore, it is good practice for Codex Committees to keep their documents under review to ensure they remain relevant and fit for purpose. Taking into account the number of importing countries having implemented requirements for establishments lists and the number of countries considering implementation since CXG 89-2016, and the lack of guidance on this issue, the proposal is highly relevant and timely.

3. THE MAIN ASPECTS TO BE COVERED

Taking into account existing guidance (remote audits, certificates, equivalence etc), and CXG 89-2016 develop principles and guidelines to harmonise the use (the drivers), development (content and format) and implementation (mechanisms including digitalization) of establishment listings, in order to support timely and meaningful information exchange to provide the necessary assurances to importing countries to confirm safe food is being produced and exported by an establishment. This would contribute to saving time and money, ensuring updated information is readily available for trading partners, and consequently facilitate trade.

4. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES

General criterion: Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries.

The proposed new work will support competent authorities when considering whether it is justified to require establishment lists for imports. It will also contribute to establish systems for exchanging information regarding safe food, thereby improving consumer protection. Furthermore, it will promote consistency and harmonization of establishments lists, thus facilitating fair practice in the food trade, while at the same time allowing sufficient flexibility to consider the different levels of risks and limiting requests to additional information in response to gaps or risks not addressed. Updating the global guidelines will also provide greater clarity and certainty for competent authorities and food businesses operators.

CRITERIA APPLICABLE TO GENERAL SUBJECTS:

(a) Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade.

Lack of standardization or harmonization of establishment lists can hinder fair practice in food trade. This is especially challenging in situations where updating of lists take time.

(b) Scope of work and establishment of priorities between various sections of the work.

Refer to scope section above.

(c) Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies)

We are not aware of any work being done in this area.

(d) Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardization.

Codex currently has texts covering equivalence, exchange of information, import control system and National Food Control Systems, which all refer to establishment listing. The proposed work would consider revision of one of the existing documents to provide guidance in such lists.

(e) Consideration to global magnitude of the problem or issue.

Increases in global trade, the complexity of supply chains, and digitization of information along with technologies to facilitate the integrity and sharing of such information suggest it would be timely to revisit the existing guidelines, *Principles for the Exchange of Information between importing and exporting Countries to support the Trade in Food* (CXG 89-2016).

Standardization of establishment listing requirements will also help countries to use establishment lists in a more streamlined manner, allowing more timely transfer of information, ensuring updated information readily available for trading partners.

5. RELEVANCE TO CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The proposed work is directly related to the purposes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, namely, goals one of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025: "Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner", in particular Strategic Objective 1.2: "Prioritize needs and emerging issues". In addition, the work is relevant to goal five: "Enhance work management systems and practices that support the efficient and effective achievement of all strategic plan goals."

6. INFORMATION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROPOSAL AND OTHER CODEX DOCUMENTS

The proposal relates to establishing "Principles and guidelines for Establishment listing" a possible annex to CXG 89-2016. The proposed new work provides a link between elements of information to be exchanged, as described in several CCFICS texts:

- *Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems* (CXG 26-1997)
- *Guidelines for the Development of Equivalence Agreements Regarding Food Imports and Export Inspection and Certification Systems* (CXG 34-1999)
- *Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates* (CXG 38-2001)
- *Guidelines for Food Import Control Systems* (CXG 47-2003)

7. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY REQUIREMENT FOR AND AVAILABILITY OF EXPERT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

N/A

8. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY NEED FOR TECHNICAL INPUT TO THE STANDARD FROM EXTERNAL BODIES SO THAT THIS CAN BE PLANNED FOR

None anticipated.

9. **PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF THE NEW WORK, INCLUDING THE START DATE, THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION AT STEP 5, AND THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION BY THE COMMISSION; THE TIMEFRAME FOR DEVELOPING A STANDARD SHOULD NORMALLY NOT EXCEED FIVE YEARS**

It is proposed that the work will extend over three (3) sessions of CCFICS.

PROJECT DOCUMENT

DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPLES FOR THE DIGITALISATION OF NATIONAL FOOD CONTROL SYSTEMS (NFCSs)

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED NEW STANDARD

The purpose of the work is to develop high-level principles that guide authorities in their consideration and application of digital solutions to enhance existing food control systems. A principles-based approach would be light touch and provide the necessary flexibility for members looking at digital solutions as part of their regulatory modernisation programmes and help support and encourage a gradual shift away from manual/physical practices. The work would be broad in scope with the intention that the principles can be applied to any part of a national food control system that may be suitable and benefit from digitalisation and the use of digital tools, including artificial intelligence in a responsible and ethical way.

2. RELEVANCE AND TIMELINESS

Regulatory modernisation and continuous improvement are a feature of many control systems as competent authorities strive to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their NFCS to better protect the health of consumers, food security and facilitate fair trade practices. Digital approaches are viewed by many as an enabler of data-driven decision making, transparency and robust evidence that allows authorities to better target their regulatory resource. The benefits of digitalisation include improved productivity, sustainability, resilience and the potential for real-time monitoring and rapid responses to issues and a step towards food system transformation. Digitalisation is broadly applicable to NFCS, or parts thereof, so work to develop high level principles would be timely to support its application by members.

Countries have identified these benefits and are at the point where they are either in the process of digitalising, or looking to digitalise, parts of their NFCS. Acknowledging this trend, and the enormous task competent authorities face, high-level principles will help guide countries refine and choose an approach that is tailored to their national settings and capacity, drawing on existing experiences that will help strengthen collaboration to overcome common challenges.

There is strong interest within the Committee to take a first step and begin by developing digital-related guidance in the form of high-level principles that would support some of the existing CCFICS texts, or those under development, noting the number of digital-related issues identified on the most recent emerging issues list (Appendix A, CX/FICS 24/27/9). Given this, it is also timely to prioritise the development of a framework within CCFICS which connects and organises this work across Codex Alimentarius committees and is coherent with work underway in other international organisations.

3. THE MAIN ASPECTS TO BE COVERED

The work would result in the development of high-level principles to guide and support competent authorities in the consideration and uptake of digital solutions that could help transform and modernise their NFCS, or parts of these systems. The principles would capture key universal considerations for competent authorities, providing an overarching framework. The principles would serve as a foundation for future work and proposals for specific digital-related guidance that would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis when submitted.

The principles would be designed to acknowledge and draw from existing digital-related international standards and guidance that contain relevant information to the digitalisation of NFCS. This approach will ensure the future work of Codex Alimentarius in the digital space is connected, aligned and coherent with the work underway in other multilateral fora.

Noting the need for digital transformation processes to be user-driven, the principles will also capture and take account of available high level digital guidance specific to NFCS. Such principles have not been developed within the Codex Alimentarius or other food safety related multilateral fora. The guidance would be sufficiently flexible for different countries and systems at varying stages of development to assist competent authorities navigate the digital transformation process, for example directing authorities to consider cost/benefits.

The principles would include relevant definitions including existing digital-related definitions developed in other Codex texts and multilateral organisations. Similarly, they would reference the use of data standards to encourage and enable the ability to share data both within their NFCS and with trading partners.

The principles would be high-level and provide the necessary flexibility to authorities applying them to their national settings and capacity. They would also not include specific guidance on available technologies

applicable to a specific component or part of the NFCS. Should specific guidance be required, it would likely first be captured as an emerging issue for potential new work using the high-level principles as a foundation.

4. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE CRITERIA FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WORK PRIORITIES

a) *Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade.*

In general, currently national legislations are being reviewed and/or amended to better consider how governments can facilitate the adoption of digital tools and technologies in the agriculture and food sectors.

This is occurring as policymakers consider the potential opportunities, costs, and risks of digital transformation, and it is likely that this trend will accelerate. Additional guidance developed by Codex Alimentarius might encourage and assist countries through this process to support the transition away from manual/physical and paper-based practices in food safety regulation. It may also assist avoid trade impediments arising from a widening digital divide, where countries less advanced in adopting digital ways of operating, or which have different digital systems, are excluded or unable to fairly participate in international trade.

b) *Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of the work.*

Development of an overarching framework for CCFICS, supported by high level principles which capture the key considerations for competent authorities considering, or in the process of digitalisation NFCS, would be the priority. This work would draw together common principles of digitalisation across different aspects of the NFCS, connect existing and future digital-related CCFICS work and ensure assimilation with the work of other international organizations. A critical component of this work will be to identify existing digital guidance that may have an application and relevance to the digitalisation of NFCS *whether from the food sector or others.*

Identifying and/or establishing definitions to assist consistency in interpretation and implementation of requirements for the digitisation of NFCS would be a secondary priority, as many of these definitions likely already exist.

Once the principles are completed, the review of existing CCFICS guidance would be conducted to remove repeated information and reference the principles to provide a transparent structure in which Codex texts would be required.

c) *Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies).*

Specific principles on the digitalisation of NFCS has not been developed, nor are they under development by other international organisations. This topic is of significant interest, with many international bodies, such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), bringing countries together to discuss food safety and trade digitalisation topics and develop issue scanning reports and case studies to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities it presents. Key insights and findings from these information gathering activities will be considered when developing the principles.

There is a significant amount of work that has, or is in the process of being undertaken, by international organisations in the digital related space, which may be applicable but not necessarily specific to the digitalisation of NFCS and food safety. Of note, the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is exploring the use of digital tools to support decisions to prevent plant pest outbreaks. Both IPPC and the World Organization for Animal Health (WHO) have guidance of the application of electronic phytosanitary and veterinary certification. Further the work undertaken by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the World Customs Organisation (WCO), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the OECD, requires thorough review and consideration to identify linkages to the digitisation of NFCS. This review is included as a specific aspect of the scope of new work.

d) *Amenability of the subject of the proposal to standardization.*

Digitalisation is highly suitable for standardisation. The proponents believe that principles can be developed to address the issues identified in this proposal for new work.

e) *Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue.*

For countries to invest in the digitalisation of NFCS, clear, structured guidance within Codex Alimentarius that connects and aligns with guidance in other trade related international organisations is extremely important. This would simplify the development pathway for countries in the process of, or considering digitalising their NFCS, encourage greater adoption of digital solutions and assist with avoiding the emergence of impediments to international trade as a result of digital divide.

5. RELEVANCE TO THE CODEX STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The digital transformation of NFCS is a current issue within the food safety regulation and enforcement space. Developing principles would align with the Codex Alimentarius' strategic goal 1: Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner.

Digitalisation has the potential to support national and international controls making them more effective and streamlined. It could also facilitate more predictive and accurate modelling of risk as well as targeting of resources that makes better use of existing or diminishing resources. Remote audits/inspections, automated controls, improved traceability, and the like are examples where benefits can be achieved.

This work is also linked to several sustainable development goals, such as SDG 12 Ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns and SDG 17 Revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development. The digitalisation of NFCS can assist governments to better develop, design and enforce food safety policies and regulations, become more efficient and reduce waste. By establishing a clear pathway for countries to adopt digital solutions and ways of operating, it can facilitate greater uptake and narrow the digital divide, which is important to continue to support a non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system. It is also widely recognised that digitalisation will play a role in food system transformation, to a more sustainable model.

6. INFORMATION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN THE PROPOSAL AND OTHER EXISTING CODEX DOCUMENTS AS WELL AS OTHER ONGOING WORK

Several CCFICS texts reference using 'electronic means' or 'electronically' without further elaboration on what this entails. There are also several texts that also contain guidance on the collection, analysis and reporting of data from a scientific process rather than a digital perspective.

In other Codex Alimentarius texts, there is very little digital related content. Like CCFICS, several texts include guidance on the collection, analysis and reporting of data from a scientific process, but not from a digital perspective.

A summary of the preliminary gap analysis can be found in ANNEX 2 of document CX/FICS 24/27/9 Add.2.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY REQUIREMENT FOR AND AVAILABILITY OF EXPERT SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

None anticipated.

8. IDENTIFICATION OF ANY NEED FOR TECHNICAL INPUT TO THE STANDARD FROM EXTERNAL BODIES SO THAT THIS CAN BE PLANNED FOR

None anticipated.

9. PROPOSED TIMELINE FOR COMPLETION OF THE NEW WORK, INCLUDING THE START DATE, THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION AT STEP 5, AND THE PROPOSED DATE FOR ADOPTION BY THE COMMISSION; *THE TIME FRAME FOR DEVELOPING A STANDARD SHOULD NOT NORMALLY EXCEED FIVE YEARS.*

Subject to the Codex Alimentarius Commission approval at its 47th Session in 2024, it is expected that the work can be completed in four to five years, depending on the future schedule of CCFICS meetings:

- Agreement to undertake new work at CCFICS 27: September 2024
- Approval as new work by CAC47: November 2024
- Proposed draft principles for consideration at Step 3 at CCFICS28: Oct 2026
- Proposed draft principles for consideration at Step 5 at CCFICS29: 2028
- Finalised for adoption at Step 8 at CCFICS30: 2029
- Adoption by CAC53: 2030