



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



World Health  
Organization

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: [codex@fao.org](mailto:codex@fao.org) - [www.codexalimentarius.org](http://www.codexalimentarius.org)

Agenda item 5

CX/FICS 18/24/5Rev.1

August 2018

**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME**  
**CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION**  
**AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS**

**Twenty-Fourth Session**

**Brisbane, Australia 22 - 26 October 2018**

**PROPOSED DRAFT GUIDANCE ON PAPERLESS USE OF ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATES (REVISION OF THE GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN, PRODUCTION, ISSUANCE and USE of GENERIC OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES –CXG 38-2001)**

**(At Step 3)**

Prepared by an electronic working group chaired by The Netherlands and co-chaired by Australia

Codex members and Observers wishing to submit comments at Step 3 on this draft should do so as instructed in CL 2018/52/OCS-FICS available on the Codex webpage/Circular Letters 2018:  
<http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/circular-letters/en/>.

## Background

1. The Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), at its 23<sup>rd</sup> session, in 2017, agreed to submit a proposal to commence new work on the revision of the Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates (CAC/GL 38-2001). According to the proposal, the existing CAC/GL 38-2001 would be revised to develop guidance on the use of electronic certificates by competent authorities and the migration to paperless certification:
2. The Committee was supportive of the discussion paper and recognised the need for better guidance material to assist the understanding of competent authority(ies) on how to implement a paperless exchange of export certificates (CX/FICS 17/23/7).
3. The Committee considered a draft project document (CX/FICS 17/23/7) and recommended that the Committee undertake the development of guidance material for implementation of paperless electronic certification by amending and complementing the Codex Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates (CAC/GL 38-2001).
4. The 23<sup>rd</sup> session of CCFICS further agreed to establish an electronic working group (eWG), working in English chaired by The Netherlands and co-chaired by Australia, to prepare the proposed draft revision to the guidelines for circulation for comments at Step 3 and consideration at the 24<sup>th</sup> session of CCFICS, in 2018.
5. The new work was approved by CAC40 in July 2017.
6. 42 Members and 14 International Organisations<sup>1</sup> have registered as participants of the electronic working group.

## Conclusions

7. The outcome of the eWG work can be summarized as follows:
  - a) The essential provisions of CAC/GL 38-2001 concerning the Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates are maintained in the revised text.

<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, EU, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iceland, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, UK, Uruguay, USA, International Food Policy and Research Organization (FPRI), the Food Industry Asia (FIA), the Consumer Goods Forum, SSAFE, INC, NSF international, FAO, IPPC, OIE, ISO, UN/CEFACT, WCO, WTO

- b) The addition of an annex to explain the fundamentals of an exchange mechanism to achieve paperless exchanges
- c) The inclusion of provisions for paperless and new elements/updates have been introduced, in particular:
  - i. for the transition from the existing guidance based on the paper certificate (which is also available in an electronic format) into paperless use of electronic certificates without excluding the use of the paper certificates for those countries that do not use electronic certificates.;
  - ii. definitions for an electronic certificate, an electronic signature and a single window; and
  - iii. the description of responsibilities, requirements and a data model for paperless exchange of official certificates.

### **Recommendations**

8. The Committee is invited to consider the revised text presented in **Appendix I** for the Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certificates (CAC/GL 38-2001).
9. In particular the Committee's attention is drawn to the following:
  - a) that assistance for implementation of paperless use of electronic certificates is sufficiently and satisfactory captured and covers the experiences of those countries that have already implemented such exchanges;
  - b) that there are different approaches to achieve paperless, that have been informed from legislation and experience;
  - c) that specific issues require bilateral discussion to identify priorities and solutions to enable the implementation of paperless exchanges
  - d) that this paper has been developed by considering the input of a broad range of experience from countries; including from countries that are using electronic exchanges to support paper certificates or have implemented paperless exchanges and suggestions from countries that have no system.
  - e) the importance of a 'Single Window' environment.

## APPENDIX I

**GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN, PRODUCTION, ISSUANCE AND USE OF GENERIC OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES<sup>2</sup>****(Step 3)****THE PROPOSED NEW TEXT IS PRESENTED IN *ITALICS AND UNDERLINE*****SECTION 1 – PREAMBLE**

1. These guidelines recognize that the importing country's competent authority may, as a condition for clearance of food presented for international trade, require official certificates issued by or under the authority of the exporting country's competent authority.
2. These guidelines are not intended to encourage or mandate the use of official certificates for food presented for international trade or to diminish the trade facilitating role of commercial or other types of certificates, including third party certificates that are not issued by, or under the authority of, the government of the exporting country.
3. These guidelines recognize that while official certificates may help importing countries to achieve their objectives relating to food safety and ensuring fair practices in the food trade there may also be other approaches, which can complement or substitute for official certificates, e.g., establishment listing.

**SECTION 2 – SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES**

4. These guidelines provide guidance to countries on the design, production, issuance and use of official certificates to attest that food presented for international trade has met the importing country requirements relating to food safety, and/or ensuring fair practices in the food trade.
5. These guidelines may also apply to official certificates that are issued for feed for food producing animals.
- 6. These guidelines provide assistance in identifying the information and attestations (both called data elements) required of competent authorities together with the mechanisms to exchange such information.*
- 7. These guidelines are applicable to paper based exchange of information and attestations of official certificates and paperless exchange of the data elements when both, the importing and exporting country are confident about the reliability and security of all components involved in the electronic exchange of official certificates.*
8. These guidelines do not deal with matters of animal and plant health unless directly related to food safety. However, it is recognized that, in practice, a single official certificate may contain information relevant to several matters (e.g., food safety and animal and plant health).

**SECTION 3 – DEFINITIONS**

*Certificates are documents, which describe and attest to attributes of consignments of food destined for international trade.*

Certification is the procedure by which official certification bodies or officially recognized certification bodies provide written or equivalent assurance that food or food control systems conform to requirements.

Certification of food may be, as appropriate, based on a range of inspection activities which may include continuous on-line inspection, auditing of quality assurance systems, and examination of finished products<sup>3</sup>.

Official certificates are legal documents issued by, or under the control of the exporting country's competent authority, including by a certifying body recognized by the competent authority to issue such certificates.

Certifying bodies are official certification bodies and officially recognized certification bodies.<sup>4</sup>

Certifying officers are officers authorized or recognized, by the exporting country's competent authority, to complete and issue official certificates.

---

<sup>2</sup> These Guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Codex Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment, and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CAC/GL 26-1997), particularly Section 7, certification systems. Reference should also be made to Codex-developed model certificates.

<sup>3</sup> Principles for Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification (CAC/GL 20-1995).

<sup>4</sup> Recognition of certification bodies is addressed under Section 8 – Official Accreditation of the Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CAC/GL 26-1997).

Consignment means a defined collection of food products normally covered by a single certificate.

## SECTION 4 – PRINCIPLES

9. The following principles apply to the design, production, issuance and use of official certificates.

- A. Official certificates should be required only where attestations and essential information are necessary to ensure that food safety and/or fair practices in the food trade requirements are met.
- B. Exporting countries may provide assurances through means other than consignment- by-consignment certificates, as appropriate.
- C. Attestations and information required by the importing country should be confined to essential information that is related to the objectives of the importing country's food inspection and certification system.
- D. The rationale and requirements for specific attestations and identifying information should be communicated to exporting countries in a consistent and transparent manner and be applied by the importing country in a non-discriminatory manner.
- E. Official certificates should present information in a form\* that simplifies and expedites the clearance process while meeting the importing country requirements.
- F. The competent authority of the exporting country is ultimately responsible for any certificate it issues or authorizes to be issued and for the management of the exchange status of a paperless certificate.
- G. All relevant attestations and identifying information required by the importing country should be included on a single official certificate, where possible, to avoid multiple or redundant certificates.
- H. Competent authorities should take appropriate action to prevent the use of fraudulent certificates and should assist, as appropriate, in the timely investigation of such use.

\* The electronic certificate message exchange should be compatible with a Trade Single Window (as per UN/CEFACT recommendation 33 single window and further future developments).

## SECTION 5 – USE OF OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES

### Principle A

**Official certificates should be required only where attestations and essential information are necessary to ensure that food safety and/or fair practices in the food trade requirements are met.**

10. Specific attestations and information related to the product identified in the certificate can provide assurances that the food or group of food products:

- complies with the food safety requirements of the importing country; and
- complies with requirements of the importing country related to fair practices in the food trade.

11. It may be the case that national legislation does not authorize an exporting country's competent authority to issue the certificate required by the importing country. Such information should be communicated to the importing country. In such instances, the importing country should consider the need to provide flexibility to allow such assurances to be provided by alternative means so long as food safety and fair practices in food trade are assured.

## SECTION 6 – ALTERNATIVES TO THE USE OF OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES

### Principle B

**Exporting countries may provide assurances through means other than consignment- by-consignment certificates, as appropriate.**

12. Alternative arrangements that provide equivalent assurances with respect to food safety or ensuring fair practices in the food trade should be considered.

13. In some circumstances, an importing country may agree to accept from an exporting country a listing of establishments that meet the specific requirements of the importing country. This listing may be used to accomplish the same objectives as consignment-by-consignment certificates, recognizing that the importing country may still need additional information (e.g. mode of transport) for each consignment.

14. The mechanisms and criteria for establishing, maintaining and reviewing such lists should be made transparent by the exporting country and agreed to by the importing country.

15. Recognising that a consignment is normally covered by a single official certificate, it is also possible for certain certificates to apply to multiple consignments if agreed by the importing country. In such cases multiple consignment certificates should have a fixed duration.

## **SECTION 7 – EXTENT OF INFORMATION, TRANSPARENCY AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

### **Principle C**

**Attestations and information required by the importing country should be confined to essential information that is related to the objectives of the importing country's food inspection and certification system.**

16. The particular official attestations and information to be included on a certificate will be determined by the requirements of the importing country. Importing countries should make use of international standards, if available, with the objective of reducing the need for extensive detail in certificates.

17. Official attestations and information should be clearly identified in the text of the certificate and not be any more complex or detailed or onerous for the exporting country than is necessary to meet the objectives of the importing country's food inspection and certification system. Such attestations may include, but are not limited to:

- compliance with particular standards, production or processing requirements, if relevant;
- the status (e.g., licensing details) of production, processing, packaging and/or storage establishments in the exporting country;
- the exporting country's animal health status, if it may affect the safety of the food; and
- reference to any associated bilateral/multilateral agreement.

18. Commercial or marketing specifications, such as specific product attributes or conformance to importer specifications should not be required in official certificates.

19. A consignment consisting of a food sample intended for evaluation, testing or research in the importing country should be clearly identified according to its intended use. It should be clearly indicated on the certificate or the package that the sample is not intended for retail sale and has no commercial value.

### **Principle D**

**The rationale and requirements for specific attestations and identifying information should be communicated to exporting countries in a consistent and transparent manner and be applied by the importing country in a non-discriminatory manner.**

20. In establishing requirements for certificates, importing countries should ensure that criteria will apply equitably to all exporting countries in order to avoid arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination.

21. Competent authorities of the importing country should, on request, communicate to the exporting country the requirements for the official attestations and information in certificates and their rationale.

### **Principle E**

**Official certificates should present information in a form\* that simplifies and expedites the clearance process while meeting the importing country requirements.**

*\*The electronic certificate message exchange should be compatible with a Trade Single Window (as per UN/CEFACT recommendation 33 single window and further future developments).*

22. The design and utilization of official certificates should:

- simplify and expedite the clearance of the consignment at the point of entry or the point of control;
- be compatible with a 'Single Window' environment;
- provide for accurate identification of the consignment being certified and the parties involved in the production and issuance of the certificate;
- facilitate the importing country's assessment of the validity of certificate; and
- minimize the potential for fraud.

23. To the extent practicable, a standard format should be employed for official certificates. Certificates should:

- clearly identify the certifying body and any other parties involved in the production and issuance of the certificate<sup>5</sup>;
- be designed so as to minimize the potential for fraud including use of a unique identification number, or other appropriate means to ensure security (for example, use of watermark paper or other security measures for paper certificates or for electronic certificates use internationally recognized best practice and standards for data integrity and exchange security);
- clearly describe the commodity and consignment to which the certificate relates;
- contain a clear reference to those official requirements for which the certificate was issued;
- contain attestations of officials of certifying bodies which/by the official or officially recognized certifying body which relates to the consignment described on that certificate and should not be required to be endorsed/re-certified after they are issued; and
- be in a language or languages fully understood by the certifying officer in the exporting country, in transit countries where appropriate, by the receiving authority in the importing country or those countries in which the inspection of the food takes place. Where required the certificates can be accompanied by official translations.

24. The information related to the product being certified should be clearly documented on the certificate and should include as a minimum the following. It may also include additional information as agreed to by the importing and exporting country:

- nature of the food<sup>6</sup>;
- name of product<sup>7</sup>;
- quantity, in the appropriate units<sup>8</sup>;
- a description of the commodity and consignment to which the certificate uniquely relates, e.g., lot identifier, means of transport, security seal number(s) or date coding;
- identity and, as appropriate, the name and address of the producer/manufacturer of the food and/or storage establishments and their approval number;
- name and contact details of the exporter or consignor;
- name and contact details of the importer or consignee;
- country of dispatch<sup>9</sup>, or part of the country where these relate to specific attestations; and
- country of destination<sup>10</sup>.

## **SECTION 9 – ISSUANCE AND RECEPTION OF OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES (RESPONSIBILITY OF CERTIFYING OFFICERS, SECURITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND PREVENTION OF FRAUD)**

### **Principle F**

**The competent authority of the exporting country is ultimately responsible for any certificate it issues or authorizes to be issued and for the management of the exchange status of a paperless certificate.**

25. Official certificates as issued, are ultimately the responsibility of government authorities, while recognizing that it is the food production sector that is fundamentally responsible for food safety and the prevention of fraud and deception as it relates to food in international trade.

---

<sup>5</sup> When additional information is required on the certificate, it should be constructed in such a way that it is clear who has provided the various parts of the certificate (e.g. laboratory, producing establishment, certifying body).

<sup>6</sup> The World Custom Organization classification should be used when appropriate. When species identification is needed, the Linnaeus classification should be used.

<sup>7</sup> Reference should be made to Codex standards if available.

<sup>8</sup> Quantity should be in accordance with the International System of Units (Modern Metric System).

<sup>9</sup> ISO country codes may be used.

<sup>10</sup> ISO country codes may be used.

26. The certifying body should:

- be designated and adequately empowered by national/regional<sup>11</sup> legislation or regulation in a transparent manner to provide the particular attestations required in an official certificate;
- have its designation/ empowerment recognized as sufficient by governments, alleviating the need for any additional endorsement/re-certification of the certificates they issue;
- provide information relating to its official empowerment to the importing country upon request;
- ensure that its procedures allow for the issue of official certificates in a timely manner so as to avoid unnecessary disruptions to trade;
- have in place an effective system to minimize, to the extent practicable, the fraudulent use of official certificates; and
- have in place an effective and timely training program for its certifying officers.

27. If the competent authority of the exporting country has legislative authority to utilize third party certification bodies and has authorized a third party body to issue certificates on its behalf, the competent authority must ensure that there is adequate oversight of the third party, including auditing arrangements.

28. Certificates should normally be issued prior to the consignment to which the certificate relates leaving the control of the certifying body. Certificates may be issued while consignments are in transit to or have arrived at the country of destination only when appropriate systems of control are in place in the exporting country to support this practice and the practice is agreed to by the importing country, and when applicable, to the transiting country.

29. Certifying officers should:

- be appropriately designated by the certifying body;
- have no conflict of interest in the commercial aspects of the consignment and be independent from the commercial parties;
- be fully conversant with the requirements to which they are attesting;
- have access to a copy of regulations or requirements that are referred to on the certificate or clear information and guidance notes issued by the certifying body or competent authority explaining the criteria that the product must meet before being certified;
- only attest to matters that are within their own knowledge (or have been separately attested to by another competent party); and
- only certify to the circumstances that can be verified, directly or by documentation provided, including conformity with production requirements and any other specified requirements between production and date of issue of the certificate.

30. Where paperless certification is under consideration the exporting and importing countries should have:

- national legislation or regulation in place to facilitates confidential paperless certification;
- confidence in the reliability and security of all components involved in the electronic exchange of official certificates including the integrity of the messages and overall security of the applied data exchange mechanism
- capability to exchange messages between officials.
- adequate data retention and archiving in place.

31. Where paperless certification is in place the competent authority of the importing country becomes custodian of the issued certificate after the exchange

### **Principle G**

**All relevant attestations and identifying information required by the importing country should be included on a single official certificate, where possible, to avoid multiple or redundant certificates.**

32. Requests for certificates should minimize to the extent possible the need for redundant or duplicative certificates. Examples of such situations include: (1) multiple certificates with similar attestations are required

<sup>11</sup> Regional refers to Regional Economic Integration Organisation (REIO) as defined by Article 2, Constitution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

by different agencies within an importing country; (2) multiple certificates are required for different attributes when a single attestation would suffice; and, (3) multiple certificates with similar attestations are required from different certifiers within the exporting country.

33. When a certificate requires multiple attestations (e.g., food safety, animal health and/or plant health) standard attestations developed by organizations recognized in the World Trade Organization (WTO) Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement (SPS) may be used (i.e., Codex, OIE, IPPC).

34. In case certificates are required from different bodies, a single competent authority may issue the certificate based on information received from other official bodies. An example of such cases would be attestations of animal health status and public health matters on the same certificate.

35. In instances where the importing country requests that an official certificate contain proprietary information, such requests should be confined to the need to ensure the product meets food safety requirements and to ensure fair practices in the food trade. If such information is requested, adequate means to protect the proprietary nature of such information shall be employed and communicated to the exporter.

36. Commercially sensitive information such as contract numbers and bank arrangements should not be included in official certificates.

37. Where, in exceptional cases justified by documented public health problem, the importing country requires assurance that an ingredient originating from a specified country (or countries) is not contained in the exported food; such attestations should be included in the certificate. When the country or countries have managed the risk based on science and the measures implemented to address the hazard are satisfactory to the importing country, the use of these attestations should be discontinued.

#### ***Use of paper certificates***

38. Paper certificates where used should be issued and presented to the exporter or their agent as the original certificate.

39. Paper certificates should, to the extent practicable, be in compliance with the UN Layout Key for Trade Documentation (Recommendation No 1, ECE/TRADE/137).

40. A copy of the original certificate (clearly marked as such) should be kept by the certifying body in the exporting country and be provided, on request, to the competent authority in the importing country, or in a country carrying out import controls on behalf of the importing country.

41. When issuing a paper certificate, the certifying officer should ensure that:

- the certificate contains no deletions other than those required by the text of the certificate;
- any alterations of the certified information are initialized or otherwise approved by the certifying body;
- for multiple page certificates, it is clear that the pages constitute a single certificate including official translation(s) when appropriate (e.g., each page is numbered with the same unique certificate number so as to indicate it is a particular page in a finite sequence);
- the certificate bears the official identifier of the competent authority, signature, name and official position of the certifying officer (the signature may be hand written or a controlled facsimile signature);
- the certificate bears the date, expressed unambiguously, on which the certificate was signed and issued and, where appropriate, the period of time for which the certificate will remain valid; and
- no portion of the certificate is left blank in a manner that would allow it to be amended.

#### ***Paperless exchange of data elements (information and attestations) of official certificates***

42. Competent authorities should have infrastructure that supports paperless exchange of official certificates.

43. Where export certificates are exchanged electronically between the competent authorities of the exporting and importing countries, the electronic certification systems used for issuance and for receipt of official certificates should:

- consider data elements and message structure such as those ratified by the United Nations Centre of Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business<sup>12</sup> for electronic SPS certificates exchanged between

---

<sup>12</sup> The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) is a subsidiary, intergovernmental body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Trade, mandated to develop a programme of work of global relevance to achieve improved worldwide coordination and cooperation in these areas of trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards (<https://www.unece.org/cefact/>)



government border authorities (UN/CEFACT eCert SPS data standard and message structure). The importing and exporting countries will need to agree on the data elements set to be exchanged;

- consider usage of available technologies for message exchange to expedite direct communication between officials in such a way as to ensure that data exchange options enhance business continuity and the use of the Trade Single Window
- ensure authenticity, integrity and security of the electronically exchanged official certificates by the use of international standards and recommendations (see annex) with regards to:
  - the exchange mechanism
  - the connection protocol responsible for the end-to-end communication
  - the message language, structure and exchange protocol.
- take into account the limitations of infrastructure and capabilities of involved countries\*; and
- include a contingency plan to ensure disruption to trade is minimal in the event of system failure.

44. The exporter or their agent should be notified when an electronic certificate has been authorized for a consignment and where appropriate be informed about the exchange status.

\* As long as limitations of infrastructure and capabilities of countries in transition, including developing countries, do not enable an electronic exchange compliant with requirements 1 - 5 in Section 4 of Annex II it is recommended to keep the paper versions in parallel to the electronic exchange.

### **Presentation of original certificates**

45. In the case of paper certificates the importer or consignee is responsible for ensuring that the product and the original certificate, in accordance with the importing country's requirements, is presented to the importing country's authorities or to the authorities in a country carrying out import controls on behalf of the importing country.

46. In the case of paperless exchange of official certificates, the importing country competent authorities should ensure that the importer or representative provides relevant information electronically for the verification of the consignment against the details contained in the certificate.

### **Replacement of certificates**

47. Replacement certificates may be issued by a competent authority to rectify certificates that have been for example, lost, damaged, contain errors, or where the original information is no longer correct. These certificates must be clearly marked to indicate that they are replacing the original certificate. A replacement certificate should reference the number of the original certificate that it supersedes and the date the original was signed. The original certificate should be cancelled and in case of hard copy, where possible, returned to the issuing authority.

### **Revocation of certificates**

48. When, for good and sufficient reason, there is cause to revoke a certificate, the certifying body should revoke the original certificate as soon as possible and notify the exporter or their agent in hard copy or by electronic means of the revocation. The notice should reference the number of the original certificate to which the revocation refers and provide all particulars regarding the consignment and the reason(s) for the revocation. In the situation that the consignment is already under the responsibility of the importing country the appropriate food control authority should be notified in hard copy or by electronic means. The revoked original paper certificate should, where possible, be returned to the issuing authority.

## **Principle H**

**Competent authorities should take appropriate action to prevent the use of fraudulent certificates and should assist, as appropriate, in the timely investigation of such use.**

### **Fraudulent certificates**

49. When a competent authority suspects on reasonable grounds that an official certificate may be fraudulent, because of deliberate misrepresentation or other criminal activity, it should immediately commence an investigation and involve the certifying body of the country from which the suspected fraudulent certificate is purported to have originated. Considerations should also be given to notify any third country that may have been implicated. Additionally, the competent authority should retain the associated consignment under its control, pending the outcome of the investigation.

50. Certifying bodies in the countries from which the suspected fraudulent certificate is purported to have originated should cooperate fully with the investigation of the competent authority of the importing country. If the certificate is found to be fraudulent, every effort should be made by the competent authorities to identify those responsible so that appropriate action can be taken according to national/regional law.

51. The product relating to fraudulent certificates should be considered to be in violation of the importing country's requirements since the precise condition of the product is unknown. Destruction of the product is one of the measures that can be implemented since destruction is a strong deterrent to future fraudulent activity.

52. Competent authorities in importing countries should maintain current records of certificates from certifying bodies in pertinent exporting countries, including, in relation to paper certificates, copies of official stamps and marks.

## GENERIC MODEL OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE

### **Scope of the Annex**

This Annex is intended to provide additional guidance to competent authorities based on the principles set out in Section 4 and elaborating on the information provided in Sections 8 and 9. When model official certificates for specific purposes are otherwise established by Codex Alimentarius, countries should refer to such guidelines.

Although certificates are primarily focused on sanitary aspects, they may also address aspects relating to fair practices in the food trade where these matters are certified by the certifying bodies.

This model certificate could cover multiple products in a single certificate.

### **Explanatory notes on the generic model for an official certificate**

#### **General:**

The certificate should be completed in a legible manner.

If the consignee, point of entry, or transport details change after the certificate has been issued, it is the responsibility of the importer to advise the competent authority of the importing country. Such a change should not result in a request for a replacement certificate to be issued.

The model certificate as it appears includes numbers designed to facilitate establishing a link between a particular section and the corresponding explanatory note. It is not intended that these numbers appear in the actual certificates issued by the certifying body.

#### **Specific:**

**Certificate type:** the certificate should be marked with "ORIGINAL", "COPY" or "REPLACEMENT" as appropriate.

**Country:** name of the country that issues the certificate possibly accompanied by a logo or a letter head. The objective is to clearly identify the country having the responsibility of issuing the certificate.

### **GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN, PRODUCTION, ISSUANCE AND USE OF GENERIC OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES (CAC/GL 38-2001)**

1. **Consignor/Exporter:** name and address (street, town and region/province/state, as applicable) of the natural or legal person or entity who sends the consignment.
2. **Certificate number:** this identification number should be unique for each certificate and authorized by the competent authority of the exporting country. For multiple page certificates, see paragraph 38 of document CAC/GL 38-2001.
3. **Competent Authority:** name of the Competent Authority of the country responsible for certification.
4. **Certifying Body:** name of the Certifying Body when it is different from the Competent Authority.
5. **Consignee/Importer:** name and address of the natural or legal person or entity to whom the consignment is shipped in the country of destination, at the time the certificate is issued.
6. **Country of origin**<sup>13</sup>: name of the country in which the products were produced, manufactured or packaged.
7. **Country of destination**<sup>Error! Bookmark not defined.:</sup> name of the country of destination of the products.
8. **Place of loading:** name of a seaport, airport, freight terminal, rail station or other place at which goods are loaded onto the means of transport being used for their carriage.
9. **Means of transport:** air/ship/rail/road/other, as appropriate and the identification (name or number) of these if available, or relevant documentary references.
10. **Declared point of entry:** if required and available the name of the point of entry authorised by the competent authority of the importing country and, its UN/LOCODE (refer to the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations).

---

<sup>13</sup> ISO Code: the two letter country codes, in compliance with the international standard (ISO 3166 alpha-2), could be used.

11. **Conditions for transport/storage:** appropriate temperature category (ambient, chilled, frozen) or other requirements (e.g. humidity) for transport/storage of the product.
12. **Total quantity:** in appropriate units of weight or volume for the whole consignment.
13. **Identification of container(s)/Seal number(s):** identify the containers and seal numbers where applicable or if known.
14. **Total number of packages:** total number of packages for all products in the consignment.
15. **Identification of food product(s):** give the descriptive information specific to the product or products to be certified.

Where appropriate: nature of the food (or description of the commodity), commodity code (HS code), species, intended purpose, producer/manufacturer, approval number of establishments (slaughterhouse, production plant, store (cold store or not)), region or compartment of origin, name of the product, lot identifier, type of packaging, number of packages, net weight per type of product.

- **Nature of the food (or description of product):** description of the product(s) precise enough to allow the product(s) to be classified in the World Customs Organisation's Harmonised System, including the commodity code (HS code) where appropriate
- **Intended purpose (or Food products certified for):** the end use of the product should be specified in the certificate (e.g. direct human consumption, further processing, and trade samples).

Where a certificate for trade samples is required, a consignment consisting of a food sample intended for evaluation, testing or research, in the importing country may be described using a term such as "trade samples". It should be clearly indicated on the certificate or the package that the sample is not intended for retail sale and has no commercial value.

- **Region or compartment of origin:** if applicable: This is only for products affected by regionalisation measures or by the setting up of approved zones or compartments.
  - **Type of packaging:** identify the type of packaging of products as defined in Recommendation No. 21 of UN/CEFACT (United Nation Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business).
16. **Attestations:** information indicating compliance with the relevant regulation(s) of the importing or exporting countries in accordance with the recommendations, as appropriate, of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Attestations should be the minimum required for the products certified to ensure food safety and fair practices in the food trade. Attestations should be applicable to the food products certified.

Non-applicable attestations should be excluded or deleted.

There may be other attestations covering different issues (cf. paragraph 7 of document CAC/GL 38-2001).

17. **Certifying officer:** name, official position, official stamp (optional), date of signature and signature.

Certificates should be issued in accordance with section 9 of document CAC/GL 38-2001.

**LOGO/LETTERHEAD**  
**GENERIC MODEL OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE**  
**LOGO/LETTERHEAD**  
**GENERIC MODEL OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE**

**COUNTRY:****CERTIFICATE TYPE**

<b>1. Consignor/Exporter:</b>		<b>2. Certificate number:</b>			
		<b>3. Competent authority:</b>			
		<b>4. Certifying body:</b>			
<b>5. Consignee/Importer:</b>					
<b>6. Country of origin:</b>				<b>ISO Code:</b>	
<b>7. Country of destination:</b>				<b>ISO Code:</b>	
<b>8. Place of loading:</b>					
<b>9. Means of transport:</b>			<b>10. Declared point of entry:</b>		
<b>11. Conditions for transport/storage:</b>			<b>12. Total quantity*</b>		
<b>13. Identification of container(s)/Seal number(s):</b>			<b>14. Total number of packages:</b>		
<b>15. Identification of food products as described below (multiple lines may be used for multiple products)</b>					
<b>No.</b>	<b>Nature of the food, commodity code (HS code) where appropriate</b>		<b>Species*</b>		<b>Intended purpose</b>
<b>No.</b>	<b>Producer/Manufacturer</b>	<b>Approval number of establishments*</b>		<b>Region or compartment of origin</b>	
<b>No.</b>	<b>Name of the product</b>	<b>Lot Identifier*</b>	<b>Type of packaging</b>	<b>Number of packages</b>	<b>Net weight</b>
<b>16. Attestations:</b>					
<b>17. Certifying officer:</b>					
<b>Name:</b>			<b>Official position:</b>		
<b>Date:</b>			<b>Signature:</b>		
<b>Official Stamp:</b>					

The Generic Model Official Certificate should be read in conjunction with the explanatory notes.

\* If required

**Annex II****REQUIREMENTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND DATA MODEL FOR PAPERLESS EXCHANGE OF OFFICIAL CERTIFICATES****SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION**

Competent authorities may decide to implement paperless exchange of official certificates. This annex is not intended to mandate the use of specific concepts for electronic certification mechanisms but to provide guidance to assist a country to implement an electronic exchange in place of paper based certification.

**SECTION 2 – SCOPE**

This annex provides guidance for use by competent authorities of both importing and exporting countries to ensure an effective, efficient, transparent\*, and consistent approach for paperless exchange of official certificates by applying an electronic certification mechanism based on international standards and recommendations, like UN/CEFACT<sup>14</sup> SPS standardized language, structure and exchange protocols.

\*Governments should ensure that the operations for paperless exchange of official certificates are as transparent as possible, while respecting any legal confidentiality requirements and avoiding the creation of new barriers to trade by introducing excessive requirements for security and/or authenticity and/or integrity.

**SECTION 3 – DEFINITIONS**

- An electronic certificate is the electronic representation of the wording and data describing and attesting to attributes of a consignment of food destined for international trade, transmitted by authenticated and secure electronic means from the exporting country authority to the importing country authority. (sources: Codex and appendix 1 of ISPM 12)
- An electronic signature is data in electronic form which is attached to or logically associated with other data in electronic form and which is used by the signatory to sign. It captures the signatory's intent to be bound by the contents of the signed document (source: eIDAS article 3)
- A single window can be defined as a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfill all import, export, and transit related-related regulatory requirements (source: WCO single window concept)

**SECTION 4 - REQUIREMENTS**

The following\* systems and protocols involved in the paperless exchange of official certificates should follow relevant international standards, recommendations and guidance

1. Exporting country's electronic certification system
2. Connection protocol responsible for the end-to-end communication
3. Importing country's receiving system
4. Message language, structure and exchange protocols
5. Integrity and/or authenticity and/or security protocols (including electronic signature)
6. Single Window systems (as defined by UN/CEFACT recommendation 33)

\*As long as limitations of infrastructure and capabilities of countries in transition, including developing countries, do not enable an electronic exchange compliant with requirements 1 - 5 it is recommended to keep the paper versions in parallel to the electronic exchange.

---

<sup>14</sup> The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) is a subsidiary, intergovernmental body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Trade, mandated to develop a programme of work of global relevance to achieve improved worldwide coordination and cooperation in these areas of trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards (<https://www.unece.org/cefact/>)

## **SECTION 5 – ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Paperless exchange of official certificates between the competent authorities of exporting and importing countries using UN/CEFACT SPS standardized language, structure and exchange protocols presents the following responsibilities of involved competent authorities and business operators.

- The exporting competent authority makes available the issued official certificate to the importing competent authority and confirms the exchange status the official certificate to the exporting business operator.
- The exporting business operator is responsible for forwarding the information of the issued official certificate to the importing business operator
- The importing competent authority, becoming the custodian of the issued official certificate as soon as the certificate is properly received, should confirm\* to the exporting competent authority that the official certificate has been received.

\*in case of UN/CEFACT SPS standardized exchange protocols the receiving infrastructure will automatically generate this.

- The importing competent authority receives electronically relevant information for the verification of the consignment against the details contained in the certificate from the importing business operator.

## **SECTION 6 – EXAMPLES OF ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION MECHANISMS**

The concepts below are the electronic certification solutions identified to date, each delivering electronic certificates in a specific format together with dedicated security features.

- a) The electronic certification system of the importing competent authority retrieves (“pulls”) or receives (the information having been “pushed”) certificates data directly from the electronic certification system of the exporting competent authority through a web service interface (e.g. Simple Object Access Protocol [SOAP]).
- b) The electronic certification system of the exporting competent authority provides certificates, to the competent authority of the importing country through Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP).
- c) The electronic certification system of the importing competent authority receives certificates data from the electronic certification system of the exporting competent authority through a central hub (being developed by the International Plant Protection Convention as ePhyto).

The examples above do not exclude future evolved electronic certification mechanisms and exchanges of electronic representations of certificates which competent authorities consider eligible for dematerialization of paper systems and procedures used by competent authorities and business operators.

The examples above do not exclude other electronic certification mechanisms and exchanges of electronic representations of certificates which competent authorities consider suitable to meet their requirements for paperless certification.

## **SECTION 7 – ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONALITIES FOR RETRIEVING CERTIFICATE INFORMATION**

- The exporting competent authority may consider:
  - a. the use of secured technology as a means to provide authorities with lawful accessibility to information about certified shipments (viewer).
  - b. to provide a service, for example a dedicated website, to enable authorities involved in border clearance or transit to verify certificate information which is issued through the electronic certification system of the exporting competent authority (verification tool).
- The importing competent authority may authorise the exporting competent authority to use the secured database of the importing country in which the certifying official can insert the certificate information.

## **SECTION 8 - DATAMODEL OF THE GENERIC MODEL OFFICIAL CERTIFICATE**

This data model is an example of the generic model official certificate and does not limit or restrict the ability to include additional data, using a wider capability of the UN/CEFACT SPS standardized language, structure and exchange protocols, when bilaterally agreed between the competent authorities of the importing and exporting country.

The detailed data model of the generic model official certificate can be accessed through the following links: **Excel or PDF**