



CODEX CAPSULE 4

The Codex Contact Point (CCP)

Slide 1

This session is dedicated to reviewing the role of the Codex contact point – One of the key structures associated with the membership in Codex.

When a country decides to become a member of the CAC, that decision will result in a **commitment of resources** as well as involvement in **international discussions** on food safety and quality.

Therefore, before taking such a decision, a country should carefully consider whether it is appropriate for it to become a member.

To make this determination there are some aspects to be considered. Let's explore them together...

To determine if it is appropriate for a country to become involved in the work of Codex, these considerations should be taken into account:

- Is the country a Member of FAO and/or WHO?
- Would the adoption or use of Codex standards in national legislation facilitate protection of the consumers?
- Is it important to introduce a national food control system, improve the existing system, or improve the national capacity to deal with food safety incidents?
- Does it export agricultural crops, animal products or species of fish in their raw or processed state, and do any of these commodities contribute significantly to the economy?
- Are there specific food imports upon which the country relies to ensure an adequate and nutritious food supply?
- Is the country a Member of WTO?

If the responses to any of these questions are in the affirmative, then it would likely be appropriate for a country to become a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Once the decision is taken to become a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, then the country must **notify this desire to the Director-General of either FAO or WHO.**

The notification should have to be communicated by means of a letter, a copy of which should also be referred to the Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The resources a country needs to expend on its Codex activities will depend on the extent to which it is involved.

When a country takes a decision to become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and become involved in its work, it is not necessary for the country to be involved in all of the Commission's subsidiary bodies.

Most developing countries, or countries with small economies, tend to focus on:

- the Codex Alimentarius Commission;
- the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for their region; and
- one or two other committees/task forces that are developing standards for products of significance to them.

An essential task that a country must undertake when becoming a member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is the designation of a Codex Contact Point (CCP).

It is important to remember that all official communication with each Codex member country is channeled through the Codex Contact Point.

Therefore, an email address should be operational and in the case of a change to the address the Codex Secretariat should be notified.

Arrangements should be in place to regularly review the incoming information.

It is vital that the Codex Contact Point has sufficient resources, including administrative and logistical support, in order to effectively carry out the required functions.

Let's see what these resources are

Ideally the CCP should correspond to an administrative office or unit in the government.

The official responsible should be a professional officer, preferably with a background in food safety/food standard setting.

In some countries, the designated Codex Contact Point is a senior official who may have little hands-on dealings with day-to-day Codex activities. This is acceptable provided there is a professional officer with the authority and time to carry out the coordination work and report regularly to the Codex Contact Point.

The individual must be given sufficient authority to coordinate the programme and have sufficient time to devote to it. The amount of time will vary, depending on:

- the number of committees a country is involved in;
- the level of training of the professional officer, etc.

It is up to the individual country to determine its needs, but a recommended time allocation would be in the range of 25% - 50% of the person's time (i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1.5 – 3 days per week) to Codex activities, based on minimal Codex activities (e.g. involvement limited to the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee and one or two other committees).

Ideally, the individual should have no other duties, but this is not always realistic. Regardless, the individual must be able to devote an identified portion of time to dealing with Codex issues.

It is essential that the Codex Contact Point, staff and others involved in the management of the Codex programme are equipped with

- Communication Infrastructure intra-government and with stakeholders
- Technical Capacity to Analyse Codex texts and contribute effectively in Codex work: combination of internal and leveraged capacity

A functioning email address is a must! This is because the primary method of contact between the Codex Secretariat in Rome and the Codex Contact Points is via electronic mail.

It is desirable to establish a distinct e-mail address for the Codex programme so that communications regarding the programme do not get lost in the general e-mail account of the Codex Contact Point or agency.

Many countries have established an e-mail address with a high degree of success along the following lines:

- codex.countryname@...
 - E.g. codexvenezuela@sencamer.gob.ve, codex.samoa@mcil.gov.ws, codex_canada@hc-sc.gc.ca, codex.germany@bmelv.bund.de

This is also useful to ensure that there is no interruption in the flow of information should there be a change in the individual designated as being responsible for the Codex Contact Point.

Due to increased costs related to printing and distribution of documents, the Codex Secretariat is placing greater reliance on electronic circulation of Codex documents. Therefore, the Codex Contact Point, other professionals associated with the country's Codex activities and the support staff must have reliable access to email and to the internet.

The Codex Contact Point is primarily a coordinator and focal point for Codex activities within the country.

It is also the link between the country and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (and its Secretariat).

When deciding about the location of the Codex Contact Point, the following criteria should be satisfied:

- neutrality as far as possible with regard to all stakeholders involved in Codex work;
- capability to perform the functions of the Codex
- Contact Point; and accessibility to all parties interested and/or those involved in the activities of Codex.

The decision-making process should also be transparent.

Examples:

- Australia: Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Food
- Barbados: National Standards Institution
- Brazil: Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Canada: Department of Health
- Guatemala: Office of Standards and Regulations, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food
- Saudi Arabia: The Saudi Food and Drug Authority
- Nigeria: Standards Organization of Nigeria
- United States: US Codex Office, in the Office of Undersecretary, for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs, US Department of Agriculture

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, being an independent intergovernmental body for the development of food standards, does not provide technical assistance for participation in the work of Codex or for implementing its outputs at national level.

FAO and WHO, however, engage in a variety of capacity-building activities to support countries that wish to harmonize their national standards with those of Codex.

Both FAO and WHO provide direct assistance to members of Codex to ensure that they can participate as effectively as possible in the Codex process. This includes the development of a strong national programme to support Codex activities.

The Codex trust fund supports comprehensive Codex program development in eligible countries.

FAO and WHO also developed the training material on the basis of which this program is being delivered.

In summary:

- It is important for countries to actively participate in the work of Codex due to public health and economic benefits which result from such participation.
- It isn't necessary for a country to be involved in all of the Commission's subsidiary bodies.
- The resources a country needs to expend on its Codex activities depends on the level of its involvement.
- The CCP has to have sufficient resources (including administrative and logistical support) in order to effectively carryout the required functions.
- The location of the CCP should be decided following the criteria of neutrality, capability, and accessibility.
- The decision to establish a national Codex programme should be taken collectively, with the consent of all stakeholders who will be involved in the implementation of the programme.
- FAO and WHO and their partners provide various capacity-building activities to support countries that want to be involved in Codex.