



## **The Codex Alimentarius Commission – Codex – An Overview**

### **Slide 1**

The first part of this capacity building program is related to the international food regulatory landscape and the positioning of Codex, or the Codex Alimentarius Commission in it.

## **Slide 2**

We will examine the need for international standards, introduce a brief description of the structure and composition of Codex, then review the importance of Codex standards,

And the relationship between these International Standards and international agreements of the world trade organization (WTO).

### **Slide 3**

It is expected that the world population will reach 9.6 billion individuals by 2050.

It will be important to provide a safe, nutritious and sufficient food supply to all.

We also know that food and agri-food commodities are among the most traded commodities around the world.

This makes the development of agreed-upon food standards that define safety and the quality attributes of food traded internationally, among the most important enablers of international food trade, providing, therefore, the ability for these products to be made available where needed, helping to address food security challenges.

## Slide 4

One illustration depicting the necessity to develop international standards is this simple loaf of bread. This is in fact a “citizen of the world” with ingredients and sub-ingredients sourced internationally, like wheat flour, which can be produced in North America or Europe, but need to be exported and made available in African countries or the South-West Pacific region.

Food additives and other smaller ingredients would also be sourced from various countries in Asia, but would be made available globally.

Crossing borders for ingredients requires agreed-upon standards and rules.

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And when we examine consumer expectations worldwide, we would find quasi-unanimity that consumers, wherever they may be, aspire to access safe, quality and affordable food.

As a result, consumers expect that food regulators impose requirements to control food hazards and mandate conditions of food production that result in food products at the same level of safety and quality, whether they are produced domestically or imported. This is another argument for the need for standards that level the playing field between nations and address consumer expectations wherever they may be.

## **Slide 6**

The strategic plan of the Codex Alimentarius Commission has adopted a vision for 2020-2025 (Turn)

**“where the world comes together to create food, safety and quality standards to protect everyone, everywhere.”**

## **Slide 7**

The Codex mission was set and remains unchanged, that is, to protect consumers' health and promote fair practises in the food trade, by setting international, science-based food safety and quality standards.

## **Slide 8**

The Codex mission is to be fulfilled while observing the values of:

- inclusiveness,
- collaboration,
- consensus-building, and
- transparency.



## **Slide 9**

And beyond setting standards, Codex has resulted in the creation of a food regulatory community for experience-sharing, information exchange and collaboration between food regulators, and also between regulators and other stakeholders represented in Codex.

## Slide 10

To illustrate the leading role of Codex in shaping food regulatory decisions internationally, a few examples are presented here:

- (A) It was not until Codex developed a standard on food allergen labeling, mandating that prepackaged food include on their label, a clear mention of an ingredient known to cause food allergies, when it is added intentionally to the recipe of the food, **that countries** began regulating this area, contributing to enhanced protection of food allergic consumers globally.

The Codex guidance also specified what should be considered as a priority allergen, therefore requiring this enhanced labeling and even scientific guidance on how to grant such priority status for allergenic ingredients, both at the regional level and global level, while considering the possible variation in food allergy prevalence around the world, as well as the variety of dietary habits.

Since the adoption of the standard by Codex in 1999, several food regulatory jurisdictions have developed their own food allergen labelling requirements,

beginning with Australia-New Zealand in 2001, the European Union, the United States, Canada and several countries in Asia, South America and around the world.

- (B) Codex guidelines were also indispensable to develop the requirements and the guidance to assess foods derived from biotechnology.
- (C) And In 2011, we were very fortunate to rely on the Codex guidelines related to the assessment of risks that may result from radionuclides, potentially present in food as a result of a nuclear accident. This was instrumental to handle the repercussions of the tragic Fukushima nuclear accident and was another illustration of how Codex could be called upon to address emerging issues.
- (D) A similar situation occurred in 2009, when the maximum levels developed by Codex, for melamine in food allowed to differentiate between the adulterated products from those that were not.

This helped mitigate possible chaos in the international trade of processed foods, due to the multiplication of national standards of melamine in food that contained dairy ingredients, which could have been adulterated by Melamine.

## **Slide 11**

Codex Alimentarius literally means the Food Code. The word Codex Alimentarius Commission is used interchangeably to mean the Code itself, meaning the set of international standards or the organization that produces them : the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

This organization resulted from the joint food standards program of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Codex is a component of this joint program. The other two components are scientific advice and capacity building for developing countries.

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Codex held its first meeting in 1963 and is now an organization that includes 189 members that are 188 countries and one member organization: the European Union.

Considering the need to involve stakeholders in food decision making, including international food standard setting, Codex also involves a significant number of observer organizations that represent a large number of stakeholders, for whom the development of food standards would have an impact. At the time of development of this material, Codex includes 16 UN organizations, 164 non-governmental organizations and 59 international intergovernmental organizations, or a total of **239** observer organizations. This number increases every year with more organizations seeking observer status. Observers have the same prerogatives as members in Codex, with the ability to comment on the proposed international food standards; the only limitation is their inability to vote on a given Codex text, when that option is resorted to.

## **Slide 13**

What is the main function of Codex? It is in fact to develop standards, guidelines and codes of practice that protect consumers' health and enable fair practises in the food trade.

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And given that a big part of international food standards are food safety and nutrition standards, these decisions require the reliance on a scientific assessment, or a risk assessment that is carried out by the joint expert committees of risk assessment managed by the two parent organizations of Codex: FAO and WHO. In fact, Codex is the international food risk manager, supported by the expert committees/meetings as a risk assessment body dedicated to specific topics which in fact act as the international risk assessors.

JECFA or the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives specializes in the Risk Assessment of Food Additives, Contaminants and Residues of Veterinary Drugs.

JEMRA, the Joint Expert Meeting on Microbiological Risks; JEMPR, the Joint Expert Meeting on Pesticide Residues and JEMNU, the Joint Expert Meeting on Nutrition specialize in microbiological, pesticide residues and nutrition assessments, respectively.



When needed, and a risk assessment is required by a Codex subsidiary body in areas beyond the mandate of these standing Committees or outside of their agreed upon workplans, it is possible for FAO and WHO to create Adhoc Expert Consultations where international experts are recruited to review a specific matter.

These Adhoc Expert Consultations follow the same rules of engagement as other expert committees regarding the way experts are recruited and the manner in which expert advice is prepared.

## **Slide 15**

This makes the participation in Codex proceedings by country representatives and food competent authorities, not only desirable, but indispensable.

By taking part in Codex standard setting, countries can express their view on the suitability of the standard and can, or rather should, submit data, when they are called upon to do so, such that they ensure that standards being developed reflect their own reality from a food production or dietary habit perspective.

## **Slide 16**

Beyond its critical role as an international food standard setting body, Codex is also a key forum for engagement among food regulators to exchange information on emerging issues and to develop relevant collaborations to address food safety and quality challenges.

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Codex standards have gained importance, in particular, following the development and signing of the 2 agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO):

- The Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) agreement or the SPS agreement and
- The Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) agreement or the TBT agreement.

The SPS agreement calls on WTO members to participate in international standards development and on adopting the risk analysis principles in setting national standards and regulations.

The adoption of Codex standards in national regulations, where applicable, is generally a corroboration of the country's commitment to fulfil its WTO obligations, considering that these standards are not arbitrary and are evidence-based.

## **Slide 18**

The SPS agreement explicitly identifies Codex standards as a reference, while the TBT agreement calls for abiding by international standards in national decision-making, such that they prevent the development of arbitrary food technical regulations which may constitute impediments to international trade.

This further emphasizes further the importance of international Codex standards.

## **Slide 19**

With this last demonstration, we hope that the case has been made for just how important the Codex standard setting process is and, in particular, how essential the organization entrusted with it globally: the Codex Alimentarius Commission.