



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



Codex adopts more than 20 food standards

New guidelines on animal feeding and milk products, while trade concerns stall progress on specific products

8 July 2004, Rome/Geneva -- The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) adopted over 20 new and amended food standards during its annual meeting, which finished 3 July. Among new standards and other texts that will protect consumers' health and facilitate fair practices in the food trade worldwide are ones concerning animal feeding, milk products and a newly-adopted definition of Traceability/Product Tracing.

The CAC also looked at means of improving the function of Codex, including further increasing the participation of members from developing countries, and streamlining its committee structure.

However, in areas where intellectual property concerns were important, such as the labelling and composition of parmesan cheese, no consensus was reached and the CAC referred these and other issues to its next session or back to Codex committees for further work.

"This has been an extremely productive session. Even though only one year has passed since the last CAC meeting, we adopted over 20 standards which, when used appropriately, will better protect consumers' health and improve their confidence in the products they are buying. Moreover, we took important steps this week to involve partner organizations in the setting of these standards and to make the structure of Codex more efficient," said Dr Stuart Slorach, who was re-elected at the meeting as CAC Chairman.

Oranges and milk products

A new Codex standard on oranges provides for quality and other requirements in fresh oranges and is itself the fruit of collaborative work between Codex and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. In addition, a new Code of Practice on Milk and Milk Products supersedes an old code of practice on dried milk and will provide guidance to member countries to prevent unhygienic practices in the production, processing and handling of milk and milk products, which form a large portion of the diet of consumers, especially infants, children and pregnant and lactating women, in many countries.

Traceability/product tracing is increasingly seen as an important element of national and international food regulatory systems. The consensus reached by the Commission reflects the need for such concept, as highlighted by a series of recent large-scale food safety crises. The adoption of the definition by the Commission marks its first step in this area. The Commission may undertake in the future further work on principles for the application of traceability/product tracing.

The CAC also adopted amended Guidelines on Health and Nutrition Claims, which supplement the existing provisions for nutrition claims, provide definitions of health claims and the conditions under which they can be allowed, and may assist governments in establishing national provisions for health claims, as is already the case for nutrition claims. Codex work in the area of nutrition labelling and claims is especially important in light of the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) Consultation on Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases and the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

Increased cooperation

FAO and WHO recently set up, with the support of the Government of Spain, INFOSAN, which connects food safety authorities around the world in a rapid response and information exchange network that aims to prevent foodborne disease outbreaks from unduly spreading. Now, the CAC adopted new Guidelines on Information Exchange in Health Emergencies that spell out how that information exchange should take place.

Codex also increased its cooperation with other international agencies working on trade in healthy foods. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) has been contributing to Codex in the areas of meat hygiene, residues of veterinary drugs in food, milk and milk products, fish and fish products, and animal feeding.

Safe animal feeding practices

With technical input from FAO, WHO and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), Codex has now established its first code that helps to ensure the safety of food for human consumption through adherence to good animal feeding practices at the farm level and good manufacturing practices during all phases of animal feed production.

Codex and the OIE have considered how to work together to address the issue of antimicrobial resistance. Still in its early stages with modalities yet to be agreed, this initiative aims to contain or minimize antimicrobial resistance by preventing the over/mis-use of antimicrobials in animals destined for human consumption.

The CAC also discussed the state of the Codex Trust Fund, which has been set up to fund the participation of representatives of the world's poorest countries in the Codex process. While welcoming the near-\$1 million that the Fund has already attracted, CAC participants concluded that at least four times that amount would be needed if there was to be effective participation in the Codex process by all Member States. Representatives of 28 countries were supported by the Trust Fund to attend this session of the CAC.

This 27th Session of the CAC also began the examination of how it can streamline its network of committees so that work can progress through Codex more efficiently. It is expected that next year's CAC meeting, due to be held in Rome at the beginning of July, will discuss possible options.

Codex is an international food standards-setting body established by FAO and WHO. It has 170 member countries, all of which are members of FAO or WHO or both. In addition, the European Community is also a Codex member organization. The main work on standard setting is carried out in the more than 20 Codex Committees and Task Forces. The Codex Commission adopts the standards proposed by these Committees and Task Forces and sets the Commission's future work plan.