



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Thirty-first Session

Bordeaux, France, 11-15 March 2019

DISCUSSION PAPER ON EMERGING AND FUTURE ISSUES WITHIN THE REMIT OF THE CCGP

Background

Having jurisdiction to deal with procedural and general matters, the Codex Committee on General Principles (CCGP) is tasked with facilitating the handling of questions involving all Codex Alimentarius committees and/or members.

Previously, the CCGP has been responsible for drawing up the *Working Principles for Risk Analysis for Food Safety for Application by Governments* (CAC/GL 62-2007) and the *Code of Ethics for International Trade in Food including Concessional and Food Aid Transactions* (CAC/RCP 20-1979). It has also drafted the general definitions set out in the Procedural Manual and added various sections that are of use for all Codex members (Core functions of Codex Contact Points, Relations with other organizations, etc.). Over the years, it has also overseen changes to the standard-setting procedure by factoring in the international context (cooperation between the Codex and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) on food safety from “farm to fork”, collaboration between the Codex’s general subject committees and commodity committees, criteria for the establishment of work priorities, etc.).

Although each Codex committee has its own role in the constant elaboration of standards, current changes relating to food worldwide, sustainable development challenges and new technologies, for instance, are now causing issues that are common to all committees to emerge. All Codex members need to consider new cross-cutting work perspectives.

This document sets out, and suggests to the Committee, a non-exhaustive list of the fields which the members of the CCGP may consider relevant in terms of improving or facilitating the work of all Codex bodies. Subsequently, the conclusions of this discussion could be subject to recommendations for new or future CCGP work and be referred to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) for approval.

1. *Facilitating the elaboration of standards by the Codex*

As part of its 31st Session, the CCGP will examine the procedural matters that have been noted or which may arise when it has been decided that a subsidiary Codex body should work only by correspondence.

Broadly speaking, Codex standards are increasingly elaborated using paperless procedures as a result, in particular, of the actions of the electronic working groups (eWGs).¹ This move makes the Codex more effective and cuts the cost of arranging physical meetings. Nevertheless, the 40th Session of the CAC, which was held in July 2017, did acknowledge that the management of the eWGs and their deliverables is currently highly variable due, inter alia, to the lack of standardized reporting procedures that eWG chairs or co-chairs could use, and of precise guidelines on the appropriate amount of detail, the presentation of majority or minority opinions and of the recommendations made by eWGs.

Furthermore, a number of Codex committees have begun to trial innovative working methods. In December 2017 and May 2018, the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) used webinar technology to enable as many people as possible to take part in physical working groups. Although there are still certain technical issues (interpretation, potential time differences, connectivity),

¹ In January 2019, the Codex has 111 active eWGs.

these are interesting options in an age when new means of communication are constantly emerging and being rolled out at global level.

In order to factor in the cross-cutting nature of these issues concerning use of new ICTs, it may be useful to look into how the CCGP's work on the Committees working by correspondence could help manage the eWGs or foster the rollout of innovative working methods (e.g. webinars).

2. Monitoring Codex results in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

In September 2017, the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC) examined the Codex's direct, indirect or potential contribution to achieving the SDGs which had been adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015.² The Codex's vital role in respect of Goal 2 (End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture), Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns) and Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) was highlighted. It was agreed that the new Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 should flag up the linkage between the Codex's work and the SDGs.

As part of the monitoring of the Codex Strategic Plan, the CCGP could consider building relevant indicators to show the Codex's contribution to SDGs 2, 3, 12 and 17 (or even others). It could also compile the data gathered by members with an eye to measuring these indicators.

3. Food fraud / food integrity and food authenticity

In 2016, owing to rising concerns, the CCFICS had the issues of unintentional adulteration and food fraud referred to it. At its 24th Session (October 2018), this committee decided to further consider its role with respect to tackling the challenge of food fraud and to inform the Codex's subsidiary bodies, including the CCGP. Where applicable, the latter could table guidance for the future work of the CCFICS, and possibly other Codex committees, on food fraud.

4. Consumer information

The Codex Committee on Food Labelling's (CCFL) analysis of the issue of food fraud also stressed the role of food labelling when consumers have to be provided with unambiguous information. More generally, the CCGP could suggest starting discussions on how to provide consumers with information on both the health factors (warning labels for sensitive consumers) and factors concerning fair practices, so that this information is understood and assimilated by everyone. Possible global cultural differences and the availability of new technologies would have to be taken into account.

5. Observation structure for the application of Codex standards

The draft Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 contains a Strategic Goal 3 which states that "Codex standards are globally used". However, there are many ways of using Codex standards. These include enacting them in domestic legislation, using them as a benchmark to certify food safety or as a framework for elaborating regulations, or even to provide guidance for regulating imports and exports between countries. In order to obtain a better overview of the use of Codex standards by all agri-food sector stakeholders, available global data may need to be collected. A dedicated structure may have to be set up due to the scope of this groundwork.

The CCGP could discuss the most suitable approach to bolstering knowledge concerning application of Codex standards and agree on the nomination of appropriate incumbent bodies. Feedback from other relevant international organizations, which already have a comparable policy in place, could also inform the discussions.

² Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015. *Resolution 70/1. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.*
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=e

6. *System for improving coordination with other international organizations*

In July 2018, as part of its regular review of Codex work management, the Codex Secretariat presented an analysis of relations with other international food standard-setting organizations. A number of areas for improvement were pinpointed (periodic review of references, mechanism to avoid duplicate or contradictory standards, etc.) and the CCEXEC will continue to examine this issue.³ The CCGP could be the venue for an inclusive discussion of the options, including those put forward by the CCEXEC.

7. *Possible changes to the Procedural Manual*

The Procedural Manual of the Codex Alimentarius Commission sets out all the information required for Codex stakeholders to participate effectively in the work of the Commission. It contains the basic texts, a detailed description of the adoption process for standards, guidelines for the Codex's subsidiary bodies, working principles for risk analysis, details of relations between the Codex and other organizations, etc.

As regards the Manual's format, many sections have been added over time and this may mean that the various users have difficulty understanding it. As part of the implementation of the Codex Communications Workplan, the Codex Secretariat has stated that it is working on a searchable online version of the Manual.⁴ In conjunction with this work, the CCGP could examine whether the Procedural Manual's current structure enables all Codex members and observers to easily obtain the information they need or whether improvements (for instance, reindexing) would increase the Manual's accessibility, in particular as regards the version drawn up especially for online consultation.

³ REP18/CAC

⁴ CX/EXEC 18/75/4