

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD HYGIENE

50th Session, Panama City, Panama

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REPORT OF THE PHYSICAL WORKING GROUP ON CCFH WORK PRIORITIES (PROPOSALS FOR NEW WORK AND/OR REVISION OF EXISTING STANDARDS)

PREPARED BY THE UNITED STATES AND PANAMA AS CHAIRS OF THE WORKING GROUP

The physical working group (PWG) was chaired by Ms. Jenny Scott, the United States delegate to the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene, and Ing. Luis M. Benavides, General Administrator in Charge of the Panamanian Food Safety Authority. The working group chair from the United States opened the meeting by welcoming the delegates. The chair noted that the *Request for Proposals for New Work and/or Revision of Existing Standards* (CL 2018/35- FH) did not result in any proposal for new work. However, CCFH49 had agreed to a discussion paper be prepared on the control of Shiga Toxin-Producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) by Uruguay, Chile and the United States of America for consideration at CCFH50. A discussion paper with a project document was received (CX/FH 18/50/9).

The two main objectives of the working group were 1) to discuss the discussion paper on the Development of Guidelines for the Control of Shiga Toxin-Producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) in Beef Meat, Unpasteurized Milk and Cheese Produced from Unpasteurized Milk, Leafy Greens, and Sprouts (discussion to be led by the Chair from the United States); and 2) to discuss and update the CCFH Forward Work Plan in CX/FH 18/50/10 (discussion to be led by the Chair from Panama).

Development of Guidelines for the Control of Shiga Toxin-Producing Escherichia coli (STEC) in Beef Meat, Unpasteurized Milk and Cheese Produced from Unpasteurized Milk, Leafy Greens, and Sprouts

The United States and Chile presented the discussion paper and project document and proposed to develop new guidance based on the FAO/WHO JEMRA expert meeting recently published that had been commissioned by CCFH47.

The United States discussed the public health burden of STEC across the world, as well as the risk management challenges associated with STEC and trade. According to the data compiled by JEMRA, estimated foodborne STEC caused more than 1 million illnesses, 100 deaths, and nearly 13,000 disability adjusted life years. The most important sources of STEC estimated globally based on outbreak data are produce (13%), beef (11%), and dairy products (7%), with nearly 60% of outbreaks unattributed to a particular food. Dairy products are largely associated with consuming unpasteurized milk and products made from unpasteurized milk. While beef was identified as the most important source of outbreaks in the African, European, and East Mediterranean regions and the Americas, analysis of outbreak data indicated that fresh produce, namely sprouts and leafy greens, are important in North America and Europe.

The United States also described the importance of virulence factors described in the JEMRA document. Ever since the emergence of STEC serotype O157:H7, serotype has been used by risk managers to develop public health policies that also impact trade. However, serotype does not ensure a strain has the expressed toxin and adhesion genes necessary to cause infection. The United States further described how the guidance document would provide guidance to risk managers on how to apply the set of virulence factor criteria in the JEMRA report for characterizing the potential risk of severe illness. The Codex guidance document could lead to streamlining and focusing product sampling and testing programs that play such a large role in STEC control around the world based on genetic virulence factors rather than serotype.

Chile described the proposal for the structure of the guidance document and how it would follow the overarching structure of existing codes of hygienic practice on meat, fresh fruits and vegetables, and milk and milk products, as well as guidance on *Salmonella* in beef and pork meat. The format would be in a chapter structure where the first chapter would be devoted to the characteristics of STEC and its virulence factors, followed by chapters that describe the validated interventions for each commodity at primary production, processing, and distribution, including laboratory analysis detection criteria for STEC according to the JEMRA virulence factor analysis.

One delegation stated that, as fecal contamination was the main source of contamination with STEC, controls would likely not be specific and would be similar to controls for pathogens such as *Salmonella* and *Campylobacter* in meat. Controls based on testing for virulence factors were dependent on new methodology under development.

Delegations agreed that the proposed STEC guideline is important and supported moving forward with the development of guidelines for the control of STEC in all four proposed commodities. Several delegations indicated that certain existing code of practices may already contain information that can be applicable to the control of STEC and that the control measures for STEC should complement these codes. It was suggested that the work should start with a review of the existing documents and identify gaps.

There were differing views regarding the inclusion of small ruminants in the guideline of control of STEC in beef. One delegation stated the JEMRA report did not show small ruminants as having a higher illness burden than other commodities. Other delegations supported the inclusion of small ruminants in the guideline of control of STEC in beef. Moreover, including small ruminants was not likely to increase the work significantly.

Other points made by delegations included:

- game meat should be included in the proposed STEC guideline, as 74% of game meat had been found to be positive for STEC;
- OIE should be involved in addressing primary production with respect to beef;
- the prioritization of virulence factors should be included in the guidance document;
- FAO/WHO experts should be asked to conduct a literature review to determine controls to include in the document or to ensure interventions included in the guidance document are validated;
- the term “unpasteurized milk” should be replaced with the term “raw milk” to avoid confusion with milk that may have received thermal treatment but not pasteurization.

One delegation suggested that the guideline development can take on one commodity at a time. Several delegations suggested beef to be the first commodity because of public health and trade issues.

CCFH Forward Workplan

The Chair opened this discussion by asking the delegations to review the Forward Workplan. One delegation asked whether the Forward Workplan would be updated with respect to work on the Principles for the Safe Use of Water in Food Processing since FAO/WHO would soon be issuing a report on this subject. One delegation suggested that because of the large outbreak of listeriosis in South Africa, there may be a need to revise the CCFH guidelines related to the control of *Listeria monocytogenes*. The Chair indicated that interested delegations can prepare a project document for this work.

One delegation inquired about the project document on the Code of Hygienic Practices for the Storage of Cereals. (The document was prepared several years ago by India.)

There was insufficient time to consider the Forward Workplan in depth and it was not revised.

The PWG on new work recommendations:

- Accept the development of Guidelines for the Control of Shiga Toxin-Producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) in Beef Meat, Unpasteurized Milk and Cheese Produced from Unpasteurized Milk, Leafy Greens, and Sprouts as new work.
- Discuss when the committee can begin on the development of this guideline given the current workload and whether the committee should develop the guideline for one commodity at a time.