

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
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World Health
Organization

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FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NORTH AMERICA AND THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC

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DISCUSSION PAPER ON USE OF CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION AND PRIORITISATION TO RESOLVE FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY CHALLENGES, IDENTIFIED BY THE REGION

*(Prepared by New Zealand, with the support of the International Union of Food Science and Technology
(IUFoST))*

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to invite discussion on the use of criteria for evaluating and prioritising responses to food safety and quality challenges identified by the region to help ensure tangible outcomes can be achieved.

Introduction

2. The Joint FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees play an invaluable role in ensuring that the work of the Commission is responsive to regional interests and to the concerns of developing countries.

3. Unsafe food is regularly identified as a significant issue in the South West Pacific region as noted in World Health Organisation (WHO) reports and fact sheets¹. Additionally, resources for addressing unsafe food are limited in the Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Currently, developing country resources are also constrained, impacting investment in Codex including funding opportunities for capacity building projects.

4. In order to promote the best value for the regions' investment in Codex, this paper sets out for discussion, draft criteria for use by the region to evaluate potential responses to food safety and quality challenges, to ensure impactful outcomes for the region, within resource constraints.

Background

Composition of CCNASWP

5. The Joint FAO/WHO food standards programme FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the South West Pacific (CCNASWP) brings together a rich mixture of countries. Developed countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States combine with ten SIDS countries, comprising the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Federation of Micronesia, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu (noting the size of the populations vary widely ranging from Nauru with a population of around 12 thousand, and Papua New Guinea with around 10 million).

6. Because of their geographic isolation or limited natural resources, SIDS often share a unique set of circumstances, such as exposure to natural disasters or reliance on imports and they remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities.

Ongoing food safety and quality challenges raised in the CCNASWP region

7. As noted under CCNASWP17 (2025) Agenda Item 4.1², key food safety and quality challenges, faced by the South West Pacific (SWP) include:

- *A reliance on imported food*, which may not meet local food safety standards, contributing to an increased risk of contamination.

¹ https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/food-safety#tab=tab_1

² CCNASWP17 (2025) CX/NASWP 25/17/4

- *Indigenous and traditional foods:* Indigenous foods, while rich in nutrients, sometimes pose food safety risks due to limited regulation. There are concerns about traditional food preservation methods not meeting modern safety standards, especially in remote areas.
- *Seafood safety:* Overfishing and unsustainable fishing practices, particularly in the Southwest Pacific, threaten food security and safety. Additionally, seafood can be contaminated by pollutants like mercury or microplastics, which pose health risks to consumers.
- *Natural disasters and food security;* Cyclones, flooding, and drought: The Pacific Island nations are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, with rising sea levels, cyclones, and droughts threatening local agriculture and the safety of food supplies. This results in food scarcity and a reliance on international aid, which may not always meet safety standards.
- *Regulatory gaps:* Smaller nations in the Pacific face challenges due to a lack of infrastructure and resources to support the operation of food safety regulations. This can result in inconsistent food quality and safety across the region.

8. At times these challenges can be exacerbated by regulatory consistency, lack of consumer education and the need for environmental sustainability. Agenda Item (4.1) also identifies the top five emerging issues expected to have an impact on food safety in the region in the next 5-10 years. The rating of the significance of each of the emerging issues for the region have all increased since the 2023 report, as indicated:

- Limited capacity to manage food regulatory systems (35 per cent – up from 22 per cent in 2023)
- Increased foodborne disease transmission (15 per cent – up from 9 per cent in 2023)
- Climate Change (20 per cent – up from 13 per cent in 2023)
- Innovative Food Technologies (15 per cent – up from 9 per cent in 2023)
- Antimicrobial Resistance (15 per cent – up from 4 per cent in 2023)

Objectives

9. This paper is intended to serve as a discussion on how to support the region to respond to some of the more pressing and ongoing food safety and food quality challenges that have been identified over time.

10. To explore solutions to the issues and needs of the SWP countries (including issues identified in existing Codex committees and/or FAO/WHO reports) concerning food standards and food control and identify context-specific evidence based actions for the region to progress within current capacity.

11. To prioritise action of food regulatory programmes in SWP countries, to maximize impacts of Codex standards and enhance their contribution to the Codex agenda with proposals of new work that are most relevant to their food safety and trade interests.

Key Issues

Key food safety and quality challenges in the region and the need to prioritise

12. The food safety issues in the SWP region remain relatively consistent over the years and are exacerbated by the limited resources available in the Pacific.

13. Codex continues to be the main source from which food regulatory measures developed in the SWP region are derived. In this regard, it is important for countries of the region to be well equipped to translate Codex guidance in their national regulations in a manner that enables their uptake by Food Business Operators (FBOs).

14. It is also important for members of CCNASWP and particularly those representing Pacific Island Countries (PICs), to contribute to the identification of issues relevant to their jurisdictions with the possible proposal of new work that would contribute to the member countries food safety and trade facilitation goals. It might also be useful if the region considers more fully how it can respond to food safety challenges in addition to programmes to develop commodity standards.

15. Food regulatory programmes in PICs continue to face challenges in adapting to new developments in food safety mitigation strategies. This includes those identified and advocated in Codex texts and codes of practice to mitigate food safety hazards, and in offering the relevant food regulatory response. It is important that these mitigation strategies are well characterized and enabled for use by food producers in accordance with set safety and efficacy requirements that could be spelled out in regulatory directives or tailored guidance.

How it would help the region

16. It is vital that in considering Codex programmes in the SWP region we discuss and prioritise responses to food safety challenges so that the region is able:

- to identify priority indigenous food and varieties, for which regional standards could be developed to support their access to markets in the region and potentially beyond.
- to identify important Codex texts of relevance to the region, including recently adopted codes of practice for food risk mitigation and based upon-which national guidance could be developed.
- to identify gaps in Codex guidance to address priority areas of food safety and quality in the SWP region, where proposals of new work could be considered for development, starting with the relevant analysis against Codex criteria on work priorities.

Potential responses to some key food safety and quality challenges identified in the region

17. Some examples of possible responses to food safety in the SWP region could make to address key food safety and quality changes in the region:

- a. Development of Risk Profiles for priority hazards and/or hazards commodities in the South West Pacific Region to be carried out collaboratively. This effort would be part of a capacity building initiative gathering food regulatory authorities from the NASWP and their stakeholders.
- b. Identification of Codex texts requiring added guidance to support their uptake by FBOs in the region. Of particular interest, guidance that encompasses the reliance on disruptive technologies, such as ozonation and the application of high-pressure processes. Such application may require further guidance on the way food regulators determine their conditions of efficacy and safe use to promote their adoption by FBOs of the region.
- c. Identification of Codex texts newly adopted (e.g., remote inspection, reliance on Voluntary Third-Party Assurance (vTPA), food allergen management in the food industry) which if applied effectively in the region, could promote added optimization in food regulatory resources.
- d. Identification of Codex texts under development or under consideration: that would benefit most to stakeholders in the region and prioritise collection of input and contribution to the standard development, such that these texts are reflective of the food production landscape in the region (e.g., current efforts to develop guidelines on allergen precautionary labelling)

Proposed process

18. It is intended that the region identify areas in Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice where emphasis needs to be made, to make Codex recommendations accessible and feasible for the food production sector in the region.

19. Items agreed as best fitting with the terms of reference (TOR) of regional committees (Annex 1) would be envisaged as new work for CCNASWP. For this purpose, a prioritisation approach could be applied, in a manner similar to what was adopted by other Codex Committees (CCFL and CCNFSDU) to ensure that resources devoted to CCNASWP by members and by the Codex Secretariat are best utilized. This is in line with the Codex Strategic Plan 2025-2030, calling for enhanced relevance of Codex work to Codex members and observers.

20. A mechanism for identifying the areas for response and the use of the draft criteria for evaluation and prioritisation of these potential pieces of new work would need to be agreed. To ensure its usefulness, it would need to be simple and able to be readily implemented, as needed.

Stakeholder Engagement

21. The proposed examples of responses to challenges could be submitted to a stakeholder consultation by food regulators from SWP jurisdictions, to gain better insight of stakeholder priorities and challenges. Such consultation would also inform the collaborative approaches to be considered for the implementation of the responses retained, amongst those suggested above.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

22. CCNASWP17 is invited to discuss:

- (i) the draft criteria for evaluation and prioritisation of new work set out in Annex 2 of this document to prioritise new work in CCNASWP17.
- (ii) a possible process and mechanism for identifying potential responses to be put forward to be assessed against the criteria for evaluation and prioritisation of new work.
- (iii) the possible responses (paragraph 17) that could be put forward to the region and their relevance to ensure tangible outcome can be achieved to address challenges and stakeholders needs within resources constraints.

ANNEX 1**TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEES**

1. Defines the problems and needs of the region concerning food standards and food control.
2. Promotes within the committee contacts for the mutual exchange of information on proposed regulatory initiatives and problems arising from food control and stimulates the strengthening of food control infrastructures.
3. Recommends to the Commission the development of worldwide standards for products of interest to the region, including products considered by the committee to have an international market potential in the future.
4. Develops regional standards for food products moving exclusively or almost exclusively in intraregional trade.
5. Draws the attention of the Commission to any aspects of the Commission's work of particular significance to the region.
6. Promotes coordination of all regional food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations within the region.
7. Exercises a general coordinating role for the region and such other functions as may be entrusted to it by the Commission.
8. Promotes the use of Codex standards and related texts by Members.

ANNEX 2**DRAFT CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION AND PRIORITISATION TO RESOLVE FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY CHALLENGES, IDENTIFIED BY THE REGION****Purpose:**

1. Having identified food safety and quality challenges to resolve, draft criteria is suggested as a tool to assist CCNASWP evaluate and prioritise the work accordingly.

Scope:

2. The criteria intended for evaluating and prioritising work would apply to CCNASWP new work proposals including revision of current texts.
3. The criteria have been developed in addition to the “Criteria for the establishment of new work priorities” applicable to commodity or general standards as outlined in the Procedural Manual³
4. The additional criteria relevant to the work of the CCNASWP have been developed, taking into account the purpose of the Codex Alimentarius Commission⁴, the priorities outlined in the Codex Strategic Plan, and the CCNASWP terms of reference.

Principles:

5. It is intended that the additional criteria would only be applied on an as-needed basis and that if the need arose, as generally supported at CCNASWP.
6. The intent of the additional criteria for evaluating and prioritising new work is to keep it as simple and flexible as possible.

Additional criteria for evaluating and prioritising new work

7. The following are the additional criteria against which the new work to be undertaken in CCNASWP may be assessed, including both positive and negative impacts:

Criterion	Further information	Rating
Relevance to CCNASWP mandate	Does the proposed new work fit within the terms of reference of CCNASWP?	Yes/No/Partially
Aligns with the region’s, Implementation Plan to support the Codex Strategic Plan	Possible new work to address recommendations included in the implementation plan developed by the region	High Medium Low
Aligns with Prioritisation of Risk Profiles developed regionally or by countries of the region	Possible new work to address recommendations included in the risk profiles developed for the SWP region	High Medium Low
Supports the development of enhanced or adapted guidance stemming from Codex texts, which enables a better understanding of the Codex text or increased opportunities of its adoption by regulators and FBOs in the SWP	Possible new work to develop guidance on regulatory management of food safety applications referred to in Codex texts, but for which there are regulatory void/gaps in the SWP, enabling better access to such applications (e.g. disruptive technologies for risk mitigation mentioned in Codex Codes of practice and which require regulatory oversight to maximise their effectiveness and safe use)	High Medium Low
Where applicable to the Codex purpose, its contribution to achieving internationally adopted global goals related to food safety, health or nutrition	Identify the organization and goal ^{2 2} For example: WHA73.5: World Health Organization - “Strengthening efforts on food safety” adopted in 2020 and the Global action plan for the food safety 2022–2030: towards stronger food safety systems and global cooperation.	Yes/No/Partially

³ *Procedural Manual*, Section 2 Elaboration of codex standards and related texts; Criteria for the establishment of work priorities <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/e96c7dbb-c396-43b3-a4c4-a1c2f84d7927/content> (Page 34)

⁴ Article 1, Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Codex Procedural Manual

Criterion	Further information	Rating
	Describe how the proposed new work can address the goal within the mandate of CCNASWP	
Supports indigenous and traditional foods from the region	Identify priority indigenous food and varieties, for which regional standards could be developed to support their access to markets in the region and potentially beyond while creating an enabling environment to address global challenges ⁵	High Medium Low

⁵ The Codex Strategic Plan (2026-2031) adopted by CAC47 (2024) noted that Codex texts can provide an enabling environment which facilitates the uptake and implementation of policies and programmes to address global challenges around areas such as climate change, environment, sustainability, and trade.