

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
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Agenda Item 7

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

14th Session

Buenos Aires, Argentina, 29 November - 3 December 2004

REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL COORDINATING COMMITTEES

GOVERNMENT COMMENTS

(Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico)

ARGENTINA

A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

The main role of the Committee should be the coordination of regional strategies with regard to the positions on relevant Codex issues. To achieve this goal, it is necessary for regional meeting agendas to address more concrete issues, besides informative matters. This would contribute to the work of the Commission and of the Codex Committees, providing the regional view. This would also help continue improving the safety of food produced in CCLAC countries and achieve the aim of Codex standards which should facilitate international trade.

Argentina also believes that the regional Strategic Plan is of great help to manage work by the Committee, including the prioritization of standard needs.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic Coverage:

Argentina believes that the current membership of the Coordinating Committees is the appropriate one as far as the CCLAC Region is concerned, as it follows the "regional" structure of various international bodies, including FAO regional conferences. In this respect, Argentina believes that changing the membership of regional groups—even if it was carried out on a flexible, ad hoc basis—could have two effects:

- a) weakening the current regional cooperation framework, as Regional Committees were set up owing to common problems in the regions, subdividing the groups would reduce the exchange of experiences, data and knowledge among countries in the same geographic area;
- b) cause confusion regarding the membership of groups, which currently follows FAO regional structure.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards;

Argentina believes that some terms of reference of the Regional Committees are currently included in the regional Strategic Plan. Therefore, it should be evaluated on this basis whether any of the activities raised in the Procedural Manual should be changed, taking into consideration that the Strategic Plan is to be approved by the Commission.

Also, it is worth pointing out that some activities provided for in the Procedural Manual seem to exceed the possibilities of a Regional Coordinator, particularly where committees group developing or least developed countries.

As regards the terms of reference of item h)—relating to the promotion of acceptance by Member countries of standards and maximum levels set in Codex—we believe that it should be analyzed in detail as, in fact, it is not applied, although greater efforts should be made for promotion in this regard.

The development of standards at regional level is only considered in very specific occasions. However, the Committee might work on the development for the submission of proposals to the Commission on the need of specific standards, which may then be considered by another Codex Committee.

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

1) In Argentina's view, Regional Coordinating Committees can perform an extremely important role when working on reaching regional consensus to achieve common objectives. Similarly, the Committees provide a favorable framework for the development of new capacities in Region Members, through the exchange of experiences among countries with similar situations.

2) At times, Committee Members lack the operational capacities to develop a national position on general issues of interest. In this case, the exchange of information with other Committee Members may help their concerns on certain issues addressed and thus reach the most appropriate position for an official submission.

3) Participation by countries, particularly developing or least developed countries, is usually linked to the availability of the economic resources and the technical and operational capacity of Codex Contact Point and standard-management bodies.

Participation by countries should be evaluated from two points of view; namely, participation through meeting attendance and the capacity to make comments, and participation through development of national positions.

As regards the former, a Regional Committee's possibilities to achieve participation in Codex meetings are very limited, mainly focusing on encouraging governments to actively participate in the development of Codex international standards and take actions to promote greater contributions to the Trust Fund by countries which are able to do so. In addition, other international organizations might be sensitized to this situation so they might allocate funds with to this end.

However, the Committee should continuously encourage governments to prioritize Codex Alimentarius work among their activities. This initiative should also be boosted by the Codex Commission and by FAO/WHO in ways other than through Codex Contact Points themselves.

As for the latter, participation through the development of position papers, Argentina believes that the exchange of information among Members of a Committee, in the face of common concerns, might help—at times—support a position paper.

4) Argentina believes that the choice of venue of meetings is due to practical reasons, as they are held in the country in charge of the coordination of the Committee. However, the criteria might be made more flexible, as is the case with other Codex Committees.

5) According to the changes to the Terms of Reference for Commission sessions, which establish that they are to be held annually, Regional Coordinating Committees should meet with the same frequency; otherwise they would not be able to achieve one of the objectives of the terms of reference (i.e. submitting positions upon consensus has been reached to the Commission). At present, the decisions of the Commission are not in tune with those of Regional Coordinating Committees with regard to the development of working arrangements.

Despite the limited economic resources, the dynamics of the Regional Coordinating Committees and the expected outcome might be strengthened by means of annual meetings, which would help effectively achieve the objectives of the terms of reference.

Last, regardless of the frequency of the meetings, Regional Coordinating Committee Members should come closer to one another through greater use of available electronic means.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

a) Roles:

Currently, there is no clear distinction between the roles of the Coordinator and those of the Member elected on a regional basis. According to the Procedural Manual, the roles of the Regional Coordinator are those established under Article 2, paragraph c). However, the adoption of the regional Strategic Plan indicated, based on the objectives raised, several other important activities which the Regional Coordinator should conduct. Nevertheless, the Procedural Manual has not established specific roles for the Member elected on a regional basis.

The Member elected on a regional basis should serve as an advisor to the Committee Coordinator and help achieve the objectives of the regional Strategic Plan on a previously agreed basis, as well as represent the Region at the sessions of the Executive Committee.

However, we believe that both the Coordinator of the Regional Committee and the Member elected on a regional basis should be Members of the Executive Committee, as already expressed at previous CCGP sessions, with a view to promoting the positions of Region Members together with their needs and concerns more effectively.

b) Length of the terms of the Members elected on a regional basis:

In Argentina's view, the length of the term of the Member elected on a regional basis has become out of step with the length of the other Executive Committee Members and the Regional Coordinator.

The term of the Representative elected on a regional basis should be the same as that of the Regional Coordinator with the aim of promoting synergies between the pursued objectives and the work they may conduct jointly.

With regard to the reelection, it should take place only once. Members should thus not be allowed to serve a third consecutive term.

F. – Any Other issues:

The current agenda of Regional Committees does not take account of the needs of the Region. It should therefore allow for more flexibility.

Argentina is particularly concerned over all those issues which Committee Members are concerned over. In order to reach regional positions, these issues should be addressed under "Other Business".

We believe that the regional positions reached should not be addressed under “Other Business”. Given that this is one of the key objectives of the Terms of Reference of Regional Committees, they should have a separate heading in a central part of the agenda format.

Should this was not possible, we suggest that item “Other Business” should be provided with some kind of structure comment, in order to determine with more precision which issues may be addressed.

BRAZIL

A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

In order to help achieve the objectives of the Commission, Coordinating Committees should develop more objective meetings, by adopting a work agenda with informative topics for specific issues which may generate results that help countries extend their influence on the work of the Commission and Technical Committees, enhance their food control structures and subsequently improve food safety and increase participation in international food trade.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic coverage:

Brazil wishes to stress the following issues of importance: overall, there is no proportionality in terms of the membership of Regional Coordinating Committees and their representation in the Executive Committee, as there are Committees with a large number of Members and others with few Members which have the same number of Representatives. Another issue is that there are geographical regions which have several subdivisions with different states of development, customs, languages and involvement in Codex work. For these cases, mechanisms should be developed to reduce differences and involve all Member countries in the Committee. The proposal to set up sub-coordinators according to the sub-regions, already discussed in connection with the Evaluation of Codex Alimentarius, might be of help in this task.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards

The current terms of reference of the Regional Committees are as follows:

- a) define the problems and needs of the Region concerning food standards and food control;
- b) promote within the Committee contacts for the mutual exchange of information on the proposed regulatory initiatives and the problems arising from food control, and stimulates the strengthening of food control infrastructures;
- c) recommend 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 in the future;
- d) develop regional standards for food products moving exclusively or almost exclusively in intra trade;
- e) draws the attention of the Commission to any aspects of the Commission’s work of particular significance to the Region;
- f) promotes coordination of all regional food standards work undertaken by international governmental or non-governmental organizations within the Region;
- g) exercises a general coordinating role for the Region and such other functions as may be entrusted to it by the Commission;
- h) promote the acceptance of Codex standards and maximum limits for residues by Member countries.

The terms should be revised as the topics related to the acceptance of standards and maximum limits are not being applied at regional or international level. As regards regional standards, there is a tendency not to foster the development of this kind of standards, but global standards. In fact, a number of issues in the terms of reference need to be effectively promoted. The acceptance of standards and limits should be an on-going activity, aimed at countries.

The development and implementation of the CCLAC Strategic Plan is an important initiative which is being developed with the aim of satisfying the terms of reference of the CCLAC

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

Regional Committees are important and can play a key role in stimulating the participation of the countries of the Region in the work of several Codex Committees. It is the forum where countries can discuss common issues and create strategies to achieve their objectives. We believe that the venues for the meetings are in accordance with other Codex Committees' practices. We consider that the frequency of the meetings should be in accordance with the sessions of the Commission, so there is consistency in the development of work plans.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

Currently, there is no clear distinction between the roles of the Coordinator and of the Member elected on a regional basis. Article 2, paragraph c) of the Procedural Manual describes the roles of Regional Coordinators, but it does not indicate those of Members elected on a regional basis. Brazil is of the view that the Member elected on a regional basis should express the position of the Region at the Executive Committee. Therefore, there should be some kind of formal coordination between the Member elected on a regional basis with the Coordinators and countries of the regions.

CHILE

Review of the structure and functioning of Codex Coordinating Committees

A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

Briefly, its main role is the Coordination and promotion of Codex Alimentarius implementation in the Region, even when regional standards may be developed, its main role is performed in the strategic and political arena in connection with key Codex issues.

We support the approach adopted by the CCLAC, namely working on the basis of a Strategic Plan with certain objectives and responsibilities.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic Coverage

The membership of the CCLAC seems to be appropriate, the only difficulty being the fact that Caribbean countries are not fully integrated with the rest of Latin America; which is mainly due to language problems.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards

It may be possible to revise some terms of reference in a more general manner. The Strategic Plan of the Regional Committee will be expected to go into greater detail within this umbrella. Clearly, the strategic plans generated shall be approved by the Commission.

Regional standards were developed on specific occasions. This may be the case where agreement is reached to obtain recommendations. However, not being international standards, they would not be considered a reference. Still, they may be considered a step towards potentially proposing it as an international standard in the future.

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

Countries' participation in Codex meetings is affected by Codex problems with regard to the funding and conditions of developing countries. Problems regarding participation are related to the importance national Governments give to Codex, rather than to how the Committee works. The feasibility of having a Trust Fund for the Region might be considered, but in order to reach a more permanent solution the bodies involved should include Codex matters in their strategic plans with the aim of institutionalizing the work.

Venues:

This is independent from participation, and meetings should continue to be held in the country of the Regional Coordinator for the purposes of preparation.

Frequency of the Meetings:

Considering that Commission meetings are currently held annually, the Committee should also meet annually, but there are funding problems.

Notwithstanding, it is important that coordination and communication be kept between sessions, especially using modern means of communication.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

Representation at the Executive Committee:

Chile has proposed at meetings of the CCGP and informal CCLAC meetings that both the Coordinator of the Committee and the regional Representative should be Members of the Executive Committee. This would ensure greater representation of the Region, which is particularly important for large regions integrated by a large number of countries. In this respect, it also makes sense that the Coordinator and the Representative of the Region come from different geographical areas.

Roles:

In addition to chairing the meeting of the Committee and developing work related to this, the Regional Coordinator will play an important role in the development of the Committee Action Plan, the coordination of regional positions on different issues; and should represent the positions of the Region in the Executive Committee, as is the case currently.

The Regional Representative might serve as Vice-chair of the appropriate Regional Committee, working in coordination with the Regional Coordinator. In addition, it should help in the implementation of the Strategic Plan of the Committee, in previously agreed responsibilities. For the above-mentioned reasons, s/he should continue as Representative of the Region at the Executive Committee.

Terms:

Currently, regional Representatives can remain in the post for a longer period than Regional Coordinators and even other Executive Committee Members. With the aim of achieving greater similarities and rotation possibilities, we suggest that they might be re-elected only once and thus could serve the term for as long as the other Executive Committee Members.

F. - Any other issues:

We suggest the analysis of the contents of the Agendas, adjusting them to the interests of the Region. Were it not possible to modify them because there is a standard format for all Regional Committees, the item "Other Business" could be further developed following a more structured approach.

We wish to stress the importance of the work between meetings for the purposes of continuity, which is addressed in the Strategic Plan; but we are all responsible for the communication among one another, the instances and the links.

Chile proposes to stress the discussion of important cross-committee issues within Codex. We suggest that the following agenda items be included at the next session of the Regional Committee:

- Evaluation of the regional Strategic Plan
- Evaluate the harmonization of food safety regulations among countries in the Region and with Codex.
- Make efforts to try to obtain a common regional position on Traceability, risk analysis, Code of Ethics.
- Regional Plan for inquiry and registration of local data concerning the main "food-agent" combinations with the aim of developing risk assessments, not being necessarily dependant on the information coming from developed countries.
- Regional Plan for the conduct of studies on local diets and on contamination levels of foods in the region to improve the esteem of the exposure of our consumers.

GUATEMALA
A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

There are no comments.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic Coverage

The membership of the Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean has a logical basis. However, it can be seen that the Caribbean, English- and French-speaking countries, is not very integrated.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards

The development of regional standards seems to have stopped. Guatemala provided some comments on the tourist project, but has not received follow-up of the document.

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

Communication is normal, without other specific actions.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

There are no comments.

F. – Any other issues:

There are no comments.

HONDURAS

With regard to the Regional Coordinating Committees, the 27th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2004) agreed that a Circular Letter was to be submitted to all Codex Members, in which governments would be invited to make observations on the following issues:

A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

Honduras is pleased about the activities of the Regional Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean, which is chaired by Argentina. We believe that it is helping achieve the objective of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic Coverage:

The coverage of the CCLAC and its membership is acceptable.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards:

In order to analyze compliance with the terms of reference, we should analyze the approval of regional documents by CCLAC. We would appreciate it if the approved documents were indicated to us.

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

Honduras recommends that meetings should be held annually in order to speed up Codex work and adjust to the increasing requests.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

We support this; our critical comment is that the Regional Coordinator ensures compliance so that Codex objectives may be achieved.

F. – Any other issues:

We request the inclusion of the criteria adopted in the distribution of FAO/WHO funds as one of the items to be discussed, taking account of the call to ensure appropriate regional representation and effective country participation in Codex work.

MEXICO

Comments on the issues listed:

A. - Role of Regional Coordinating Committees in furthering the objectives of the Codex Alimentarius Commission:

- Facilitating the adoption of Codex guidelines or standards, reaching a consensus on regional interests, in order to reduce, as far as possible, divergent positions within the same Region.
- Analyzing the priorities of the Region with the aim of considering it when putting forward new work at the various Codex committees and help achieve the aims as soon as possible.
- Developing and revising regional standards—considering, within this assessment, the possibility of submitting them to a specific Committee.

B. - Membership of Regional Coordinating Committees, including their current geographic Coverage:

- Current membership is considered appropriate.

C. - Terms of reference of the Regional Coordinating Committees as set out in the Procedural Manual, including the relevance of developing regional standards:

- Current terms of reference are considered appropriate.

D. - Effectiveness of Regional Coordinating Committees in respect of country participation record and of venues and meeting intervals (currently every two years):

- In particular, the problem related to participation in the CCLAC is that at Commodity Committees and General Committees. Recommendations arising from this assessment should therefore be implemented, especially with regard to the use of electronic means to enhance participation and the advance of work.
- Venues and meeting intervals are considered appropriate.

E. - Respective roles of the Regional Coordinator as *ex officio* Chairperson of the Regional Coordinating Committee and the Member(s) of the Executive Committee elected on a geographic basis, particularly within the framework of the Executive Committee:

With the aim of making the most of the expertise gained in their posts, it is suggested that they should participate as advisors.