



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEx COMMITTEE ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

Thirty-second Session

Virtual

8-17 February 2021

MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE – Part 2

MATTERS ARISING FROM SUBSIDIARY BODIES

Matters for information

80th Session of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CCEXEC80)

Report of the CCEXEC sub-committee on Codex and the pandemic - Strategic challenges and opportunities¹

1. In line with the recommendation of CAC43 that CCEXEC80 share its recommendations based on the report of the sub-committee with all subsidiary bodies for their information and further consideration as appropriate, the recommendations of CCEXEC80 on this matter were as follows:
2. CCEXEC80 confirmed their general support for the report and reviewed the proposed recommendations of the sub-committee in light of their discussions and:
 - i. recognized the progress made by Codex in 2020, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, as an indicator of the resilience of Codex and its Members.
 - ii. strongly encouraged the maintenance of a pragmatic and engaged approach moving forward with Codex work in 2021.
 - iii. recognized that CAC43 had agreed on the possibility of holding virtual meetings in 2021 and endorsed the proposals from the sub-committee to operationalize this decision, noting that this did not at present require any change to formal Codex procedures.
 - iv. recommended that FAO, WHO, the Codex Secretariat and host countries pay particular attention to the following criteria in arriving at decisions on whether to convene virtual Codex sessions:
 - any UN declared global emergency situation;
 - the extent of travel restrictions or changes/expected changes in travel restrictions;
 - priority of the matters scheduled for the relevant Codex session;
 - information from Codex Members concerning their inability to participate in physical meetings; and
 - security concerns (global, regional or local as appropriate to the meeting of interest).
 - v. recommended that for 2021, the alternative to physical sessions was virtual sessions together with the use of online written discussions and supporting informal mechanisms. These ways of working were likely to be robust in the face of a range of future challenges.
 - vi. recommended that the Codex Secretariat and Host Country Secretariats facilitate equitable participation when planning a virtual Codex session taking into account that the technical platform, including its ability to support interpretation, duration, scheduling and agenda all serve as the basis for this.

¹ REP21/EXEC1, paragraphs 35-36

- vii. recommended that when planning the agenda of Codex sessions to be convened virtually in 2021:
 - pre-meeting planning and preparations were optimized in order to distill key issues for consideration by Codex subsidiary bodies and that this was communicated in a transparent manner; and
 - the Chairpersons together with the host and Codex secretariats were adequately prepared for the sessions and how to deal with agenda items in recognition of the challenges associated with conducting a virtual session.
3. CCEXEC80 further recommended that the Codex Secretariat:
 - i. update its informal guidance on how to participate in a virtual Codex session taking into consideration the ideas collated by the sub-committee over the course of its consultations as well as input from the post-CAC43 survey, and experiences from future Codex meetings and other international organizations.
 - ii. provide updates about the working mechanisms applied and tools adopted in virtual Sessions of committees in 2021 and the lessons learnt from the experiences during the pandemic.
 - iii. in cooperation with the Regional Coordinators, reach out to all Members to inform an assessment of both the benefits of participation in virtual meetings, and any barriers to participation and changes that may mitigate them, paying particular attention to those Members who were unable to participate in virtual committee sessions because of those barriers.
 - iv. ensure predictability of the Codex meeting schedule to facilitate planning and participation by Members and explore opportunities for cooperation to strengthen related capacities.
 - v. deliver webinars in the lead up to committee meetings in order to remind Members of virtual participation etiquette and protocol in the Codex context.
 - vi. consistent with the conclusion of CAC43², explore with the FAO and WHO Legal Offices how elections in the absence of physical meetings will be organized and inform CCEXEC and the Codex membership as early as possible, ideally by 31 May 2021, on progress made and any steps to be taken.

² REP20/CAC, para 20, iv)