



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD IMPORT AND EXPORT INSPECTION
AND CERTIFICATION SYSTEMS**

Twenty-first Session

Brisbane (Australia), 13- 17 October 2014

**DISCUSSION PAPER ON THE REVISION OF THE CODEX PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES
FOR THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY SITUATIONS
(CAC/GL 19-1995)**

(Paper prepared by an electronic working group led by the United States of America)

Background

1. The 19th Session of CCFICS considered a proposal for new work submitted by the International Dairy Federation (IDF) to revise the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) to include more detailed information on managing food safety emergency situations. IDF noted that Codex had not yet provided full guidance on how to manage international emergencies as CAC/GL-1995 only defines “food safety emergency” and provides guidance only for the exchange of information. IDF further noted that the various Codex principles and guidelines for risk analysis are meant for normal circumstances, not for emergencies and that the document being developed on providing guidance on national food safety control systems did not specifically address these gaps. IDF mentioned that work on effective response to international food safety emergencies had been addressed by FAO and WHO with useful guidance and tools (e.g., INFOSAN, EMPRESS and other FAO/WHO guidance) but that these programs and guidance did not have the same status as Codex texts.
2. The Committee noted, in regards to the IDF proposal, that the paper identified gaps in the Codex texts in relation to: the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders; coordination mechanisms; and risk management. Several delegations, however, stated that risk management aspects should be excluded as they were not in the mandate of CCFICS but were within the mandate of other committees, (e.g., Codex Committee on Food Hygiene, Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food, etc.).
3. The Committee agreed that the United States of America would prepare a discussion paper that would consider, among other things, a possible revision to the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). The revision would include the following aspects: a) the roles and responsibilities of the various parties/stakeholders involved in food safety emergency situations; b) the processes involved in responding to a food safety emergency situation(s); and, c) communications associated with food safety emergency situations.
4. The 20th (2013) Session of CCFICS considered a discussion paper prepared by the United States that contained a framework and basic outline for the revision of the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). The discussion paper also contained a Project Document for new work to revise the Document.
5. The 20th Session of CCFICS indicated general support for the work but had insufficient time to consider the proposal in-depth. Comments provided during discussion indicated that the work should not address risk analysis, and risk management in particular, which were not within the CCFICS mandate; and, that the work should take into account new developments in information technology.
6. In addressing the comment made at the 20th Session regarding risk analysis including risk management, it may be helpful to note that the processes and procedures established to address and control food safety emergency situations are, in fact, risk management measures. To this extent, the existing guidance and its revision are appropriate and within the mandate of CCFICS. It is suggested

that the intent of the comments made at the 20th Session regarding risk analysis was that the work undertaken by CCFICS should not address control measures used to control a specific hazard in a food *per se* and which rightfully are the responsibility of other Codex Committees (e.g., CCFH, CCCF, CCPR). It is not the intent that the proposed new work would extend into these areas.

7. CCFICS agreed to establish an electronic Working Group (eWG), chaired by the United States, working in English only and open to all Codex members and observers to: (i) revise the Project Document; (ii) prepare an outline of the proposed revision of the *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) for consideration by CCFICS at its next session.

8. An invitation to participate in eWG was sent to all Codex Members and Observers on August 6, 2013. Responses were received from 33 individuals from 22 Members and Observers.

9. A request for input into development of the discussion paper was sent to all respondents on September 16, 2013. eWG members were invited to provide their thoughts on preparing an outline for revision of CAC/GL 19-1995, taking into account the framework for a revision of the Guidelines presented in Appendix 2 of the discussion paper presented at the 20th Session of CCFICS (CX/FICS 13/20/6).

10. Limited responses were received from the eWG. Responses generally indicated that the outline presented in Appendix 2 of the discussion paper presented at the 20th Session of CCFICS was a satisfactory basis on which to begin a revision to the *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). One Member suggested that it may be helpful to:

- Include guidance to competent authorities as to arrangements to provide for prompt notification of food safety emergencies to competent authorities. These arrangements might cover plans and activities for competent authorities and food industries to identify mechanisms for notification of food safety emergencies.
- Provide more detailed guidance on food safety emergency plans and recommended that this additional guidance could be included by expanding current Section 11 (Other Considerations for Information Exchange), current paragraph 24 (sub-heading "Food Safety Emergency Plan).

11. Appendix 1 contains a proposed framework for the revision of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). Appendix 2 contains a Project Document for this work.

Recommendations

12. The Committee is invited to consider the framework for the revision of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) presented in Appendix 1 and the associated Project Document and to recommend new work to revise the Guidelines.

13. The Committee is also invited to consider the suggestions for inclusion of guidance relating to prompt notification of food safety emergencies and for the expansion of guidance relating to food safety emergency plans as presented in paragraph 10 above.

Appendix 1**Framework for the revision of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995)**

The following is the basic outline for a revised *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* CAC/GL 19-1995). While the outline generally follows the organization of the current document, new sections are proposed. Additionally, information currently contained in certain sections may be relocated.

Section 1: Preamble/Introduction

Section 2: Scope (The scope will need to be modified to reflect the revised nature of document, that is, the inclusion of the role of the various parties involved in a food safety emergency and the process of managing a food safety emergency situation including the possible incorporation of arrangements for notifications . The content of the other sections will also need revision/adjustment to accommodate the modified scope)

Section 3: Definitions

Section 4: Principles

Section 5: Nature of a food safety emergency situation

Section 6: Stakeholders and their respective roles

- Governments (include current section on “role of competent authority”);
- Industry including growers, producers, distributors, sellers
- Consumers

Section 7: Processes for managing a food safety emergency situation

- Include current sections on: a) “designated official contact points for information exchange”;
- b) “informing all known affected and potentially affected countries”; and, c) “information to be exchanged”; and d) information flow.
- Include, as appropriate, information contained in *FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures During Food Safety Emergencies*.
- Consider inclusion of the concept and guidance on arrangements for prompt notification of food safety emergencies as suggested by an eWG comment.

Section 8: Communications required in Food Safety Emergency Situations

Section 9: Other Considerations for Information Exchange (guidance in this section may move to other sections of the document). Consideration should include expansion of guidance on food safety emergency plans as suggested by an eWG comment.

Annex: Standard format for information exchange in food safety emergency situation (will need to comply with INFOSAN requirements).

PROJECT DOCUMENT**Proposed New Work for the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection
and Certification Systems****PROPOSAL TO REVISE THE CODEX *PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE EXCHANGE OF
INFORMATION IN FOOD SAFETY EMERGENCY SITUATIONS* (CAC/GL 19-1995)****Prepared by: An electronic working group led by the United States of America****Purpose and scope of the proposed standard**

The purpose of the new work will be to revise the existing Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) to include information relating to the roles of various parties (government, industry, consumers) involved in food safety emergency situations and to include guidance on the process of managing food safety emergency situations. Updating and/or expansion of existing guidance will also be done.

Its relevance and timeliness

The original Codex guidance on the exchange of information in food safety emergency situations, developed by CCFICS, and adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1995, has provided useful information to governments. The document was originally developed to contain guidance on: what constitutes a food safety emergency; the role of the competent authority in a food safety emergency situation; what information ought to be exchanged between competent authorities in the case of a food safety emergency; the need for a plan that provides procedures to handle a food safety emergency; and information on certain aspects of risk communication. However, the document is basically silent on the roles of other parties that have a significant role in dealing with a food safety emergency situation, including the food industry (producers, processors, distributors, sellers) and the consumer. Additionally, the document contains no guidance relating to the process of managing a food safety emergency situation. Since the adoption of CAC/GL 19-1995, significant development has occurred in procedures to manage and investigate food safety control situations. Additionally, while the original document contained references to the involvement of FAO and WHO in food safety emergency situations, the document was developed prior to the implementation of both WHO's International Food Safety Authority Network (INFOSAN) and FAO/WHO's Emergency Prevention Systems (EMPRES). Further, the revision of WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR's) had not yet been revised to include provisions relating to the reporting of certain food safety emergency situations that have a global impact. A revision of CAC/GL 19-1995 should incorporate all of these areas. These aspects, coupled with the increase in global trade for food, and the potential for increased incidents relating to the control of food safety emergency situations, speaks to the relevance and timeliness of revising the existing CAC/GL 19-1995 document.

The main aspects to be covered

The existing CAC/GL 19-1995 would be revised to include the role of the various parties involved in a food safety emergency and the process of managing a food safety emergency situation. Additionally the document would be revised to include appropriate references to: WHO's International Food Safety Authority Network (INFOSAN); FAO/WHO's Emergency Prevention Systems (EMPRES); and, the revision of WHO's International Health Regulations (IHR's).

A proposed framework for the revision is the following: While the outline generally follows the organization of the current *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995), new sections are proposed. Additionally, information currently contained in certain sections may be relocated.

Section 1: Preamble/Introduction

Section 2: Scope

(The scope will need to be modified to reflect the revised nature of document, that is, the inclusion of the role of the various parties involved in a food safety emergency and the process of managing a food safety emergency situation including the possible incorporation of an "early warning system". The content of the other sections will also need revision/adjustment to accommodate the modified scope)

Section 3: Definitions

Section 4: Principles

Section 5: Nature of a food safety emergency situation

Section 6: Stakeholders and their respective roles

- Governments (include current section on “role of competent authority”);
- Industry including growers, producers, distributors, sellers
- Consumers

Section 7: Processes for managing a food safety emergency situation

- Include current sections on: a) “designated official contact points for information exchange”;
- b) “informing all known affected and potentially affected countries”; and, c) “information to be exchanged”; and d) information flow.
- Include, as appropriate, information contained in *FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures During Food Safety Emergencies*.

Section 8: Communications required in Food Safety Emergency Situations

Section 9: Other Considerations for Information Exchange (guidance in this section may move to other sections of the document). Consideration could also include expansion of guidance on food safety emergency plans.

Annex: Standard format for information exchange in food safety emergency situation (will need to comply with INFOSAN requirements).

An assessment against the *Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities*

The proposal is consistent with the criteria as follows:

General Criterion: Consumer protection from the point of view of health, food safety, ensuring fair practices in the food trade and taking into account the identified needs of developing countries.

The proposed new work will provide substantially more guidance to countries to manage food safety emergency situations. This should be of direct benefit to public health and food safety. The guidance will be developed to take into account the different capabilities of countries, providing flexibility to the extent possible, recognizing the critical nature of a food safety emergency situation.

Criteria Applicable to General Subjects:

Diversification of national legislations and apparent resultant or potential impediments to international trade:

The revision to the existing CAC/GL 19-1995 will provide additional guidance to governments that should allow for a more consistent process for the handling of food safety emergency situations and which should provide uniform guidance to governments that should minimize individual country approaches to these types of events, helping to improve fair practices in the food trade.

Scope of work and establishment of priorities between the various sections of work:

The scope of the work will expand the current Codex guidance provided for the control of food safety emergency situations, addressing important aspects relating to the roles of various parties and the process of managing food control emergency situations.

Work already undertaken by other international organizations in this field and/or suggested by the relevant international intergovernmental body(ies):

As noted, this document will expand existing Codex guidance on the control of food safety emergency situations. The work will take into account guidance provided in the *FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures During Food Safety Emergencies* (FAO/WHO, 2011).

Consideration of the global magnitude of the problem or issue.

Food safety emergency situations often present a significant public health threat to large numbers of individuals, often impact more than one country and can, upon occasion, be global in nature. The guidance to be provided in the revision to CAC/GL 19-1995 can be very important in helping to manage and control food safety emergency situations and thus have a significant impact, both with respect to individual countries and globally.

Relevance to the 2014-2019 Codex Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives

The proposal is consistent with Goal 1 (Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food issues) and to both Objective 1.1 (Establish new and review existing Codex standards, based on priorities of the CAC) and Objective 1.2 (Proactively identify emerging issues and Member needs and, where appropriate, develop relevant food standards). More specifically, the work is consistent with Activity 1.2.2 (Develop and revise international and regional standards as needed, in response to needs identified by Members and in response to factors that affect food safety, nutrition and fair practices in the food trade).

Information on the relation between the proposal and other existing Codex documents

This proposal revises the existing Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). The revision to this document will take into account the existing *FAO/WHO Guide for Application of Risk Analysis Principles and Procedures During Food Safety Emergencies* (FAO/WHO, 2011).

Identification of any requirement for and availability of expert scientific advice

None required, although assistance from FAO and WHO may be needed to ensure that there is proper inclusion of information relative to INFOSAN and EMPRES.

Identification of any need for technical input to the standard from external bodies so that this can be planned for

None required

The proposed timeline for completion of the new work, including the start date, the proposed date for adoption at Step 5, and the proposed date for adoption by the Commission; the time frame for developing a standard should not normally exceed five years

Subject to Commission approval at its 38th session in 2015, it is expected that the work can be completed in 3-4 years, as follows:

- Commencement of work and development of an initial draft text for circulation at Step 3 and consideration by CCFICS at Step 4 at the Committee's 22nd Session in 2015 or 2016 depending upon the final schedule of Codex committee meetings.
- Consideration of the text at Step 5 by CCFICS at its 23rd Session in either 2016 or 2017 depending upon the final schedule of Codex committee meetings.
- Consideration of the text at Step 8 by CCFICS at its 24th Session during the period 2017 to 2018 depending upon the schedule of Codex committee meetings.
- Adoption by the Commission at the Commission's 2017 or 2018 Sessions depending upon the schedule of Codex committee meetings.