



## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING

Forty-eighth Session

Quebec City, Canada

27 October – 1 November 2024

*Comments from Panama*

#### **AGENDA ITEM 2: MATTERS REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND/OR ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES - CX/FL 24/48/2**

Panama reaffirms its commitment to the development of food standards at the 48th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling, particularly supporting the provisions on allergens in the General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods, given their crucial role in consumer safety. In addition, it highlights the importance of guidelines for e-commerce and the use of innovative technologies to ensure that food information is clear and accessible. Panama supports the strategic objectives of the Codex Plan 2026-2031, promoting international cooperation in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure a healthy and fair food system.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 3: ISSUES OF INTEREST RAISED BY FAO AND WHO CX/FL 24/48/3**

Since 2023, Panama has been evaluating WHO guidelines, among others, on healthy diets based on scientific studies. These guidelines are essential to guide the country in promoting healthy eating habits among its population.

The WHO has also called for reducing sodium intake and eliminating trans fatty acids, setting a global goal of reducing sodium consumption by 30% by 2030. Panama, in response to these international recommendations, is implementing tools and policies for salt reduction, seeking to improve the cardiovascular health of its population.

Regarding infant nutrition, Panama uses WHO guidelines as a reference, which underline the importance of offering a varied and balanced diet to children, with the introduction of complementary foods and the implementation of campaigns focused on promoting breastfeeding.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 4: CONSIDERATION OF LABELLING PROVISIONS IN DRAFT CODEX STANDARDS (RATIFICATION) - CX/FL 24/48/4**

Panama strongly supports the labelling provisions proposed by Codex committees, including the Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH), the Committee on Fats and Oils (CCFO) and the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC).

In particular, the clarification between "country of origin" and "country of harvest" is an important point for Panama, given its commitment to the quality and authenticity of agricultural products. The addition of information elements on a product, in this case, about origin, allows:

- To consumers to make better decisions;
- support in fraud prevention;
- ensure that unique characteristics are respected;
- provides effective and direct traceability tools to health authorities.

Panama recognizes that these distinctions are vital to incentivize producers and promote fair trade.

Finally, Panama emphasizes the importance of labeling that complies with the General Standard for the Labeling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985) and other relevant standards. The adoption of these provisions will allow the country not only to align itself with international best practices, but also to impact public health through informed and conscious eating. Panama is committed to the effective implementation of these regulations, thus contributing to the well-being of its population and the sustainable development of its food

industry.

**AGENDA ITEM 5.1: REVISION TO THE GENERAL STANDARD FOR THE LABELLING OF PRE-PACKAGED FOODS (CXS 1-1985): PROVISIONS RELEVANT TO ALLERGEN LABELLING - CX/FL 24/48/5 (Part A):**

Panama supports the revision of the general standard for the labelling of prepackaged foods (CXS 1-1985) and recognises the importance of establishing clear provisions on allergen labelling. We believe that the proper management of allergen information is essential for the protection of public health.

We support the following proposed definition of "food allergen":

- "Food allergen" means a food (including ingredients, food additives and processing aids) that may elicit IgE-mediated or other specific immune-mediated reactions in susceptible individuals, usually caused by a protein or protein derivative in the food.

Supporting the suggestion made by one of the EWG members who pointed out that the definition of "food" already includes the term "substance", which covers ingredients, food additives and processing aids (according to the existing definitions in the NGEAP), and that the labelling applies to a food allergen and not to the protein of the allergenic food.

We expect the section dealing with exemptions from reporting, 4.2.1.6, to be flexible and allow national authorities to take an evidence-based approach. However, we ask that any exemption be subject to clear criteria and risk assessments to ensure consumer safety.

- [4.2.1.6 Subject to assessment using established criteria 7, national authorities may exempt from declaration ingredients derived from foods listed in Section 4.2.1.4 and, where relevant, Section 4.2.1.5.]

As for sulfite;

- 4.2.1.7 Sulfite, when present in concentrations of 10 mg/kg or higher<sup>8</sup> in a food [as offered to the consumer or as consumed], shall always be declared using the specified name "sulfite" in addition to or as part of the ingredient name.

Name of the food;

8.3.2 The name specified for the food and the ingredients in Sections 4.2.1.4, 4.2.1.7 and, where applicable, Section 4.2.1.5 shall be declared in the list of ingredients or in a separate statement or both. 8.3.2.1 If used, the separate statement shall begin with the term "Contains" (or an equivalent term) and shall be placed directly below or in close proximity to the list of ingredients, when present.

**AGENDA ITEM 5.2: GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF PRECAUTIONARY ALLERGEN LABELLING - CX/FL 24/48/5 (Part B):**

Panama's position on the guidelines for the use of precautionary allergen labeling is always based on robust scientific evidence and risk assessments that consider both quantitative and qualitative aspects as appropriate reflects a commitment to food security and population health. The establishment of threshold levels by FAO and WHO experts will help the country design public health policies that protect consumers and also ensure

Likewise, in the context of precautionary allergen labelling, Panama underlines the importance of education and awareness-raising activities aimed at consumers, food companies and health professionals. It is recognised that a correct interpretation of the labelling can reduce the risks associated with the inadvertent consumption of allergens. For this reason, it is suggested that EPA (Precautionary Allergen Labelling) be accompanied by educational campaigns that inform about the risks and how to identify them in food products, thus promoting greater protection and awareness.

Panama emphasizes that the development of clear guidelines regarding allergen labeling must consider all local and regional contexts, including the most prevalent types of allergies in the Panamanian population. By actively participating in this process, Panama not only seeks to strengthen its regulatory framework regarding food safety, but also wishes to become a reference in the region in the management of allergens and in the protection of the health of its citizens. In this way, the country could significantly contribute to the harmonization of standards at an international level, benefiting both consumers and producers in Panama.

**AGENDA ITEM 6: GUIDELINES ON THE PROVISION OF FOOD INFORMATION FOR PRE-PACKAGED FOODS TO BE OFFERED VIA E-COMMERCE (Step 7) - CX/FL 24/48/6:**

The Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme highlights the importance of effective regulation in the presentation of food information, particularly in the context of e-commerce. Panama considers the proposed guidelines crucial to ensure that consumers have access to the information necessary to make informed decisions when purchasing prepackaged foods.

Adapting these guidelines to the digital environment is especially relevant in a country where e-commerce has grown considerably, posing new challenges in transparency and food safety. Panama therefore supports the inclusion of a clear regulatory framework to ensure that online food information reflects the same quality and clarity requirements expected from physical labelling.

However, it is important that the process of developing these guidelines take into account the concerns of the various members, especially in relation to the definition and concept of "durability". Panama suggests that a concerted effort be made to establish wording that, although simplified, does not compromise the ability of consumers to understand the safety and freshness of products. There will always be additional costs associated with these guidelines.

Attention must be paid to the need to ensure that any exemption applicable to small units does not compromise transparency and the right to information, which is crucial to maintaining consumer interest in a competitive market. In summary, Panama is committed to collaborating in strengthening guidelines that guarantee safe and responsible electronic commerce, that protects consumers and encourages the development of a more inclusive and efficient food system.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7: GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE FOOD INFORMATION IN FOOD LABELLING (STEP 7) - CX/FL 24/48/6:**

Advances in the regulation of food standards, particularly with regard to the use of technology for the disclosure of food information on product labelling by CODEX, which allows labelling practices to be adapted to the contemporary needs of consumers, facilitating their access to relevant and necessary information for making informed decisions.

From a scientific point of view, it is essential that the implementation of technology in labelling is supported by research that guarantees its effectiveness and accessibility. Access to food information through technological means must be considered in the context of the technological infrastructure of each region, as well as the prevalence of use of these tools by the consumer. This ensures that not only innovation is promoted, but also that less-privileged demographic layers that may not have the same level of access are respected.

It is essential that any information provided through digital technologies maintains a clear link with the mandatory information traditionally found on labels. This interrelationship must not only be visible, but also understandable, ensuring that the consumer can clearly distinguish between mandatory and commercial information. This aspect is vital to avoid confusion and to ensure that consumers can make informed decisions about what they buy and consume.

It is also important to ensure that essential food information, such as that related to health and safety, does not rely exclusively on technology. This raises the need to continue to ensure additional ways of accessing such information, which protects consumers and ensures their right to be informed, regardless of their level of familiarity with technology.

In relation to the difficulties noted in previous consultations on the need for additional provisions around data protection policies and consumer understanding of technology, we consider these factors to be fundamental to the success of any measure seeking to integrate technology into the field of labelling. Addressing these concerns from an evidence-based approach contributes to building consumer trust in modern labelling systems.

Based on the above, Panama supports the advancement of the Guidelines for the use of technology in food labeling, always considering scientific observations and the socioeconomic realities of consumers at a global level. We believe that the collaborative approach in this area will strengthen food security and promote more sustainable and responsible consumption practices.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 8: AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL STANDARD FOR THE LABELLING OF PRE-PACKAGED FOODS (CXS 1-1985): PROVISIONS RELEVANT TO JOINT PRESENTATION AND MULTIPACK FORMATS**

Food labelling plays a crucial role in promoting food safety and consumer well-being. It is imperative that the information provided is clear and accessible, allowing consumers to make informed choices. The proposed amendments have the potential to move in this direction, especially by considering the inclusion of clear definitions for "multiple packaging" and "joint presentation", which would facilitate the understanding of the labelling and its adaptation to the different commercial formats on the market.

From a scientific perspective, it is essential to ensure that information on ingredients, net contents, expiration dates and other relevant elements is visible and understandable on all packaging formats. This would not only contribute to a better consumer experience, but would also support responsible food management practices, which can, in turn, address global concerns about food waste. Implementing labels that adequately reflect the information of each component within a multipack can be a step towards transparency and food safety, especially in an environment where consumers are increasingly aware of the ingredients and origin of the food.

they consume.

It is also critical to assess the impact of the proposed regulations on product traceability and consumer protection from potential allergens. Clear presentation of mandatory information not only contributes to regulatory compliance, but also fosters consumer confidence.

Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that provisions for date marking and nutritional information are technically feasible and do not compromise product quality. Proposed amendments seeking to include references to expiry dates and storage instructions should be carefully reviewed to avoid confusion and facilitate consumer understanding.

Our country supports the need to promote amendments that strengthen the labeling of prepackaged foods, ensuring that they are scientifically based, transparent and accessible, for the benefit of public health and consumer well-being. We reiterate our willingness to actively participate in the discussions and in the development of a regulatory framework that reflects these considerations and contributes to food safety at a global level.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 9: LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES - CX/FL 24/48/9**

The review and possible development of specific guidelines regarding the labelling of alcoholic beverages responds to the growing need for clear and accessible information for consumers. Research indicates that the lack of consistent labelling in this area can contribute to consumer misinformation and, consequently, negatively affect their health. It is therefore considered essential that the CCFL evaluate the inclusion of health-related information such as alcohol content, risks associated with consumption and guidelines on its consumption on the labels of these beverages.

It is particularly relevant to take into account the opinions mentioned in the responses to Circular Letter CL 2024/13-FL, where there is broad support from Codex members and observers to establish mandatory requirements for the labelling of alcoholic beverages. This approach not only seeks to adequately inform consumers, but also to comply with international public health commitments, such as the WHO Global Action Plan on Alcohol 2022-2030.

Furthermore, concerns regarding nutritional claims are of paramount importance. Allowing such claims without appropriate restrictions could mislead consumers into suggesting that alcoholic beverages can be part of a healthy lifestyle. It is therefore suggested that specific restrictions in this regard be considered.

The issue of nutritional labelling must also be addressed in a comprehensive manner. It is essential that labels provide information on calorie content, allergens and other ingredients that may affect consumers. This information enables individuals to make informed decisions about their consumption, which is a central aspect in promoting healthy living.

The country believes that the creation of a new specific standard for the labelling of alcoholic beverages could be a viable alternative to address the particularities of this product. A dedicated standard would offer a clear and uniform framework for the regulation of labelling at an international level, thus facilitating trade and ensuring the protection of public health.

These recommendations seek to move towards a labelling system that not only adequately informs consumers, but also contributes to the promotion of health and well-being, aligning itself with best practices and existing scientific evidence in the field of alcohol consumption.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 10: APPLICATION OF FOOD LABELLING IN EMERGENCIES - CX/FL 24/48/10**

There is a clear need to establish a scientific framework to address flexibilities in food labelling during emergency situations. The country recognises that the integrity of the food system is essential, and any modification of labelling requirements must first maintain food safety, as well as food security and quality, so decisions must be based on evidence-based principles and risk assessments that ensure that consumer health is not compromised. This allows Panama to adequately manage the potential risks associated with flexibilisation of labelling in emergency situations.

Panama also recognizes that emergencies can occur in a variety of ways, from health crises to natural disasters and climate phenomena. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a flexible approach that takes into account the varied implications of each type of emergency. Guidelines must be designed not only taking into account the international context, but also local and regional circumstances, which will allow responses to be relevant and effective. In this way, the country will be able to efficiently manage emergencies that arise.

Interaction with international trade is an aspect that Panama considers essential. Labelling flexibility measures must address urgent needs without losing sight of the impact on global trade. It is vital to promote fair trade and collaboration between nations, preventing labelling exceptions from generating trade barriers or inefficiencies in the supply chain. In this regard, Panama advocates for constant dialogue and the active

participation of all interested parties, ensuring that any changes in the labelling framework are practical, effective and accepted by all actors in the food supply chain.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11: DISCUSSION PAPER ON TRANS FATTY ACIDS - CX/FL 24/48/11**

Firmly based on the commitment to public health and food safety, we consider the reduction of TFA intake to be a critical issue, given its direct link to cardiovascular diseases and other eating disorders. In this regard, Panama supports initiatives that seek to establish clear and conclusive standards on food labeling, which allow consumers to make informed decisions about their diet and, in turn, promote the production and marketing of healthier food products.

Furthermore, Panama emphasizes the importance of effective international collaboration and the inclusion of all voices in the deliberative process. We recognize that Canada's proposal to develop a discussion paper on TFAs is a necessary step to move forward on this issue. However, it is crucial that such a paper not only take into account technical and scientific perspectives, but also include the socioeconomic context of member countries. Therefore, Panama requests that the impact of the proposed regulations on local industry and the population's access to healthy and affordable food be considered, always seeking a balance between public health and economic development.

Panama advocates for the adoption of more robust preventive measures, including clear limits on the presence of TFA in food and the promotion of nutritional education in the population. This strategy will not only contribute to reducing the burden of diseases associated with the intake of TFA, but will also promote a healthy and sustainable environment. We are committed to working with our international partners to establish effective regulations that protect the health of our population and promote more responsible eating habits, thus supporting global health and well-being objectives.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 12: SUSTAINABILITY LABELLING CLAIMS CX/FL 24/48/12 - DISCUSSION PAPERS - CX/FL 24/48/12**

Panama has reviewed the document and has identified that environmental aspects will be considered for inclusion in the General Guidelines on Claims. However, we believe that Codex is not the body to address these issues.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 13: SUGAR LABELLING - DEFINITION FOR 'ADDED SUGARS' - CX/FL 24/48/13**

Panama supports the initiative to establish a clear and harmonized definition of "added sugars" within the scope of the Codex Alimentarius. The growing concern for public health related to excessive consumption of sugars has led to a notable change in the perception of nutritional labeling in the country. This reflects the need for consumers to have access to accurate and understandable information about the foods they buy, which in turn will allow them to make more informed and healthy decisions. The absence of a common definition of "added sugars" makes labeling regulation difficult and encourages confusion among consumers, which is inconsistent with international efforts to combat obesity and chronic non-communicable diseases.

Panama believes that the definition of added sugars should be based on robust scientific evidence and take into account analytical methods that facilitate its implementation and verification. However, it is recognized that the distinction between added sugars and those found naturally in foods can be complicated. Therefore, it is essential that Codex, in collaboration with other international organizations, develop methodologies that offer clarity in the correct identification and quantification of these sugars. Promoting the use of a regulatory framework that helps developing countries adopt regulations on nutritional labeling is an important step towards reducing trade barriers and improving public health.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 15 – FUTURE WORK AND DIRECTION FOR CCFL - CX/FL 24/48/15**

Panama's position regarding the approach and criteria for the evaluation and prioritization of the work of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) must be clear and based on the importance of establishing food regulations that ensure public health and consumer protection. From a scientific and public health perspective, it is essential to support the idea that the proposed criteria for prioritizing the work of the CCFL should focus on protecting consumer health through policies that reduce risks, such as excessive sodium intake. Panama, as part of the international community and a member of FAO/WHO, has the duty to align itself with these global initiatives that seek to improve food quality standards.

The prioritization approach mentioned above is crucial, as it suggests a system that evaluates proposals based on their relevance to public health and food security. Given that Panama has high rates of non-communicable diseases that are directly related to nutrition and diet, the country would greatly benefit from supporting an approach that includes evaluation criteria that address these issues. In this sense, the proposed process allows the CCFL to identify critical needs and priorities that are relevant to the health and well-being of the population. This reinforces the idea that decisions on food regulations must be supported by solid scientific evidence, which in turn can improve the quality of life of Panamanian citizens.

Despite this, it is crucial to also consider the concerns of other countries regarding the applicability and flexibility of the approach. Some proposals and comments reflect that implementing a prioritization procedure that is too rigid could limit the ability to adapt to new concerns and emerging issues in the food field. Therefore, Panama should advocate for an approach that, while having clear and specific criteria, also allows for adjustments and revisions to adapt to the changing circumstances of the global and local food context. Flexibility is necessary to adapt to the needs of Panama's food sector, thus ensuring that any strategy implemented is not only effective, but also sustainable.