

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda item 3

CAC/43 CRD42

Original Language Only

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION Forty-third Session

Prepared by the Codex Secretariat

RESULTS OF THE IN-SESSION SURVEY ON VIRTUAL CODEX MEETINGS

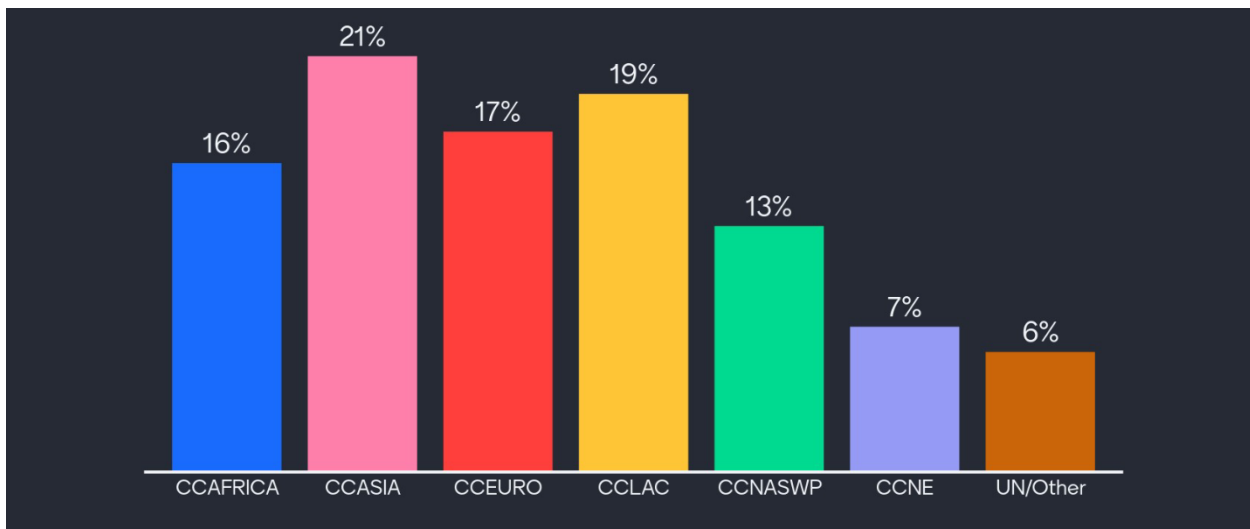
For the discussion of Item 3, Intermediate report of the CCEXEC sub-committee on Codex and the pandemic – Challenges and opportunities, the Chairperson proposed that the Secretariat, using a digital tool (Mentimeter), facilitate receipt of further input from participants on the practical aspects of holding virtual Codex meetings. A real-time survey was undertaken during plenary session 5 (19th October 2020) to obtain feedback on the following aspects:

- Key issues of importance for virtual meetings
- Input to planning of future virtual Codex meetings
 - number, length and spread of sessions
 - activities to be implemented before and/or during virtual sessions to facilitate their implementation; and
 - tools and guidance to support efficiency of virtual meetings
- Any other suggestions

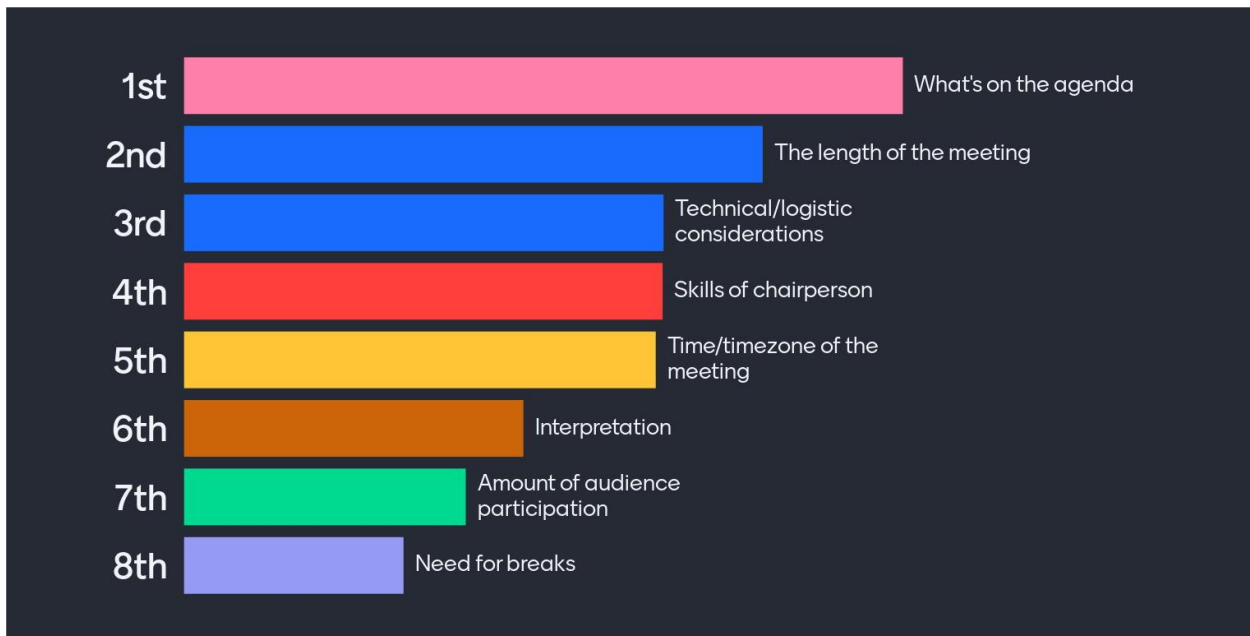
The survey was open to all registered participations. It was available in English only, with language interpretation of the questions only provided in the course of the plenary session. Delegates responded to the survey immediately before and during the session. The survey gave delegates the opportunity to provide quick informal feedback on virtual Codex meetings while still participating in a virtual Codex meeting. The results as presented in Annex 1, provide a non-representative snapshot of the views of CAC delegates which can serve as additional Member and Observer input for consideration by the sub-committee as they continue their deliberations on Codex and the Pandemic. It can also be used by the Codex Secretariat as they continue to support continuity of Codex work during the pandemic and beyond together with the more comprehensive satisfaction survey after the CAC meeting.

Annex 1: Overview of replies to Mentimeter Survey implemented during CAC43 (Plenary session 5 – Agenda Item 3)

1. Which Codex Region are you in? (310 respondents)



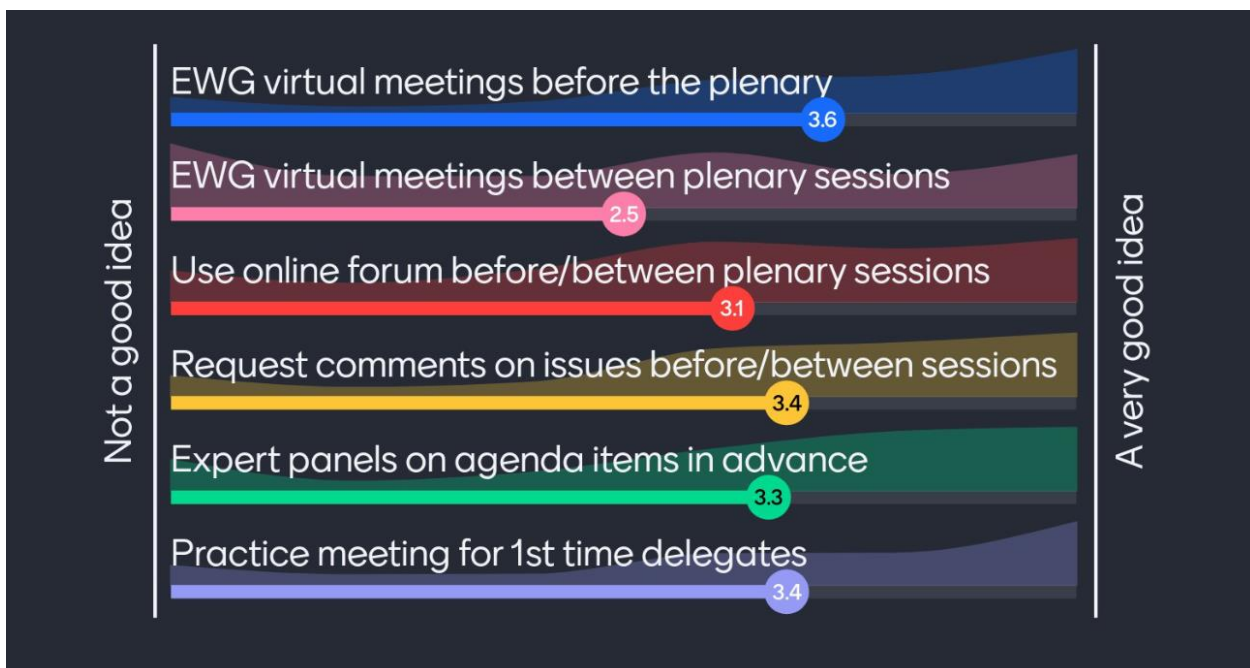
2. List the following issues in order of importance. (271 respondents)



3. **How would you plan future virtual meetings (number, length and spread of sessions)?** (272 respondents)



4. **How would you plan future virtual meetings (activities to be implemented before and/or during virtual sessions to facilitate their implementation)?** (267 respondents)



5. **How would you plan future virtual meetings (tools and guidance to support efficiency of virtual meetings)?** (268 respondents)



6. **Suggestions (149 respondents)**

Many of the participants indicated they had no further comments at this point and expressed appreciation for the virtual meeting and/or the opportunity to participate. The following comprises the suggestions that were submitted at the end of the survey grouped by issue. Suggestions are listed unedited and in the language in which they were submitted.

General comments on virtual meetings

- Virtual meetings good for consensus items, but very problematic for items needing discussion and negotiation.
- The virtual meetings don't always lend itself for good physical interactions during the sessions. In addition, internet connections are weak in some instances.
- Substantial work was delivered online and through virtual meetings by Codex. This momentum should be maintained. Budgets will be constrained in the coming years and Codex should focus on increasing efficiencies of e-meetings. Use new technologies.
- Virtually meeting on CAC43 is actually functioning. Technical considerations on the related topic is the most important to meet the productive outcomes of the meeting.
- Virtual sessions are the way to go considering the challenges recently exhibited. It has been demonstrated that more members are able to participate in virtual sessions which enhances participation in Codex activities.
- Make virtual meetings the norm for Codex meetings so that there is wide participation.
- Virtual meetings cannot replace physical meetings. Virtual meetings should only be a solution while we have restrictions due to COVID-19.
- Consider the virtual meeting as an alternative to physical meeting as it makes less developed countries to participate.

- We wish to continue holding virtual Codex meetings even for commodity committees and its electronic working groups and training on them.
- Keep virtual meetings.

General comments on hybrid meetings

- For the next meeting, both physical and online meeting can be done so that more participants can join because it worth to join.
- Hybrid meetings are not an option. Compared to CAC that does risk management, and technical issues are well developed different from subsidiary bodies, when documents have to be displayed on the screen. Transparent criteria has to be developed.
- Continue virtual meetings until no more pandemic.
- Virtual meetings are no replacement of regular meetings in person.
- It is very difficult to get a balance with face to face and virtual. It is not going to be a solution that satisfies all but we have to consider OHS and hope we have success in virtual food safety.

Challenges of virtual meetings

- It is difficult to discuss complicated technical issues by virtual codex meetings. For some complicated matters, it'd better organize the discussions physically.
- Please keep in mind that virtual meetings are technical possible but they are not the ideal situation to discuss and get interaction needed between delegations.

Pre session preparations/activities

- To reach agreement before the plenary for the extent of possible and leave to the plenary the agenda items for which consensus was not yet reached.
- Set up panel discussion gathering expert to talk about emerging topics as AI and big data sharing for addressing complex issues such as early warning of food safety risks.
- Use of expert panels to draft early step standards.
- Encourage member to submit written comments before session especially for sensitive issues or reservation on certain issues.
- Preparation.
- Agenda and documents must be made available well in advance. In principle, changing of/adding dates such as the modifications that occurred for this CAC should be avoided.
- Regular preparatory meetings.
- Written comments well before the session and all written comments be shared on-line.
- All the countries with a technical position must share it before the meeting through electronic platforms.
- Transparency about the plans for conducting the meeting is key for delegations' preparations, e.g. tentative timetables, timely availability of documents, deadlines for CRDs leaving enough time to read them etc.

Length of the session

- Preferably to have consecutive days for a Plenary meeting.
- Length of sessions should not be lengthy. All the sessions should be completed in a stretch with one day holiday in between the session.
- Maximum period should be 3 days per week.
- There needs to be an opportunity to interact with different delegations between plenary sessions to hear different perspectives on issues and to build consensus. Having at least two days between plenary sessions can allow time for that to occur.

- Session should be finished in a week.
- For meetings that have long sessions (e.g. CCPR) the various agenda could be held on different days spread in a month. Also have informal sessions before discussion of main agenda items to encourage consensus. Seek ideas on suitable times.
- Don't have too much time between plenary sessions - it can disrupt the flow of the discussions.
- The length of meeting and number of days between sessions should consider the context of the subcommittee's work. For example in CCFA, breaks between meeting sessions may impact the flow and consistency of decisions made.
- We need to know the whole timeframe, this CAC with changes of adding another plenary session and then deciding to have the adoption in two days is unacceptable.

Day/Time of session

- Rotate timing of meetings so that the detrimental impact of a country's ability to effectively participate in the middle of the night is distributed more equitably. Currently, a distinct disadvantage and strong disincentive to participate in Codex.
- Change the start time of session.
- Please do not organize the sessions on weekends.
- Tomar en cuenta los horarios ya que hay una diversidad de hora y en la madrugada es muy cansado.
- Avoid night sessions, consider rotation of time zones, make the selection of agenda items for virtual sessions clear/inclusive/transparent.
- Consider a time zone rotation for CAC44 should virtual meetings take place in 2021
- Revisar el horario de participación para CCLAC por lo menos para iniciar un horario de 6:00 am en área de Centroamérica.
- Se puede cambiar el horario unas dos o tres horas, porque el horario actual afecta a ciertas zonas y si no se modifica, estas áreas se verán obligadas siempre a madrugar.
- Que se hagan horarios rotativos.

Participants

- More transparency on who is on the call. Publish the full list of participants (and updates) with emails and acronyms explained.
- Delegate of 1-no staff-can't make all meetings-who is eligible to join me? New focal point-need training session on use of CAC website; Submitting standards for approval? WApp-mostly in Spanish-some English interpreted-some not.
- Computer generated certificate for those who attended if possible starting with CAC43 Attendees.
- Cooperación, disciplina.
- Difficult for newcomers.

Management of discussions/chairing of session

- Have an allotted time for discussion and if consensus/decisions can't be reached in that time, then move agenda item to a "parking lot" list to go back to. As will be difficult to progress through agenda items during virtual meetings.
- Chairing in virtual sessions is different from that in physical sessions. Some guidance for chair person is necessary.
- No permitir que Temas sin consenso se tomen toda una session.
- Only country with objection can intervene. Not all member necessarily has a stand on every Codex agenda. Can there be a side tool for countries that agrees to record their support?

- I think the Chairman did a wonderful job in such a huge meeting.
- It would benefit the online sessions in general if the Chair takes extra effort to focus the discussions, and in case of extended reservations, to take note of these and move on to a decision.
- Focused sessions and being very strict about the time and number of interventions per country/observer. The interventions should be limited to one unless there is an issue to be resolved.
- Dejar hablar a todos los países y no cortar la lista de intervenciones.
- Manage NGO interventions not relevant to discussions.
- Consensus, Discipline, Proactive.
- The Chair and Codex Secretariat were outstanding in allowing this first effort to conduct a CAC virtual meeting and this is critical to result in a productive CAC outcome!
- Limited agenda, short time and continual meeting is good for virtual meeting.
- To reach consensus, it would be a good idea to distribute sensitive issues one per session and leave at least 2 days apart for the president, vice presidents, and regional coordinators to help reach consensus on a proposed agreement for the report.
- Good organize by Codex secretariat, but I wonder in some cases decision should be made, maybe next policy it can be a part of important issue to be discussed.

Interventions

- A rule regarding that if a delegation ask for more than 3 interventions in a row, priority goes to the delegations that haven't no participate yet.
- The "informal" nature of Zoom meetings may have prompted people to intervene more than they would have in the normal setting, thus people were announcing they were in favour of an item even when the Chair said they did not need to do so.
- Short, clear, defined answers are good.
- Please limit the number of interventions of each member country per agenda item to avoid lengthy and circular (repetitive) discussions.
- If one country has already expressed intervention, other countries should be given a chance also to speak. Repeated statements should not be encouraged.
- intervention should be short, precise and to the point, so the audience will not lose track
- 1 minute speaking. Any county that says no to something is required to propose how they would suggest making progress. Can't just be blocking.
- To have timer (2 minutes indicators) easily displayed by all delegates, especially for the intervening delegate.
- Set time for each intervention to be a min or less.
- Limit the number of repeat interventions from same countries. On long debates, limit time to 1 min. The zoom format undervalues support for ideas. Consider a better way to capture support. Chair should consider being firmer with agenda & topics.

Use of Zoom/available technology

- Excellent progress and implementation of learnings after each session! It might further help to use Reactions from Zoom menu to ask countries supporting other position add their name to screen, avoid take the floor and minimize time for this reason?
- Have the chat reserved for more interjections.
- Important to improve people use of microphones to improve effectiveness of translations and to use slides to show decisions. Limit repeated interventions from same delegations.
- When a specific wording is proposed, please share it on the screen. Limit the use of the chat for useful interventions (not to say hello, please, it is distracting). The chair/secretariat shall enforce the agreed rules.

- It would be nicer and we could save time if we have a graphic tool that shows sound volume.
- Use of chat for formal interventions is a VERY bad idea. Interventions MUST go through the chair and SHOULD be audio, available to the rest of the committee.
- Do NOT use chat for interventions.

Interpretation

- Interpretation is something which needs be worked upon. We were not able to understand even a single word through English interpreter.
- About interpretation, find a way to mute the original sound
- Interpretations should be clear.
- Mayor fluidez en la interpretación al español.
- Need of interpretation during virtual meeting.
- interpreter voice in English language should be higher than to foreign language speaker.

Need for guidance and/or procedures

- Clear guidance is necessary for committees to continue work in virtual setting, taking into account Codex values and adherence to procedural manual.
- Drafting and sharing a guidance doc on how to hold virtual meetings. based on what we have learned would be excellent.
- Se sugiere al CCGP solicitar un manual de procedimientos para el trabajo virtual para la Comisión del Codex y sus Organos. Solicitar a la FAO y OMS el apoyo jurídico al CODEX en lo antedicho.
- The last series of questions is up to CCGP to answer as it implies to adopt rules (such as the number of interventions, length of interventions, etc.) It should lead to ask CCGP to work on practical arrangements for virtual meetings.
- Recall the procedural manual of Codex.

Meeting report

- It is important to ensure that outcomes in reports are balanced, given the current guidance that interventions are only encouraged where a Member has a reservation. There is a risk that a few reservations will (on paper) outweigh broad support.

Technical issues

- Encourage Delegations to review problems encountered with connection/logistics etc and take action to address them prior to joining sessions and experiencing serious connection problems.

Other comments

- It was very good experience. I thank all people that participate to make it a success.
- Go back to physical meetings asap and stop this Covid hysteria at once. 8 billions humans on Earth, 0.06% death toll by Covid. This is not the Walking Dead or Contagion movies. Just wake up WHO and perform public health risk analysis.
- This first CAC43 virtual session has shown the flexibility and determination of Codex Alimentarius to persevere in its commitment to carry out its mandate. This must be CONGRATULATED.
- Good way to get feedback. Prefer physical meetings.
- Look forward to how everyone thinks about this, and please let CCGP work on these questions.

