

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Agenda Item 9

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CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD LABELLING

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LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

(Comments from European Union, Kenya, Madagascar, United Republic of Tanzania, EURO CARE, OIV)

European Union

*Mixed Competence
European Union Vote*

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) would like to thank the World Health Organization for the preparation of the Discussion paper on the labelling of alcoholic beverages (CX/FL 24/48/9).

As confirmed by the Codex Secretariat, the existing General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985) and the Guidelines on Nutrition labelling (CXG 2-1985) apply to all prepackaged foods, including alcoholic beverages. Alcoholic beverages fall under the definition of 'food' and are therefore subject to the same requirements as other foods under these two Codex texts.

The EUMS are of the opinion that the requirements are sufficiently clear in these Codex texts. They consider in particular that the existing definitions are sufficiently clear and that there is no need for revising the definition of "food", nor for establishing a definition of "drinks", "alcoholic beverages" or "non-alcoholic drinks".

The EUMS are therefore not in favour to develop a new Codex standard for alcoholic beverages.

The EUMS note however that the indication of the alcohol content of alcoholic beverages (alcohol by volume/alcohol strength) is not addressed in Codex texts. As this indication is an important information for consumers to enable them to make informed choices, the EUMS support work on the labelling of alcohol content on alcoholic beverages, taking into account the existing recommendations of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV).

The EUMS note furthermore that, as regards nutrition and health claims, alcoholic beverages are subject to the same requirements as other foods under the Guidelines for Use of Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23/1997), as they fall under the definition of 'food'. In the EU, Regulation (EC) No 1924/2006 on nutrition and health claims made on foods provides that beverages containing more than 1,2 % by volume of alcohol cannot bear health claims and that, as far as nutrition claims are concerned, only nutrition claims referring to low alcohol levels, or the reduction of the alcohol content, or the reduction of the energy content for beverages containing more than 1,2 % by volume of alcohol, are permitted. The EUMS are therefore in favour of work on restrictions on nutrition and health claims on alcoholic beverages.

Finally, there is no EU level legislation concerning health warnings on alcoholic beverages and the Member States of the EU have different alcohol labelling policies.

The EUMS are therefore of the opinion that CCFL could consider work on:

- the labelling of alcohol content on alcoholic beverages in % by volume alcohol through the modification of the General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985), taking into account the existing recommendations of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV),
- restrictions on positive nutrition and health claims on alcoholic beverages through the modification of the Guidelines for Use of Nutrition and Health Claims (CAC/GL 23/1997).

Kenya

Comment: Kenya supports the initiation of work as proposed in the discussion papers except the discussion paper on Labelling of alcoholic beverages. Further, we agree with the proposal to withdrawal discussion paper on TFAs.

Rationale: Kenya recognizes the need to have appropriate labelling of alcoholic beverages, but we seek guidance whether the ToRs for CCFL includes labelling provisions of alcoholic beverages. We also note that there is no corresponding Codex commodity Committee on alcoholic beverages hence seeking clarification from Codex on its role, if any, in alcoholic beverages.

United Republic of Tanzania

COMMENT

Based on the responses to the CL 2024/13-FL:

- (a) The URT supports the Developing mandatory labelling requirements tailored to alcoholic beverages and determining the scope of such work considering the respondents' proposals and level of support on: Health-related information; Nutrition-related information; Restrictions on nutrition and health claims; Exemptions; and, Possible links between alcohol and health outcomes
- (b) The URT supports the proposed revision of the definitions

EUROCARE

Background

1. Standardising alcoholic beverage labelling plays an important contributing role in helping to inform and empower consumers to protect their health, as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm while also reducing regulatory fragmentation.
2. Alcoholic beverage labelling has received increased attention at the Codex Alimentarius Commission since 2017. Significant progress has been made, including substantive discussions on the agenda at four Sessions (CCFL44; CCFL45; CCFL46; CCFL47), the distribution of three Circular Letters (CL 2018/24-FL; CL 2019/86-FL; CL 2024/13-FL) and the submission of three discussion papers (CX/FL 17/44/3 Add 1; CX/FL 19/45/10; CX/FL 24/48/9).
3. The Report of CCL46 noted that *"responses to CL2019/86-FL showed that there was common ground on which to proceed with the work"* but that further information is required, and that challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic hindered the development of a new discussion paper. The Committee agreed that: (i) *"the Russian Federation, European Union and India with assistance from WHO and EURO CARE would prepare a discussion paper for consideration by CCFL47"*; and (ii) *"a CL would to be issued to request information to assist in the development of the discussion paper"*. The Report of the CCFL47 agreed to: *"i. Retain the item on labelling of alcoholic beverages on its Agenda. ii. Request the Secretariat to issue a CL on possible future actions by Codex on this matter. iii. Request WHO to prepare a discussion paper based on the outcome of the CL."*

4. Alcoholic beverage labelling remains an important part of the work of the Commission. Developments in this area are significant for the Commission's overarching mandate and strategic goals.

Goal 1: Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner

5. Internationally, alcoholic beverages are outside the scope of international conventions controlling psychoactive substances. At national and regional levels, alcoholic beverages are also typically exempted from many requirements of food legislations governing labelling. Despite alcohol labelling being regulated less effectively than other food products, alcohol labelling is still subject to many rules. The majority of Members require some forms of labelling on alcohol beverages. The types of labelling required, vary significantly and can include any combination of ingredients lists, energy or another nutrient declaration, health information, drinking guidelines, alcohol content as well as warnings against drinking with regard to pregnancy, underage drinking, drink-driving, cancers and other diseases, and a variety of other information. The regulatory landscape is further complicated by the considerable variations in requirements for label designs. For instance, USA requires *"GOVERNMENT WARNING: (1) According to the Surgeon General, women should not drink alcoholic beverages during pregnancy because of the risk of birth defects. (2) Consumption of alcoholic beverages impairs your ability to drive a car or operate machinery, and may cause health problems."*; whereas Lithuania require a pregnancy pictogram. Not all alcohol products are treated equally, and many countries give preferential exemptions to certain categories of alcohol.
5. Even when labelling is not mandatory, increasing emphasis on health, changes in drinking behaviours and increasing consumer demands for transparency have led to some manufacturers voluntarily giving health-related information on alcohol labelling, even if this is currently only given on a small proportion of products.
6. Further rules are being developed. For instance, Ireland has passed laws which will require energy, alcohol content in grams, and warnings on cancer, liver disease and pregnancy. Its regulations have been discussed at the World Trade Organization Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade.

Goal 2: Develop standards based on science and Codex risk-analysis principles

12. Alcohol is a psychoactive substance that contributes significantly to the global burden of disease and death. It is a causal factor in over 200 diseases and injuries, accounting for 5.3% (132.6 million) of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and 5% (3 million) of all deaths globally. Young people are particularly affected, with alcohol causing 14% of deaths among those aged 20-39 and being the leading risk factor for death and disability among those aged 15-49. Early initiation of drinking increases the risk of dependence later in life. Contrary to common belief, no level of alcohol consumption is safe; with evidence increasingly showing any amount of alcohol intake poses a risk to health.
13. Alcohol-related harms extend beyond the drinker to include family, friends, and others both inside and outside households, with impacts such as injury, anxiety, assault, and financial strain. Intoxication and heavy drinking patterns worsen these effects, and negative impacts can affect both drinkers and abstainers in public spaces, workplaces, and other social settings. The high burden of diseases and injuries caused by alcohol consumption translates into significant healthcare costs and labour productivity losses. The OECD estimates that diseases and injuries caused by drinking above 1 drink a day for women and 1.5 drink a day for men incur medical costs equal to about 2.4% of total health expenditure each year. In total, USD PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) 138 billion per year will be spent to treat these diseases across all the countries included in the analysis. This is equivalent to, for instance, the current health spending in Australia or more than twice the current health spending in Belgium. Combined with the impact on labour force productivity, it is estimated that GDP will be 1.6% lower on average in OECD countries annually over the next 30 years due to harmful alcohol consumption.
14. There is a deficit in consumer knowledge about the content of alcoholic beverages. Most consumers are not aware of the content of energy and macronutrients such as carbohydrates, ingredients, health consequences, age limits and other essential information. Alcohol labelling is the principal source of information for consumers. Labelling is uniquely placed to provide information when alcohol is both purchased and consumed. Labelling improves knowledge and is an effective measure to help ensure consumers are well-informed and not misled. Increasing evidence shows that health information can also empower consumers to make healthier consumption decisions in the knowledge of the facts.

15. Further developing the work on alcohol labelling will promote consumer protection, reduce regulatory fragmentation for governments and help create a more level playing field for economic operators in line with the best available scientific knowledge.

Goal 3: Increase impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards

16. The Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 recognises the role of Codex and Codex texts in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Alcohol labelling can help meet SDG3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, in particular through targets 3.4 (reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases), 3.5 (strengthen the prevention of substance abuse, including harmful use of alcohol) and 3.6 (halve the number of deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents).
17. Several existing Codex texts include alcoholic beverages within their scope. The general principles in the General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985) include preventing information which false, misleading, deceptive or likely to create an erroneous impression. The purpose of the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling (CXG 2-1985) includes ensuring that nutrition labelling is effective in: providing the consumer with information about a food so that a wise choice can be made; providing a means for conveying FL/47 CRD19 information of the nutrient content of a food on the label; encouraging the use of sound nutrition principles in the formulation of foods which would benefit public health; and providing the opportunity to include supplementary nutrition information on the label.
18. In light of the importance of alcohol labelling, and the ever-increasing global developments, further international standardisation is likely to have a significant positive impact on trade. Developing guidance to assist governments and other stakeholders in the development, implementation and regulation of alcoholic beverage labelling is likely to increase the use of Codex standards and guidelines.

Mandate to protect consumer health and ensure fair practices in the food trade

19. Giving consumers essential information is an important contributor to States' obligation to protect, respect and fulfil the human right to information and to the highest attainable standard of health. It is in line with the WHO Global Alcohol Action Plan 2022-2030, adopted by the 75th World Health Assembly in May 2022, which calls for States to *"ensure appropriate consumer protection measures through the development and implementation of labelling requirements for alcoholic beverages that display essential information for health protection on alcohol content in a way that is understood by consumers and also provides information on other ingredients with potential impact on the health of consumers, caloric value and health warnings"*.
20. Labelling serves as a crucial communication tool between alcohol producers and consumers, shaping perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions to drive sales. Beyond its marketing role, labelling is also a public health strategy used by governments to provide information about alcohol content and the associated health risks. Effective alcohol labelling is essential for reducing consumption and related harm by ensuring consumers are aware of the risks and able to make informed choices. Many consumers remain unaware of the dangers of alcohol and often misjudge their own intake, highlighting a significant knowledge gap. Enhanced labelling, especially health warnings, is an effective way to raise public awareness and promote healthier behaviours, such as reducing alcohol consumption and purchase frequency.
21. Public support for alcohol labelling is generally high, and increasing awareness of alcohol associated risks can also boost support for other health promoting measures, like restrictions on availability, pricing, and marketing. This suggests that labelling not only help informing consumers about alcohol-related risks, but also encourages broader acceptance of policies aimed at reducing alcohol-related harm.

The importance of keeping alcohol labelling on the agenda

22. The momentum on alcohol labelling has increased significantly in recent years. Several countries have adopted new laws on alcohol labelling, several of which are yet to come into force. Significant lessons will be learnt over the next months and years. The evidence base on alcohol labelling is also growing significantly and enhanced results of experimental data will become available in the short-term.

Moreover, many countries are in the process of developing their national and regional approaches and would benefit from additional time and enhanced scientific data to reflect on their national policies.

Conclusions

20. There is common ground to proceed with the work on alcoholic beverage labelling. Harmonisation in this area is likely to yield significant benefits for consumers in a field where science is increasingly showing the harms of alcohol and the importance of informing consumers. Harmonisation is also likely to result in significant benefits for Members and businesses in a field where the regulatory landscape is becoming increasingly fragmented. Developments in the field mean that significant changes will occur in the next months and years and continuing with work on alcohol labelling will become even more important for global trade.

Recommendations

21. Eurocare respectfully recommends the Committee to keep alcoholic beverage labelling on the CCFL agenda. One or more Member(s) is(are) invited to offer to lead the proposals for new work, and Eurocare stands ready to provide technical support and assistance.
22. In the absence of a Member volunteering to lead, the Committee is invited to reaffirm its commitment to discuss alcohol labelling at CCFL49 allowing time for Members to implement new policies and learn from these, as well as to allow current and ongoing research to be published. Eurocare reoffers its commitment to this work and requests the Committee to agree with our continued support in this further work, like it was agreed at CCFL46.

OIV

Comments of the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) on the Codex Alimentarius Discussion Paper on the Labelling of Alcoholic Beverages (CX/FL 24/48/9)

This document does not commit Member States of the OIV in the comments and views that they might provide or express separately

The role of the OIV

The OIV as the international intergovernmental organisation with responsibility for the scientific and technical aspects of wines, vitivinicultural spirituous beverages and other alcoholic beverages of vitivinicultural origin has a well-developed corpus of technical and scientific work regarding such products.

OIV recommendations are based on consensus between its 50 member countries representing 75% of global vineyard surface area, 87% of global wine production and 71% of global wine consumption.¹ All OIV member countries are members of Codex Alimentarius.

The OIV is a longstanding observer to Codex Alimentarius. At the time of the creation of the FAO, a parent organisation of the Codex Alimentarius, the autonomy of the OIV was recognised within its field of competence, and the FAO undertook to call upon the OIV in any case where the works of FAO had direct or indirect implications for the products of the grapevine.²

The OIV draws particular attention to the recommendations within its corpus on the labelling of wines and spirituous beverages of vitivinicultural origin and the desirability of avoiding duplication at the international intergovernmental level.

¹ The People's Republic of China has deposited formal notice of its request for membership of the OIV, which is expected to be completed by 14 November 2024. Once China's membership is complete, the OIV will represent more than 90% of global vineyard surface and global production.

² Bulletin de l'Office International du Vin, 221, Juillet 1949, pp.4-8

The OIV emphasises the high complexity of the labelling requirements for wines and vitivinicultural spirits, which is compounded by the fact that they are seasonal agricultural products with many geographical and cultural specificities and with potentially very long shelf life.

In the OIV's view, there would appear to be little benefit in duplicating the existing works on these subjects, but the OIV stands ready to assist if the members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission decide otherwise.

If Codex decides to proceed with a specific standard for the labelling of alcoholic beverages, then the OIV draws attention to a number of particularities for the labelling of wines and vitivinicultural spirits, e.g.: product category definitions and nomenclature; geographical indications and appellations of origin; the name of the country of origin; grapevine variety names; vintage dates; terminology related to ageing etc.

OIV Standards on Labelling

1. *International Standard for the Labelling of Wine*

The OIV has adopted the *International Standard for the Labelling of Wine*. This standard draws upon the Codex Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (CXS 1-1985), as well as relevant standards from other international intergovernmental organisations e.g. OIML.

The International Standard for the Labelling of Wine is continually updated to reflect the latest developments and best practices. An update to introduce the list of ingredients and the nutritional information will be submitted for the approval of the OIV Members States in 2024. A further update is in progress, addressing health-related information for alcoholic beverages of vitivinicultural origin.

The OIV standard specifies mandatory information that must appear on labels of pre- packed wines and spirituous beverages intended for consumer sale. This includes product definition, geographical indication, information on alcoholic strength, allergens/hypersensitivity substances, net contents, country of origin, responsible, batch identification.

Other optional information is included such as: Trademarks, responsible, name of the viticultural holding, varietal name, vintage, type of wine (considering the OIV sugar content), ageing, terms of quality, distinctions and medals, and substances known to cause hypersensitivity.

During the last General Assembly on 18 October 2024, the Member states of the OIV have decided to update the OIV International Standard for Wine Labelling by introducing several articles, in particular:

- a new paragraph is introduced indicating that OIV Member States may authorise, that certain compulsory and optional information is displayed by using e-labels.
In particular, when e-labels are used, to present compulsory information, a clear and direct link to it shall be indicated on the label, specifying what is the information which is provided by electronic means.
- Introduce a new article stating that OIV Member States may require the compulsory displaying nutritional declaration according to the national regulations.
The full nutrition declaration may be provided. OIV Member States may limit the nutrition declaration on the label to the energy value.
OIV Member States may authorise the full nutrition declaration to be displayed by using e-labels. When the full nutrition declaration is displayed using e-labels, the energy value should also be indicated on the label.
- Introduce a new article indicating that OIV Member States may require the compulsory displaying of the list of ingredients according to the national regulations.
OIV Member States may require a list of ingredients, mentioning all the ingredients, be displayed on the label.
OIV Member States may authorise the list of ingredients to be displayed by using e-labels.

2. *International Standards for the Labelling of Spirituous Beverages of Vitivinicultural Origin*

The OIV has also adopted the *International Standards for the Labelling of Spirituous Beverages of Vitivinicultural Origin*. This standard is also continually updated to reflect the latest developments and best practices.

This standard specifies the mandatory information that must appear on labels of pre- packed spirituous beverages intended for consumer sale. This includes: denomination of the product, alcohol strength, nominal volume, batch, responsible, all information required by the country where the beverage is being sold, including allergens.

Other optional information is included such as: trademark, vintage, list and/or amount of specified ingredients, history of the product, distillation, vintage, country of origin or provenance. Again, update addressing ingredient, nutrition and health information are currently under consideration.

3. low alcohol drinks

Finally, the OIV has adopted definitions for the different categories of vitivincultural products in the *International Code of Oenological Practices*. These definitions are widely adopted in OIV member countries and beyond. The Codex GSFA itself refers to the OIV definition of "wine".

With respect in particular to the labelling of "low alcohol drinks", the OIV has adopted definitions of partially dealcoholised wines with an alcohol by volume of between 0.5 and

7.5 % Vol. and dealcoholised wine < 0.5 % Vol which would need to be taken into account.

Since there is already considerable work in place at an international intergovernmental level by the OIV on labelling for wines and spirituous beverages of vitivincultural origin being undertaken, the OIV would like to emphasize the desirability of Codex taking this work into account in order to avoid the risk of duplication or inconsistency and to draw upon our specialised experience.