



JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR NEAR EAST

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DISCUSSION PAPER ON CHILLED PREPACKAGED READY-TO-EAT SALADS

(Prepared by Palestine)

1. BACKGROUND

In the last session held in Rome, 2015, CCNEA decided to ask the Palestinian delegation to present at the 9th session a discussion paper on ready-to-eat salads. The paper should include the concerns associated with these products and whether these concern can be addressed by existing relevant standards/texts or by developing new standards/texts, the nature of quality and/or safety issues and the volumes of production and trade in these products.

2. PRODUCTS DESCRIPTION

These salads are processed products of cooked pulses or cooked/fresh vegetables with the addition of various food ingredients for flavour, smell and taste. They are marketed chilled in containers of different sizes. The main ingredients of these salads go through a set of processes such as sorting, washing, chopping, cooking, mixing packing and chilling.

3. VOLUMES OF PRODUCTION AND TRADE

In Palestine, More than 2000 tonnes per month of all kinds of salads are produced, Examples of these salads are:

- Humus salads
- Eggplant salads
- Turkish salads
- Corn salads
- Bell pepper salad.
- Matboukha salad
- Tahina salad
- Cabbage salad
- Shatta salad
- Hedge mustard salad
- Potato salad

Despite the attempts to collect data on the volume of production and trade in the rest of the region, there has been no success. But it is certain that many countries produce such salads which are placed in their respective markets for domestic consumption. As for the regional trade in these products, this paper also lacks the estimated data to measure the volume of trade, but it is certain that the volume of trade will grow over time after developing the relevant standards for these products.

4. FOOD SAFETY RISKS

The nature of the production process makes the products exposed to several sources of contamination that may pose risks on the health and safety of consumers unless they are controlled as following:

- Pesticide residues: It is likely that primary ingredients may contain a relatively high content of pesticide residues resulting from the over use of pesticides, using unauthorised pesticides or disrespecting the withdrawal periods of pesticides used. These risks can be controlled by referencing the CODEX Maximum Residue Limits 1:2009 on Pesticide Residues in Food and Feed.
- Toxins and contaminants: Primary ingredients used may contain toxins like Aflatoxins, heavy metals, nitrates or radiation. The CODEX STANDARD 193:1995 on Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed can provide a basis for controlling the risks associated with these toxins.
- Physical contaminants: Like soil, gravel or other physical contaminants that can be reduced by a thorough washing of the primary ingredients.
- Microbiological factors: These factors may be transferred from the soil to the primary ingredients or by staff during harvesting and packing. In addition, the product may be exposed to microbiological contamination during the production processes such as sorting, chopping and packing taking into consideration that some types of these salads do not need cooking and can't be considered that they underwent a heat treatment process. The risk of the microbiological factors can be controlled by compliance with the national microbiological criteria set in accordance with CODEX guideline 21:1997 on Principles and Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria Related to Foods.
- Drinking water: The contamination of drinking water used in washing the primary ingredients and in the production process in general will contaminate the product with undesired results. Clear and unambiguous provisions on the cleanliness and quality of water supply should be included to control these risks.
- Food additives: Arbitrary use of food additives in the products can pose a risk on consumers. In addition the consumption of these salads on a wide and frequent basis, as the case in Near East Region, will expose consumers to high level doses of food additives. New limits other than set in CODEX Standard 192:1995 on Food Additives should be established taking into account the average daily quantity of salads consumed.
- Food contact materials: Contact with packaging materials, surfaces and processing equipment will result in the migration of chemical substances to food that may pose a risk on consumers health, particularly, because of the wide and frequent consumption of these products in the Near East region. Clear and unambiguous provisions are needed to control this risk.
- Cold Chain: Uncontrolled temperatures during the production, storing, display and transport of the product will result in the growth of microorganisms that may pose risks on consumer health and minimize its shelf life. Provisions on the compliance with the requirements of cold chain and quick chilling after cooking can control this risk.
- Allergens: Some salads might contain allergenic ingredients which may pose risk on the health of specific categories of consumers. The provisions on the labelling of these specific products shall warn consumers of these ingredients in accordance with CODEX Standard 1:1985 on the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods.
- Labelling: Failure to properly store the products will lead to the growth of microorganisms that may pose risks on consumer health and minimize its shelf life. Consumers should be informed of the proper storing conditions for these salads. The inclusion of a statement on proper storing in the provisions of labelling in accordance with CODEX Standard 1:1985 on the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods will control the risk.

5. QUALITY ASPECTS

The expectations of consumers in the Near East Region must be met as following:

- Primary ingredients: The primary ingredients chosen for processing shall be fresh and flawless. The staff responsible for sorting shall be trained and qualified in this field. A limit should be established for yeast and molds.
- Labelling: The labelling of these products should include sufficient information that enables the consumer to recognise the food ingredients used in its production, the net quantity and the food

business operators that placed the product on the market in addition to other required information in accordance with CODEX Standard 1:1985 on the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods.

- Designation: if the designation of the products includes a reference to the main ingredient used, the ratio of this product should not be below a specific level that protects consumers from misleading and deceptive practices.
- Taste and flavor: The organoleptic characteristics of the product should meet the expectations of the consumers.
- Consistency: The final product should be consistent in accordance with the expectations of the consumer.
- Packaging: The products should be packed in sealed containers that can provide protection from contamination and other factors like air, humidity and other smells and flavors.

6. PROPOSAL

Palestine propose to the distinguished committee to accept the request for developing a general regional CODEX standard for chilled prepackaged ready-to-eat salads and further proposes to ask Palestine to develop the draft of the standard and circulate it among the member states of the region at step (2).