

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

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Agenda Item 4

CX/MMP 00/7
December 1999

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX COMMITTEE ON MILK AND MILK PRODUCTS

Fourth Session

Wellington, New Zealand, 28 February – 3 March 2000

PROPOSED DRAFT AND PROPOSED DRAFT REVISED STANDARDS AT STEP 4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ON CHEESES

(Prepared by France)

At its Third session the Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP) agreed to make headway with the Committee work on individual standards and processed cheeses. The approach adopted included the setting up of a working group in charge of studying the specific issues relative to the standards in question.

The committee selected France to chair the working group and the United States to act as the rapporteur. The responsibilities of the Chairman and of the Rapporteur were presented in detail in the final report of the third session of the CCMMP.

The working group has been tasked with seeking solutions within the framework of the mandate laid down by the committee and providing recommendations which would assist the IDF in preparing draft standards which will be examined by the CCMMP at its next session.

The working group had to address the 5 following issues:

INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS FOR CHEESES

1. Identification of absolute minimum values for fat in dry matter.
2. Need to have separate individual standards and to avoid presenting in an appendix the provisions to the relevant provisions in the relevant standards for cheeses, including the possible inclusion of specific and/or essential requirements in the General Standards for Cheeses.
3. Consideration of whether requirements such as colour, rind, holes, shape and form should be deleted or transferred to appendices of the General Standards.
4. Definition of coatings.

PROCESSED CHEESES

5. Determine if the use of a minimum cheese content is adequate to characterize the products covered, and if so, identify that minimum content. If not adequate, give guidance on an alternative approach.

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To fulfil the mandate entrusted to the working group a questionnaire (copy in annex I) was sent to the governments to obtain their opinions.

Twenty-four countries¹ answered the first questionnaire and gave their comments, suggestions and advice to help make headway with the group work.

It was decided, on the basis of these first factors, to go deeper into certain specific points within the framework of a second questionnaire. Twenty-three countries answered this second questionnaire (copy in annex II).

We feel some conclusions can be reached and that specific recommendations can be sent to the IDF to allow it to consider the technical implications of these decisions and to prepare documents for the fourth session of the CCMMP.

I INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS FOR CHEESES

1) DETERMINATION OF THE FAT IN DRY MATTER RATIO

Questions 8, 9 and 10 of the first questionnaire and 2 of the second questionnaire were aimed at gathering information on this subject.

Conclusions :

- It was confirmed that fat in dry matter is indeed an essential requirement to characterize and identify each cheese.
- This ratio is considered an absolute minimum beneath which the name of the individual standard cannot be referred to.
- A few States have however stated that other requirements could also be used (moisture on a fat-free basis, protein content, lactose).
- A large majority has also been reached to consider that the minimum value of this ratio must be determined separately for each individual standard.
- Some governments however would like versions of cheeses with a lower fat content with respect to the current minimum values.

Recommendations :

- So as to answer government's expectation, fat in dry matter must be studied and laid down in standard by standard. With this in mind the IDF could base itself on the values mentioned in document CL 1997/36 MMP.

Lower fat cheese :

In the first questionnaire some countries mentioned their interest for products with a lower fat content. Questions 3, 4 and 5 of the second questionnaire were aimed at reporting the current practices in States.

The answers show that:

- The dividing line is not very clear but it appears that a slight majority of countries do not authorize the use of the names of individual cheese standards for lower fat versions.
- Regarding the labelling of these lower fat products the practices are quite varied particularly concerning the use of the names laid down in the individual standards.
- If the use of the name of individual standards is not authorized, general labelling rules apply and lead to a name such as 'cheese' accompanied with a descriptive term.

¹ These countries are as follows: Argentina, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay.

- In countries authorizing the sale of individual standard cheeses in lower fat versions, no change in the other ingredients is authorized.
- A certain number of States would like the CCMMP to hold an in-depth debate on the use conditions of the names of individual standard cheeses whose fat content is lowered, in order to reach an international rule.

Recommendations :

In order to take into account the request of those States which would like an international harmonization of individual standard cheeses whose fat content is lowered, it appears desirable to:

- seek the fat in dry matter lowering level beneath which a cheese could be described as lower fat and propose a name,
- seek the value of fat in dry matter and the characteristic(s) on the basis of which a lower fat cheese could still refer to a name laid down by the individual standards,
- study, within the framework of a lowering of fat content, the list of other ingredients that can be changed while complying with the definition criteria laid down in the individual standards.

This work should be carried out standard per standard.

2) NEED TO MAINTAIN INDIVIDUAL STANDARDS SEPARATE FROM THE GENERAL STANDARD A6

Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the first questionnaire were aimed at gathering information on this subject.

Conclusions :

There is considerable support for the existence of individual standards separate from standard A6 and for the pursuit of discussions on these standards in their current format.

Recommendations :

We therefore recommend that the IDF should continue and finish its technical work based on the present individual standards so that the Committee is quite clear about the content of these standards and therefore about the specific characteristics of these cheeses. Discussions at the fourth session of the Committee should therefore be conducted on these same bases so as to obtain a consensus on the content of each individual standard.

There were also a few opinions for a different approach involving the notion of appendices to the general standards, which approach may appear somewhat unfamiliar to many governments. One of the reasons for this is the present uncertainty or the ambiguity of the status of such appendices, particularly regarding their mandatory nature.

This alternative approach to the elaboration of the standard could be explored by the IDF on the basis of a precise example in order to assess its feasibility, yet without neglecting the full accomplishment of the above-mentioned technical work on the content of individual standards. However this example should not lead to a loss of content of individual standards but should allow it to be shown how a cheese standard could be elaborated with individual provisions contained in appendices.

The CCMMP should however be clearly informed of the conclusions of the Codex secretariat and the TBT secretariat on the status of appendices (cf. CX/GP-99/7).

3) COLOUR, FORM, DIMENSION ... REQUIREMENTS

Questions 5, 6 and 7 of the first questionnaire and 1 of the second questionnaire were aimed at gathering information on this subject.

Conclusions :

Generally speaking the countries stated that the requirements proposed in the questionnaire were necessary to characterize correctly individual standard cheeses and to make it possible to distinguish between them (type of cheese, shape, description, dry matter, fat in dry matter, sensory analysis, ...). These requirements must be determined standard per standard.

Recommendations :

On the basis of the list of criteria approved in the questionnaire, which forms a general framework, we recommend that the IDF examine each individual standard in order to check the relevance of the criteria included in each standard.

This study should make it possible to distinguish between requirements which are essential in characterizing a cheese and those which could be transferred to appendices² or possibly deleted.

4) DEFINITION OF COATINGS

Question 11 of the first questionnaire was aimed at gathering information on this subject.

Conclusion :

There is no majority to change the definition of coating as proposed at the third session of the CCMMP and which some consider an important factor.

Further, the question of the use of plastic film to ripen some cheeses must be clearly identified with respect to the definition of coating in order to allow the Committee to take a clear decision on this subject.

Recommendations :

We propose to keep the definition of coating as proposed by the third session of the Committee.

Regarding the use of plastic films for ripening, we suggest that the IDF prepare a technical document explaining this question in detail with a view to its examination at the fourth session of the CCMMP.

II PROCESSED CHEESES

Questions 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the first questionnaire and 6, 7 and 8 of the second questionnaire were aimed at gathering information on this subject.

Conclusions :

1. The existence of high variability (regarding technologies, uses and characteristics of products sold) is recognized; a slight majority wishes to take this diversity into account in the drafting of the standard.
2. The minimum cheese content criterion (in a quantified form) does not appear to be an adequate solution to obtain a consensus except for processed cheeses bearing a variety name. Indeed it appears that a majority of countries have not adopted this criterion in the form of a minimum quantified value in their national legislations. However the use of cheese is recognized as essential in the production of these products.
3. Among the countries whose regulations lay down a minimum amount of cheese, a great majority are in favour of studying an alternative approach.
4. It was noted that to date there is no analysis method making it possible to check the quantity of cheese used in the end product.

² Cf. Comments appearing in point 2 above.

5. A majority of countries were in favour of simplifying chapter 2 (description) of the standard and transferring the composition factors and differentiation factors between processed cheeses and processed cheese preparations to chapter 3 (essential composition and quality factors). By making the use of cheese mandatory this description underscores the essential nature of this ingredient.
6. The composition table, limited to dry matter and fat in dry matter criteria, proposed in question 7, has given rise to diverging opinions, particularly with respect to the need or not to lay down a quantified value relative to a minimum of cheese. This tallies with the answers obtained to the first questionnaire (cf. point 2) and confirms the need to examine alternative solutions.
7. In this respect the Chair had proposed a first alternative solution by laying down a whey proteins/casein ratio identical to that laid down in standard A6 (cheese). This proposal was not accepted.
8. Alternative proposals such as those made by Denmark and the United Kingdom are likely to obtain a consensus more easily:
 - *Proposal by Denmark: 'the product is qualified by a cheese content, in quantity or characterization terms'.*
 - *Proposal by the United Kingdom: 'cheese is a significant ingredient of processed cheese (i) and cheese preparations (ii)'.*

Recommendations :

- At this stage the laying down of a minimum quantity of cheese (in a quantified form) doesn't appear to be an approach that can obtain agreement. Alternative solutions should be sought, particularly on the basis of the proposals mentioned above (Denmark and the United Kingdom).