CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION **E**

Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

World Health
Organization

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy - Tel: (+39) 06 57051 - E-mail: codex@fao.org - www.**codex**alimentarius.org

Agenda Item 4

CX/EXEC 17/73/4
June 17

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

73rd Session

WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland
10 - 13 July 2017

REVITALISATION OF FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEES

(Prepared by the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO)

Background

1.   The FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs) support exchange of information and dialogue. Every two years RCCs sessions provide an opportunity for Codex Members to address food control and food trade issues relevant to their region. Within the Codex structure, the RCCs provide the link between the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) technical committees and the regions. They offer an opportunity to focus on issues of importance to the region, by identifying priorities, discussing current and emerging food quality and safety issues, monitoring the use of Codex texts, and facilitating information exchange.

2.   RCCs, are also a useful forum for FAO and WHO to engage with countries, and discuss priority needs and challenges which subsequently inform the planning and implementation of food quality and safety activities in the regions.

3.   Efforts to revitalize the RCCs were initiated by FAO, WHO and the Codex Secretariat with the intent to ensure maximum use is made of the time and resources invested in the RCCs.

4.   CAC38[1] welcomed the revitalization of RCCs as a useful process for exchanges and regional work and endorsed the recommendations of CCEXEC70[2]. In this context, CAC38 endorsed a standard approach across all RCCs based on a proposal aimed at keeping the agendas of RCCs aligned to each other where possible and focussed on priority issues for Codex and the regions.

5.   The proposal was to include the following standing items: (i) A keynote address to create broader understanding of food safety issues and create more political buy-in (ii) Use of Codex standards in the region (iii) A - Identification of needs and priorities in regions; B - Platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety; (iv) Regional Strategic planning.

6.   Information on the national use of Codex standards, identification on needs and priorities of the region as well as national food control systems was collected in the past via a circular letter (CL) and the information was utilised as the basis for discussion in all RCCs meetings. After the discussion on the revitalization of the RCCs, by CCEXEC70, it was decided to terminate the use of the circular letter and to replace it with surveys and a system to continuously collect data online for all six Coordinating Committees.

7.   This paper analyses the outcome of the discussion of RCCs and presents a set of recommendations on the next steps for the revitalisation of the RCCs.

General Analysis

8.   RCCs had a general discussion on the revitalisation process which was welcomed as a way for countries to improve food safety and quality systems on a regional level. RCCs were identified as the preeminent fora for the identification of needs of the regions for improved participation in CAC work.

9.   Table 1 provides a summary of the regional response rates to revitalisation items: survey on the use of Codex Standards, survey on the identification of needs and priorities in regions on food quality and safety critical and emerging issues, and the inputs to the platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety.

---

[1] REP15/CAC para. 118
[2] REP15/EXEC para 56-67

Table 1. Regional response rates to revitalisation items in percent

	CCAFRICA (49)	CCASIA (23)	CCEURO (51)	CCLAC (33)	CCNASWP (14)	CCNE (17)	Overall
Use of Codex standards (survey)	53%	60%	69%	77%	50%	82%	67%
Identification of needs and priorities in regions (survey)	35%	74%	43%	36%	86%	35%	52%
Food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety (input to platform)	6%	13%	24%	33%	21%	41%	23%

(i) *Keynote address*

10.   The inclusion of a keynote address and facilitated discussion in each RCC was a key activity within the revitalization process. It is meant to stimulate discussion and information sharing on a specific food quality and/or safety topic of interest to the region to create a broader understanding of food safety issues and raise awareness at the political level. Table 2 contains a list of topics addressed in RCC keynote speeches.

Table 2. RCCs keynotes

CCNASWP14[3]	Multi-sectoral aspects of Codex and opportunities for strengthening Codex as a means to contribute to development of the economic, trade, agriculture, health and nutrition sectors
CCASIA20[4]	The role of Codex in strengthening national food control systems in the asian region – A way forward
CCEURO30[5]	Antimicrobial resistance from a Codex / Food Safety perspective
CCLAC20[6]	Evaluation of food safety systems
CCAFRICA22[7]	The small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and food trade – Opportunities for building regional markets through use of Codex standards
CCNE9[8]	Food authenticity/Food integrity

11.   RCCs generally appreciated the keynotes, noting the importance of having a regular opportunity for such discussions at future RCCs sessions. There was lively debate and discussion in all RCCs. The discussions reconfirmed the importance of Codex to the regions to raise the profile of food quality and safety to a high political level and to bring countries together to identify common issues and the means to address them at national, regional and global level.

12.   Members also agreed to identify a topic for the keynotes address for the next round of the Coordinating Committees possibly from the results from the survey on the current and emerging issues.

(ii) *Use of Codex standards in the region*

Approach

13.   Questions on the general use of Codex standards had in the past not led to comparable and/or representative data. To come to a more systematic approach, the Codex Secretariat developed a new survey focused on widely known standards that are representative of their respective categories (i.e. numerical safety standards, general standards i.e. labelling and general hygiene principles) as follows:

---

[3] REP17/NASWAP para. 7-13
[4] REP17/ASIA para. 9-16
[5] REP17/EURO para. 6-12
[6] REP17/LAC para. 8-14
[7] REP17/AFRICA para. 9-16
[8] REP17/NE para. 5-11

- Maximum Residue Levels (MRLs) for pesticides in food and feed;
- Maximum Levels (MLs) for food additives and contaminants as described in the general subject standards for Food Additives CODEX STAN 192-1995 and Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed CODEX STAN193-1995;
- Labelling of Prepackaged Foods CODEX STAN 1-1985; and
- General Principles of Food Hygiene (CAC/RCP 1-1969).

14.   The survey also asked about difficulties related to the general use of Codex standards. In addition members were informed that other specific standards could be covered in future surveys to build up, over time, a representative data set on the use of Codex texts worldwide.

15.   RCCs were requested to take note of the results of the survey and to provide inputs on the following questions that could guide future action by the Codex Secretariat:
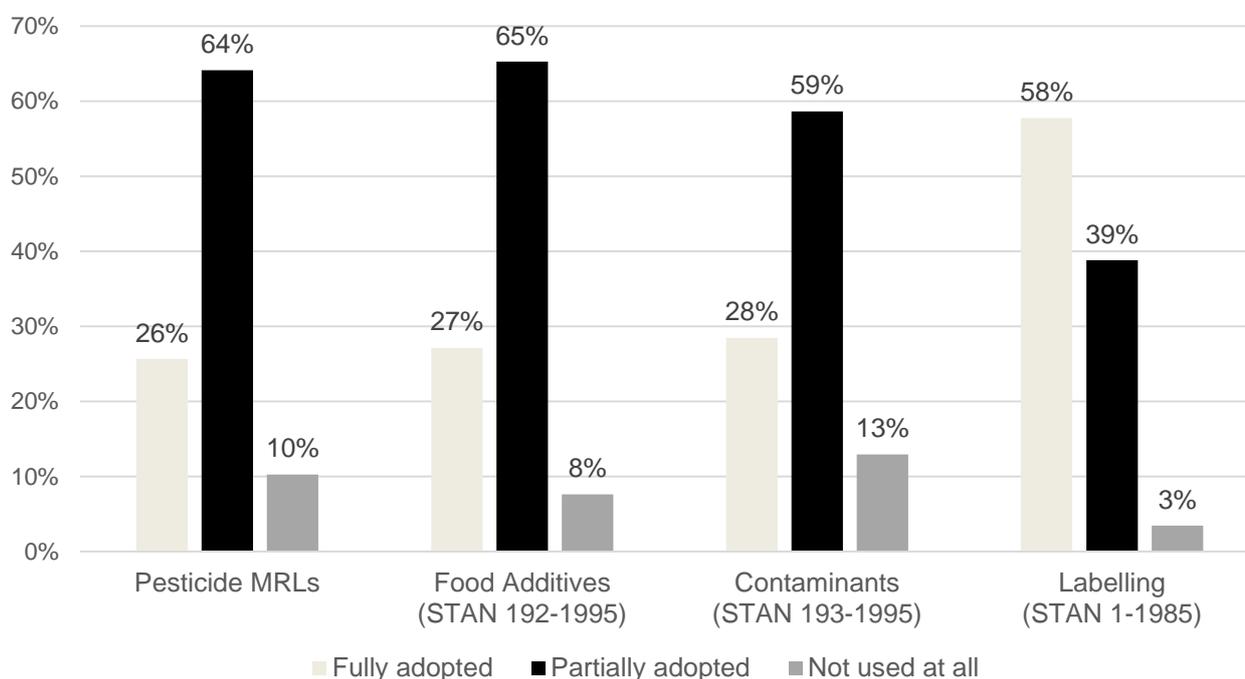
- Format and approach of the survey (e.g. whether the survey adequately addresses the issue)
- Use of the results (e.g. whether the results are considered useful, and how they should be stored and made available to Codex members with the possibility to continuously update the information)
- Scope of the next survey (which areas of Codex should be covered in future)?

Survey Results: Use of Standards

16.   The survey obtained a high completion rate of 67% of all Codex Member States (see Table 1).

17.   As shown in **Table 3**, Members partially use the Codex standards and MRLs covered by the survey, while the general standard for labelling is most widely used and fully adopted by a majority of members that responded (58%). Non-usage is highest in the case of the General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed (15 developing countries, mainly small islands, do not use it at all)

Table 3. Use of Codex standards in the region – global survey results

Survey results: Difficulties with regard to the use of Codex standards

18.   The survey results indicate that difficulties regarding the use of Codex standards are related to the adaptation of Codex standards to the specific national context; the resource investments required for the use Codex standards; lack of awareness of Codex standards in the food industry sector; the duration of Codex standard development and national implementation process.

Format and approach

19.   RCCs generally agreed with the approach, format and usability of the survey and provided comments on how to further improve the functionalities of the survey.

Use of Survey results

20. RCCs generally noted that the results of the survey and the analysis were useful and should be published online. It was also suggested to store the information provided by members online to allow regular updates and; data could be arranged by regional and global perspective. RCCs also invited countries that did not complete the survey to access it and insert their data. Members welcomed the survey as providing useful information that could support future national assessments and actions in the region with regards to the national implementation of Codex standards.

Scope of next survey

21. RCCs mentioned the need to include in the next survey:

- A question on the reasons for not using and partially adopting Codex standards;
- a possibility for documents to be uploaded in survey answer fields;
- An option to disseminate the survey to all national Codex stakeholders.

22. Members put forward the following suggestions for the scope of the next survey:

- One or two major staple commodities;
- Standards developed by CCNSFDU;
- General standards elaborated by CCFICS;
- Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CODEX STAN 234-1999);
- Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems (CAC/GL 82-2013);
- Implementation and enforcement of standards (regional level especially the regional standards);
- MRLs for veterinary drugs;
- Texts on antimicrobial resistance (AMR);
- Implementation of standards in sectors such as Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and Fish and Fishery Products.

(iii) A - *Identification of needs and priorities in regions; critical and emerging food safety issues*

23. In order to identify critical and emerging issues in food safety and quality, a questionnaire was sent to the Codex Contact Points of all members of each region with the request to indicate what issues in food safety and quality were considered as most critical and/or emerging.

24. Specifically, members were asked to indicate the 3-5 most critical and emerging issues in food safety/quality, together with an explanation on: 1) why that issue was selected (i.e. on what basis - information/data, knowledge or assumption - the choice was made) and 2) the expected and/or actual impacts of the issue (whether the impact would be sector-specific, affect only some sub-populations or countries/regions, whether it would be related to public health or trade etc.).

25. The survey obtained a completion rate of 52% of Codex Member States (see Table 1).

26. The analysis carried out was strictly linked to the level of quality and quantity of information provided by Members, and RCCs called upon countries that had not replied to the survey to provide their inputs, so that FAO and WHO could prepare a more representative analysis.

27. RCCs generally agreed that the discussion on this agenda item was an important and beneficial first step for identifying critical and emerging issues and priorities for the region and expressed appreciation to FAO and WHO for facilitating the process by preparing the analysis and the background papers.

28. RCCs noted the importance of continuing and refining the analysis on this subject, the quality of which would also rely on the level of engagement and inputs provided to the survey.

B - *Platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety*

29. The online platform prototype was created as a replacement of the former CL on the same topic for information sharing on food control. The platform is based on a set of questions that could be complemented and expanded over time, based on the feedback of members.

30. The platform, integrated into the Codex website, provides the possibility for countries to enter data and information on an ongoing basis, thus increasing relevance of data submitted by National Contact Points.

31. To facilitate information sharing on the legal basis and controls for food safety and consumer protection, the platform will also integrate a list of countries national legislation which has been extracted from FAO's database on Food Legislation (FAOLEX). FAOLEX is a database maintained by FAO to compile legislation in the food and agriculture fields.

32.   Noting that FAOLEX may not be comprehensive and up to date because legislation is collected from a variety of sources, Members were requested to verify the information before uploading them in the public domain.

33.   RCCs generally agreed that the prototype of the platform was fit for the purpose of sharing information on food control systems and food safety mechanism and recognized the importance and usefulness of such platform.

34.   RCCs appreciated the possibility to access the platform, via the respective CCPs, all year round to update their profile, add and, or change information, and to decide when the information provided should be published.

35.   RCCs made several proposals to enhance the platform and suggested to:

- Consider the diversity of key stakeholders at national level;
- Integrate information from existing food safety sources (e.g. Food Safety Almanac);
- Provide users with the Arabic translation of the platform;
- Improve technical aspects (e.g. upload of documents).

36.   RCCs agreed that the primary use and purpose of the platform was to facilitate information exchange between member countries inviting Members to actively participate on the implementation of the online platform.

Regional Strategic planning

37.   RCCs had previously agreed that regional strategic plans should be consistent and complementary to the Global Strategic Plan. Different approaches are followed by different RCC:

38.   CCNASWP, CCASIA and CCEURO considered that a Regional Strategic Plan was no longer necessary as RCCs support and contribute to the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan.

39. CCLAC, CCAFRICA and CCNE agreed to complete the implementation of their Regional Strategic Plans and following completion to focus on inputs into the Codex Strategic Plan. These RCCs consider regional strategic plans useful to plan and support activities such as resource mobilization at country and regional level.

40.   All RCCs noted the general support by Members to actively participate in the development of the new Codex Strategic Plan and discussed this topic under a specific agenda item.

Conclusions

41.   RCCs showed overall appreciation of the revitalisation process and invited FAO, WHO and Codex Secretariat to continue its implementation taking into account the outcome of the session discussions.

42.   The discussion on the items related to the revitalization i.e. key note speech, critical and emerging issues, online platform on food control systems and use of Codex standards showed that RCCs are particularly well positioned to identify and inform about regional priorities and to strategize food quality and safety issues of interest to the region.

43.   The results from the discussions on the keynote speech and the critical and emerging issues identified can play a key role in the development of the new Codex strategic plan 2020-25 and ensure that the concerns of the regions are taken into account.

44.   Both the design and response rates of the surveys on critical and emerging issues and use of Codex standards were considered an improvement compared to previous sessions but there still room for further improvements towards reaching most or all of Codex members. In order for the platform to be a useful tool for Codex members more data input is necessary. In both cases, survey and platforms, RCCs indicated the need to improve functionalities to facilitate inputs and information-sharing.

45.   The experiences and lessons learnt through the first round of the RCCs revitalisation process serve as a basis to be developed over time, based on the feedback of members. The 2016-2017 RCCs aimed at allowing countries to better engage in regional Codex and food safety and quality related activities and was an opportunity for countries to lead the way Committees develop.

46.   The survey on the use of Codex standards was a pilot which brought good results and suggestions. Future surveys could be envisaged for the same group of standards however focusing more on the difficulties of their implementation. Tailor-made surveys may be needed for "numerical" standards such as ML and MRLs and "text" standards such as hygiene and labelling provisions. Surveys could also explore how Codex, FAO and WHO can best address the problems associated with the uptake and enforcement of Codex standards.

47.   As not all Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice may be used in laws e.g. some may be used as training curricula for professionals working in the food chain, this possibility could be included in surveys to get a more complete picture of the use made of Codex standards.

Recommendations

48.   CCEXEC73 is invited to:

- Consider practical and workable options to further improve the revitalisation process.
- Recommend further development of the online platform and future surveys based on the feedback received from RCCs.