

Codex Webinar - 28th July 2020

Progressing Global Standards During a Global Pandemic

Questions and Answers

This includes questions received during the webinar in the Q & A and Chat functions in Zoom as well as questions received by email.

Please note that the answers provided below are valid at the time of issue (7 August 2020) of this document and may be superseded by specific guidance under preparation by the Codex Secretariat related to a virtual session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

All questions have been translated to and answered in English below. Other language versions will also be made available.

Group 1: General issues:

Q: *Can we get a copy of the webinar afterward the event?*

A: The webinar is available online at <http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5335/icode/>

Q: *Where can I get a copy of the presentation on scientific advice?*

A: The presentation is available [here](#)

Q: *Where can I find the Top Tips presented by David Massey?*

A: Davids Top Tips for participating in Virtual meetings can be found [here](#)

Q: *It would be great if we the list of participants was made available?*

A: 85 Codex Members and 40 Observers joined the Webinar. The list of participants for the webinar is not available due to the informal nature of the event but in the case of a virtual session of the CAC a list of participants will be published as usual.

Q: *We hope highlights of webinar would be provided as a summary report.*

A: A summary report will not be developed; however, the key information is available in the above-mentioned links and answers to all questions are provided here. A short news story is also available online [here](#). The full webinar is available online at <http://www.fao.org/webcast/home/en/item/5335/icode/>

Q: *Practical point - Chat and Q&A are very useful for showing support etc. but they are not translated, will there be any solutions to help with this?*

A: This overview of the Q & A is being translated and will be available in all six languages used in Codex work. The real time translation of Q& A and Chat is not currently possible. Solutions are being investigated.

Group 2: A virtual session of CAC43

General issues:

Q: *The letter from the Codex Secretary (12th June 2020) states that the mechanism for virtual session CAC43 will proceed with the consent of more than half of Codex membership. How is that consent be sought, is it through this webinar today? Will the proposed mechanism agreed today be circulated to the Membership for their agreement before moving forward holding virtual sessions of CAC43 in September?*

A: The consent of the membership is being sought through a letter that will be sent to all Members during the week of 3 August 2020. The letter will ask the members if they agree that CAC43 be convened virtually and it will indicate the rules to be suspended to enable a virtual session to take place. Two thirds of the membership will need to respond positively for the virtual session to proceed. The letter will provide details of how Members need to respond. The response process will entail logging into the Codex webpage and following the instructions on the Dashboard. Once the Member has responded online, they will receive a confirmation email. In case of any problems Members are advised to contact the Codex Secretariat as soon as possible (codex@fao.org).

Q: *What will countries be receiving: will it be guidance, or will a proposal be circulated to receive criteria and thus have a procedure that is approved by the countries?*

A: A letter will be sent to all members proposing that CAC43 meet virtually. The rules of procedures that need to be suspended in order to convene a virtual meeting the CAC will be clearly identified. Members will be asked to respond to confirm their agreement with the proposal. If you concur, it is critical to respond as directed in the letter as confirmation must be received from two thirds of the Members in order to proceed with a virtual session of the CAC

Q: *Will the letter to Codex members regarding the proposal to convene CAC43 be shared publicly with observers? / Can the letter seeking concurrence from delegations for the virtual CAC be posted on the CAC 43 web site?*

A: Following its dispatch to Members, the letter will also be shared with Codex Observers for information through the Codex Distribution list.

Q: *Who will define which topics should not be on the CAC agenda?*

A: The agenda for the CAC is defined following consultation with FAO and WHO and the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Q: *Is CAC43 going to be open for general public (not observer status)?*

A: CAC43 will be open to the general public who can follow the webcast.

Dates and Registration for a virtual meeting of CAC43

Q: *In case it will be approved in which month more or less would the meeting would take place?*

A: If approved the virtual session of the CAC would meet on 24, 25 and 26 September and 12 October for discussions and 19 October for adoption of the report.

Q: *Given the experiences from FAO and WHO with separating the meetings into few hours' session over one or two weeks, the dates of the CAC43, if confirmed, may be reviewed accordingly? This would also allow for the breakout time for the sides discussions to help move forward.*

A: The dates of CAC43 were initially confirmed as 24, 25, 26 September and 19 October, subject to the memberships approval to convene a virtual session. Following the webinar and the advice of the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of the Commission an additional session for discussions has been added on 12 October 2020. The additional date was selected based on availability as the parent organization have a heavy schedule of virtual meetings to support up to the end of the year.

Q: *How are registrations verified? Will it be possible to see who is present?*

A: All participants will be asked to register online through the INDICO registration system as is the normal case for the CAC. The Codex Secretariat will verify the participants with the Codex Contact Point. It is intended that all heads of Delegations will be visible with their Member Country Observer organization name. Further details of the processes will be provided when the virtual session is approved.

Q: *What would be the date of the preparatory meetings?*

A: A preparatory webinar will be convened on 11th September 2020 at 12 noon CET if the virtual session of the CAC is approved.

Q: *How can we submit additional questions and suggestions regarding the upcoming CAC meeting after today's session, to be addressed in the next webinar on September 11?*

A: Questions and suggestions can be sent to codex@fao.org

Q: *If the virtual CAC43 session is organized, how will the participation be arranged in practical terms? For example, will each Codex member and observer INGO get one dedicated line, or will each registered participant receive their individual passcodes?*

A: The practical aspects of participation are under development. To date we can confirm that the meeting will be convened using the Zoom platform. All Participants will have to register as per usual and heads of delegations will have the status of panellists in Zoom and be able to virtually raise their hand to ask for the floor.

Q: *What is the reason why the list of each delegation should also be sent to the secretariat, will the registration system we always use not be followed?*

A: While the INDICO registration system will be used, the secretariat needs to approve all registrations. Sometimes requests for registration are received from individuals not on the official Delegation. In order to ensure that only those on the official delegation are approved, the secretariat requests the CCP to send the names of the official delegation. In this case it will also be important to confirm the Head of Delegation as Heads of Delegations will be designated as panellists in the Zoom platform for CAC43.

Practical aspects of participation in a virtual meeting

Q: *How will CRDs be managed in a virtual CAC or other Codex Committee Session regarding distribution to delegates and observers?*

A: CRDs will be managed similarly to physical meetings. They can be submitted to the Codex Secretariat as word documents, within the advised deadline, will be allocated a CRD number and then posted on the CAC43 webpage as per usual practice.

Q: *How will the Chair of CAC or other Codex Committees meeting virtually identify which delegates to recognize for the purposes of making an intervention and in what order of priority?*

A: The exact details of the procedure for managing the virtual CAC are still under development but as is the case in physical meetings, Heads of Delegations will be asked to raise their virtual hands and given the floor following the order in which it was requested, with Members speaking first and then Observers.

Q: *A number of Codex Committees have in-house Physical Working Groups during their face-to-face meetings. How will these be incorporated into the virtual CAC and/or other Codex Committee meetings?*

A: Meetings of the CAC do not generally have any physical working groups. Informal discussions in the margins are always valuable and Delegations and regional groupings will be encouraged to plan to meet virtually in the margins of a virtual session of the CAC. Virtual meetings have been successfully convened with all Codex regions. A breakout room will be available in Zoom platform for each region. Guidance on this will be shared to all Coordinators in advance.

Q: *Will private chat with other delegates and delegations be available through Zoom for the CAC session?*

As Chat is a function on Zoom delegates might choose to use it during the CAC. However, Heads of delegations will be encouraged to establish other communication channels to maintain contact with members of their delegations and others during the meeting.

Q: *Appreciate all the efforts and learnings from e-meetings. In order to make them efficient and focused, we also learned that the groups need to work offline, on joint shared e-platforms. Has this been considered by CAC?*

A: If CAC43 goes ahead virtually, it will only meet for 3 hours per day. Time available before and after will be used as needed to facilitate the work.

Q: *When will the working documents for CAC43 be available?*

A: Most of the working documents for CAC43 are already available on the CAC43 webpage [here](#)

Q: *Can we use 'Thumbs up' visual icon to support an intervention or adoption of standards, rather than to make an intervention? Or silence means no objection?*

A: This is under consideration and will be addressed in the guidance that is under preparation by the Codex Secretariat.

Q: *Is there any limitation of time to make an intervention? Intervention could be made orally during virtual session and in writing. Writing here refers to written official respond or is it the comments from chat room? If it includes written official responds how is the written intervention be handled if it is different from what agreed during virtual session.*

A: As is the case in physical session of the CAC, there will be a time limitation (to be determined) for all interventions. During the session interventions will have to be made orally. An intervention may additionally be submitted in writing. Only oral interventions will be considered.

Q: *How reservation to the adoption of standards by the Membership is going to be handled? (final adoption, Step 5, approval of new work, discontinuation, revocation and amendment of standards).*

A: Reservations to a decision will be accepted as per a physical session of the CAC. Guidance will be provided in advance of the session on how reservations can be made.

Q: *We proposes Codex Secretariat to introduce rules to virtual CAC43, timely, ahead of the virtual session for example what is suggested in CWBC; silent means consent/no objection/support.*

A: The Codex Secretariat is preparing guidance for participation which will be shared with all Members in September, assuming a virtual session of the CAC is confirmed.

Q: *Will the CAC43 session be broadcast live for those who may wish to observe it and in which platform (like it has been done in the past on the Codex website)?*

A: CAC43 will be webcast. The link will be shared in advance on the CAC43 webpage.

Consensus and decision making

Q: *Since consensus is critical to advancing any “work” within CAC and other Codex Committees, will there be established guidelines for the Chairs to use in trying to identify when consensus has been reached as the CAC and Committee Chairs cannot “see the room” to make such a determination?*

A: Guidelines are under development to support the Chairperson to manage and reach conclusions in the virtual session. However, if it becomes apparent that consensus will not be possible to achieve in the virtual session, the item will be moved to the next session of the CAC.

Q: *During some Codex Committee meetings, when there is a lack of consensus, the Codex Committee Chair sometimes identifies a few delegates to meet during breaks in the Committee meeting to resolve differences. Can the same be done with a virtual meeting?*

A: Yes, it is also possible to have virtual side meetings. The recent virtual session of the CCEXEC demonstrated that it was possible to use the time before and after the formal session to connect bilaterally or otherwise with participants.

Q: *How will the vote to approve the documents be guaranteed and what are the rules of transparency in this matter?*

A: Standards will be agreed by consensus. If it is not possible to achieve consensus, the item will be moved to the next session of the Commission. It is proposed to suspend voting for this virtual session. Full details of the rules to be suspended will be provided to Members when they are requested to provide their agreement to support a virtual session of the CAC.

Q: *How do you ensure consensus in a virtual meeting*

A: Consensus will be reached in a manner similar to physical meetings, by listening to interventions, and consideration of proposals from the Chairperson. If following this process, the Chairperson determines there is no consensus, or it would require a long time to achieve consensus an item may be moved to the next session of the CAC.

Q: *How would transparency and consensus matters be resolved during virtual meetings?*

A: In terms of transparency, the session is open to all Members and Observers, Heads of delegations will be visible and clearly identified and the event will also be webcast. The issue of consensus has been addressed in previous questions (see above).

Q: *Have you considered the virtual meeting software that have Voting, and Poll tools incorporated?*

A: The software platform that will be used for a virtual session of the CAC, should it be approved, is Zoom. This is the platform currently being used by FAO and which they have integrated with their interpretation services to provide simultaneous interpretation for such meetings. While polling tools are available, for the virtual session of CAC43 it is proposed to suspend the rules relates to voting and only adopt standards by consensus.

Q: *At what point and how will you decide if an issue is “complicated” and needs to be moved to a physical session?*

A: This determination will be made by the Chairperson taking into consideration the interventions of the Membership.

Q: *Taking into account that time would be limited how to ensure that all members would be able to participate in discussions? How would final decision be made?*

A: Guidance will be provided to Members on making their interventions and the time available to do so in order to make optimal use of the session time available.

Q: *Is it the case that if any member is not for adopting the standard or forwarding it to next level than the discussion would be postponed for ordinary (not virtual) meeting. Would it be so?*

A: No this is not the case. The Chairperson will strive to achieve consensus. If one Member is not in agreement and wishes to reserve their position, they can do so without hindering the progress of or adoption of the standard. If there is no consensus among the membership, then the item will be postponed to the next session.

Q: *How will it be defined that a standard is controversial or not? And how will we know that the order of the requests for the floor will be respected?*

A: The Chairperson will take interventions on each item and propose potential conclusions in order to determine whether it is feasible to reach consensus within the allotted time. If the Chairperson determines that consensus cannot be reached at that point in time the item will be postponed to the next session of the CAC

Heads of delegation will request the floor by raising their virtual hand. When they do this, it will be possible for all heads of delegations to see who has requested the floor and in what order. The Chairperson will allow interventions in order of request, noting that Members speak first and then Observers.

Q: *In order to provide enough time for interventions, how about suspending some of the regulations to have an extraordinary CAC in one year?*

A: In order not to lose momentum and ensure key standards are adopted it is considered important to make every effort to convene a session of the CAC in 2020. Due to the current uncertainties it is still difficult to know when a physical session could be convened. The agenda for a virtual CAC will primarily focus on the adoption of standards. Guidance will be provided to indicate that interventions should be focused on priority issues.

Q: *How about outstanding issues that couldn't be resolved through virtual meeting and need more time for deliberation/debate?*

A: Any unresolved issues will carry forward to the next session of the CAC.

Q: *The Statutes stipulate that meetings are generally to be public. The Zoom tool, by default has questions visible only to panellists. Can the default be changed to make it more transparent? Also, there must be a way to allow votes instead of deferring them for a year or more as Parliaments have during COVID-19.*

A: In the interests of transparency the webinar was webcast. A virtual session of the CAC would also be webcast. For the purposes of the CAC, interventions will have to be made verbally. Anything in writing would only be to confirm the oral intervention. If approved the CAC will adopt standard by consensus. Should a vote be required the issue will be moved to the next session of the CAC.

Q: *Would voting happen in-written before the meeting, together with the Commenting documents?*

A: It is proposed to suspend voting for this virtual session. Adoption of standards will be by consensus with the opportunity for a Member to also reserve its position.

Making Interventions

Q: *In the Letter from Codex Secretary, intervention could be made orally during virtual session and in writing. Writing here refers to written official respond during the session or is it the comments from chat room?*

A: During the session interventions will need to be made orally although to facilitate understanding the proposal, it may be provided in writing in parallel or immediately afterwards. The Letter of the Codex Secretary of 12th June was specifically referring to the process for accepting comments on the report, which might be received in writing in a first round before adoption through a virtual session.

Q: *Can a position be supported by the chat function or is it necessary to speak?*

A: Exact procedures for how delegations could indicate support for positions during the virtual CAC are still under development and will be shared in advance of a virtual CAC.

Outreach and training

Q: *Have you assessed the possibility of carrying out the practical webinar by region?*

A: In the last three months virtual meetings have been convened with all regions. The Codex Secretariat has also increased the number of webinars it is providing on Codex work and effective participation therein through use of various tools. Requests for such training from individual members can be sent directly to codex@fao.org.

Q: *Is there a guidebook or other Codex documents on how to intervene online?*

A: Codex guidance on how to use existing Codex tools such as the Online Commenting System are available [here](#).

Top tips for participation in virtual meetings as presented during the webinar are available [here](#).

Q: *Good afternoon ! My question for Mr. Tom. What is the mechanism for recruiting researchers as a Codex expert*

A: Experts and researchers are not recruited directly by the Codex Secretariat. Member Countries may include experts in their delegations to Codex Committees which is facilitated by the national CCP or national Codex Committee. FAO and WHO often issue Calls for Experts to identify relevant experts to support the provision of scientific advice to Codex. Details can be found on the [FAO](#) and [WHO](#) webpages.

CCEXEC sub-Committee on Codex and the Pandemic

Q: *Can the intervention of Mariam be shared in writing?*

A: The terms of reference of the sub-committee on Codex and the pandemic and the proposed work schedule can be found [here](#). The Vice-chairperson promised that in cooperation with the Chairperson and Vice chairpersons she will do her best to get feedback from all Codex members.

Other Codex Committees

Q: *A side question that is probably not possible to answer - but regarding other meetings can they be as transparent as CAC - I have asked many times about the lack of transparency in CCNFSU*

A: All Codex meetings are implemented under the same rules of procedure and provide the opportunity for the General Public to attend. Webcasting of meetings in addition has resource and legal implications and thus needs to be considered on a case by case basis. To further enhance transparency, the CAC as the decision-making body of Codex is webcast.

Q: *One of my main concerns is that the fact that Codex prioritizes consensus over credible scientific evidence - since consensus is so influenced by political and power forces - how can we be assured that credible science will be given its due weight in virtual meetings.*

A: Guidance regarding the Role of Science in Codex Decision making process and Measures to facilitate consensus are both addressed in the [Codex Procedural Manual](#). On these aspects the implementation of the procedures should not differ between physical and virtual meetings.

Q: *Perhaps in virtual meetings developing countries can be given much fairer time. My concerns as usual refer to CCNFSU.*

A: The Chairpersons of Codex meetings aim to ensure fair and equal participation of the Members. The Codex Secretariat works to support Chairpersons in this regard and provide additional guidance as needed, for example the [Codex Chairpersons Handbook](#).

WHO Food Safety Resolution

Q: *What would be the practical effect of the Food Safety OMS resolution? In specific terms.*

A: Provided by WHO

The resolution will serve as an instrument to highlight the challenges identified in the past resolutions and ensure the commitment to address food safety as an essential element of public health at the highest political level.

The main practical effect of the resolution will be achieved through the implementation of the Global Food Safety Strategy that will be developed in coordination with FAO.

The Global Food Safety Strategy will serve as a guidance to prioritize actions for ensuring food safety at the global, regional and national level, as well as to strengthen political commitment, increase financial, human and technical resources investment at higher level. Within WHO, the Global Strategy will serve as a reference for any following

development and/or update of regional strategies, national strategies and action plans for food safety. It is envisioned that the Global Strategy will lay down the foundation of the global collaboration and harmonization of the efforts among UN agencies and other international partnerships in food safety.

To be practical, the Global Food Safety Strategy needs to:

- Fit with today's global context such as the climate change, foodborne AMR, food fraud, online sale of food, management of traditional food markets, emergency preparedness and response, evolving new technologies (i.e. blockchain, WGS, novel food and novel production methods) Have measurable, traceable food safety indicators to assess the progress of the implementation of each strategic action
- Support Member States in building or improving, where necessary, a risk-based food control system
- Encourage all different stakeholders in food safety to work together to eliminate the technical, financial barriers for the usage of new technologies and ensure that adequate attention is given and concrete actions are taken to build a proactive national food safety system with emerging challenges such as climate change, foodborne AMR etc.

To ensure that the Global Food Safety Strategy effectively addresses the needs of countries and is operational both in developing and developed countries, and will therefore lead to effective implementation and country impact, Member States consultations are envisioned, taking advantage of the opportunities of different international events/conferences, including the Codex Regional Coordination Committees.