

KAREN HULEBAK - NEW CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMISSION

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is the first newsletter of the Codex Secretariat. It is a work in progress so this edition is not much more than an outline. You will find an interview with the new Chairperson of the Commission, some photos of recent Codex Sessions and a presentation of the document of the Codex Secretariat.

You will also find some empty boxes - requesting your contributions. Codex is a big community: we are all working for the same objectives. We feel that the better we know each other - the better we can learn from each other and work together.

Therefore in the newsletter we would like to publish presentations of Codex Contact Points - tell us who you are, how you work and send us photographs.

Please also let us know if there is anything in particular that you would like us to include in the letter in the future - we are open to any suggestions.

The next newsletter will come out in March 2009 so please send us your contributions by the end of February.



Tom Heilandt
Codex Secretariat

"Bring it on!" might be the slogan for Karen Hulebak, scientist in USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service who was elected chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission this summer at the Commission session in Geneva, Switzerland.

"I know the challenges are great," Hulebak says. "Many tough issues are still on the agenda but none of these is insurmountable. I have no reluctance to take them on." Hulebak, who was named U.S. Codex manager just eight months ago, has been given leave by FSIS to give up that post in order to work full time in her new role as Codex chair. She will also yield leadership of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene.

In her new role, Hulebak faces thorny problems regarding Codex governance, standards-setting management, a tight budget, and complaints by developing countries that they can't fully participate. At the same time, interest in Codex has never been greater.

This year's Commission session attracted the largest ever attendance by far for a Codex meeting in recorded in Geneva (Commission meetings alternate between Rome, where the UN Food and Agriculture Organization is headquartered and Geneva, the headquarters of WHO). "I campaigned



Ms Karen Hulebak

on a pledge to help build an effective leadership team for Codex", Hulebak said, praising the three vice-chairs who were also elected: Mr Sanjay Dave (India), Mr Knud Østergaard (Denmark) and Mr Ben Manyindo (Uganda).

"Each is hard-working, intelligent and has appreciation for the importance of their role. They have a sense of the opportunities before them and relish the challenge. I hope their countries will give them latitude to work with me throughout the year."

Hulebak said she'd like to lead Codex back to "a stronger focus on its core mission" - protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade. "I'd like us to adopt standards that achieve those goals. We need careful listening to all member countries about problems that stand in the way. But I don't want to focus on just problems; I want to focus on solutions. Codex is evolving. The demographics are changing. We need to understand what adjustments are needed to the way it does business in order to bring a diverse population into participation."

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Asked about specific reforms, she responded, "From my work as vice-chair, I know some of the problems on the minds of member countries, but we need careful listening to them. Sometimes the real problem is something else than what's stated. It's premature to talk about solutions now. I need to understand that they understand what their problems are." Hulebak expressed no hesitation in forecasting that the Codex Executive Committee would have a stronger role than at present. "And I think the member countries are looking to the Executive Committee to provide guidance", she said. "I've seen a lot of progress in the last couple of years. The Executive Committee isn't a 'mini-commission'. It's more like a corporate board of directors that helps the shareholders understand what's going on."



31st CAC, Geneva, Switzerland

Hulebak was asked about developing country complaints about inadequate participation. "We spent lots of time in Geneva talking about their inability to fully participate in committee and work group meetings", she said. "The Trust Fund is a terrific tool to help participation. It's been the single largest factor in increasing participation, but it was never intended as a permanent fixture and it's now halfway through its 12-year lifetime. It was intended not just to help attendance but also to develop capacity within countries to participate more effectively. That's a harder goal to achieve." These are long-standing concerns. They will need a lot of discussion and innovative thinking to solve."

Asked about budget issues, Hulebak replied, "I'm aware of them and of the constraints on both FAO and WHO (which co-sponsor Codex). I've



The outgoing team from left to right:

Commission Chair Claude Moshia (Tanzania) with the three vice-chairpersons, Wim Van Eck (Netherlands), Noraini Mohd Othman (Malaysia) and Karen Hulebak (United States).

a number; it's not a head count", she replied. "It's a spirit of agreement. Developing countries feel they're not



31st Codex Alimentarius Commission, Geneva, Switzerland

already started discussions with the WHO leadership. We need to increase detailed discussions within Codex on funding, budgeting and how the money is distributed and spent. The Executive Committee needs to exercise a stronger hand and become more sophisticated. This is going to be a tough issue in times of economic uncertainty. It won't be resolved with a big influx of money." Hulebak was asked if Codex would ever come to consensus on consensus in standard-setting. "In my view consensus isn't

given the same access to decisions as developed countries; they feel they aren't heard. Understanding why that is, is the most important step toward resolving the consensus issue."

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RECENT CODEX SESSIONS



2nd TFAMR - Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 20th to 24th September 2008



30th CCNFSDU - Cape Town, South Africa, from 3rd to 7th November 2008



2nd TFAMR



17th CCFICS - Cebu, Philippines, from 24th to 28th November 2008



30th CCNFSDU



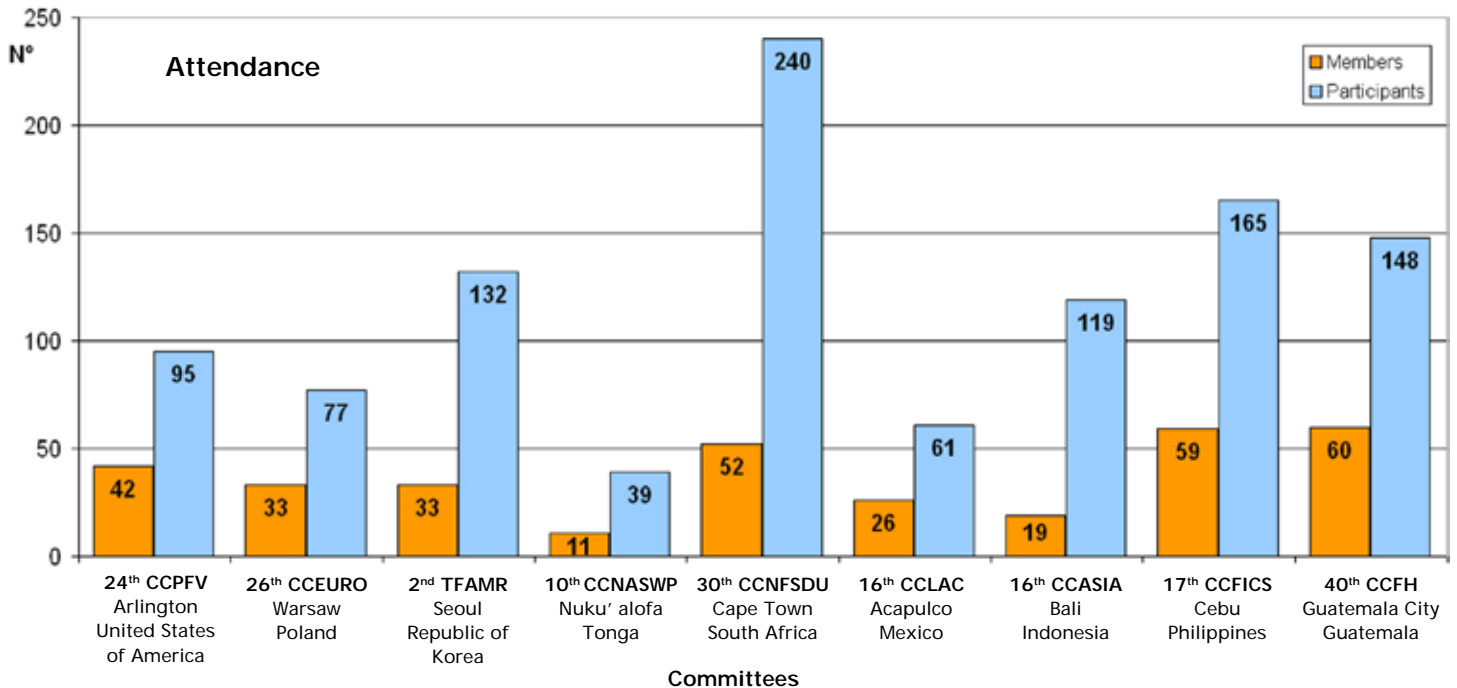
17th CCFICS



26th CCEURO - Warsaw, Poland, from 7th to 10th October 2008



26th CCEURO



INSIDE THE CODEX SECRETARIAT



The photo below shows Daniela and Patricia with a collection of Codex booklets that we printed in Russian language in cooperation with a Russian publishing house. As the books come in they sort

them and put them in our book storage until we receive requests for them from contact points or if some of our colleagues go to a training course or committee meeting where they may be of interest.



DANIELA SALVI from Italy works in the Codex Secretariat since 2001. She deals with all tasks related to documents and publications including organising translation, printing and sending. Together with Patricia she keeps the Codex archives which make up the memory of Codex. Daniela also manages the Codex electronic lists and the databases of Codex members and observers.



Patricia Lezzi and Daniela Salvi, Codex Secretariat

PATRICIA LEZZI from Argentina has joined the Codex sta recently and helps Daniela in her work with Codex documents. She also looks at the inbox of codex@fao.org so she will be the first to see many of the messages that we receive from all over the world: questions, contributions etc. Patricia will channel them to the right person in the secretariat or reply herself where possible.

Who are YOU?

Introducing CODEX CONTACT POINTS

Soon there will be 180 Codex members in the world. All of them have a Codex Contact Point. They may differ a lot in size or organizational form but all of them are essential to the success of Codex work.

In this part of the newsletter we would like to introduce YOU, the Codex Contact Points to the Codex world. Please send us your photos and a description of how YOU work before the 28th February 2009.

Questions & Answers

Questions that you may have about Codex may be of interest to others as well - please send us questions we will publish selected questions and answers here.



Season's greetings
from the Codex Secretariat

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