

EDITOR'S NOTE

Spring has finally arrived in Rome after a long and very rainy winter. With it here is our second newsletter. This is the busiest time for the Codex Secretariat with Codex meetings almost every week and a lot of work for the preparation of the 32nd session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Rome, 30 June to 4 July) where we hope to meet many of you.

In this edition we welcome 4 new members of the Commission (Montenegro, Comoros, Tajikistan and Djibouti) and you will find presentations of the contact points from the Netherlands, Tajikistan, Syria, Kenya and Ghana.

As usual there are reports and photographs of recent meetings and a collection of facts and fiction about Codex. This will also be uploaded on the Codex Website and will be available in French and Spanish as well. We have collected these because the Codex Secretariat and many of you are receiving similar questions based on rumours which attack Codex in a sometimes very harsh way. Please let us know if there are any additional questions that you would like us to answer.

If there is anything in particular that you would like us to include in the newsletter in the future - we are open to any suggestions

The next newsletter will come out in June 2009 just before the Commission so please send us your contributions by the end of May.



Tom Heilandt
Codex Secretariat

Up to 181 Codex Members

With great pleasure we welcome 4 new members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. That brings the membership of the Commission to 181 members (180 member countries and one member organization). The countries that have joined in recent months are:

- Montenegro**
(Region: Europe)
- Comoros**
(Region: Africa)
- Tajikistan***
(Region: Europe)
- Djibouti**
(Region: Africa)



Mr. Kazuaki Miyagishima © CODEX

“Codex has come a long way since its establishment in 1961/63 when there were only 27 members”, says Codex Secretary Kazuaki Miyagishima and adds: “this shows that countries are confident with Codex as the world forum to discuss food safety and quality matters to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade.” With the latest accessions, over 99% of the world’s population are represented in Codex. To the Codex Secretary this is a success but also a challenge: “Codex members are our clients and the more clients we have the better. But we also need to have the capacity

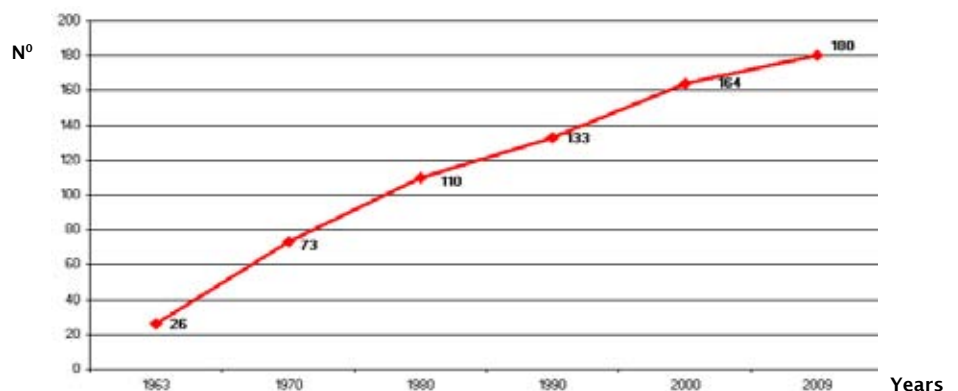
attend to their needs. We are a small team with less than 20 people, but are keen to provide as much support to Codex members who are the main actors in ensuring safe, good food for everyone.”

*Kazuaki Miyagishima
Codex Secretariat*

“
More than 99 % of the
world’s population is
represented in
CODEX ALIMENTARIUS
”

* more about the CCP Tajikistan on the 4th page

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP



RECENT CODEX SESSIONS

CCNEA 5th

Tunis, Tunisia, from 26th to 29th January 2009

The Fifth session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East exchanged updated information on national food control systems and consumer participation in food standard setting, use of Codex standards at national and regional level and nutritional issues in the region. The Committee decided to continue working on a code of practice for street-vended foods and initiate work on standards for a number of products important for the region such as Pomegranate, Harissa (hot pepper paste) and Halwa Tehenia (halwa shamia). In the future the Committee will consider new work on camel milk, date paste and molasses and discuss classification of foods based on risks.

Tom Heilandt, Codex Secretariat



CCNEA 5th, Tunis, Tunisia



Mr Rejeb Mohamed Chokri



Mr Abdelaziz Rassaa



Photo: CCNEA 5th, Tunis, Tunisia © CODEX

CCFO 21st Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia, from 16th to 20th February 2009

The 21st Session of the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils finalised the Draft Amendment to the *Standard for Named Vegetable Oils* to include rice bran oil and made substantial progress on other Proposed Draft Amendments to include palm kernel stearin and palm kernel olein. The Committee proceeded with its work on the development of criteria to assess the acceptability of substances for inclusion in a List of Acceptable Previous Cargoes in the *Code of Practice for the Transport and Storage of Fats and Oils in Bulk* and agreed to

consider further the Draft and Proposed Draft Lists of Acceptable Previous Cargoes at its next session. As regards the *Standard for Olive Oils and Olive Pomace Oils*, the Committee agreed to ask for further comments on the provisions on the level of linolenic acid in virgin olive oil and related parameters. The Committee also updated the list of additives in the current standards for fats and oils.

Selma Doyran, Codex Secretariat

CCMAS 30th

Balatonalmádi, Hungary from 9th to 13th March 2009

The 30th Session of the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling was held in Balatonalmádi, Hungary from 9th to 13th March 2009.



Photo: CCMAS 30th, Balatonalmádi, Hungary © CCP Hungary



Ms Noriko Iseki, Ms Selma Doyran



Mr Zoltan Gyaraky



Prof. Árpád Ambrus, Mr Zoltan Gyaraky, Dr Béla Kovacs

RECENT CODEX SESSIONS

CCAFRICA 18th Accra, Ghana, from 24th to 27th February 2009

Photo: CCAFRICA 18th, Accra, Ghana © CODEX



One of the key outcomes of the 18th Session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa was the identification of priority areas for the implementation of the Strategic Plan for CCAFRICA had been adopted at its last session. Key to the implementation of these priority areas was the offer of assistance from the Africa Union. The CCAFRICA also relaunched its website to enhance communication and information exchange in the region (www.codexafrica.org) and the coordinator for Africa will explore ways

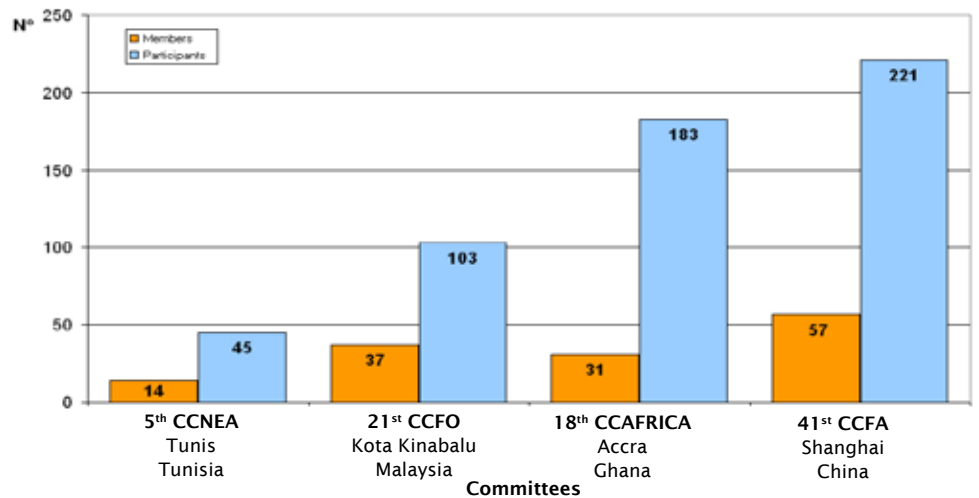
to ensure its maintenance especially during change in coordinatorship, a possibility is to have the website housed in the Africa Union. Information was exchanged on national food control systems, consumer participation in food standards setting, use of Codex standards at national and regional levels and

nutritional issues within the region.

The Committee unanimously agreed to recommend to the 32nd Session of the Commission that Ghana be reappointed as coordinator for Africa.

Verna Carolissen-Mackay, Codex Secretariat

ATTENDANCE AT RECENT CODEX MEETINGS



Samuel Sefa-Dedeh

CCFA 41st Shanghai, China from 16th to 20th March 2009

Photo: CCFA 41st, Shanghai, China : © CCFP China



The 41st Session of the Codex Committee on Food Additives was primarily involved in the continued elaboration of the Codex General Standard for Food Additives (GSFA), which encompasses a comprehensive listing of all provisions for food additives used

in all foods, regardless if said foods are standardized by Codex or not. The Committee also examined other issues related to the GSFA, in particular: the scope of certain food categories of the GSFA; the results of the 69th meeting of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), including specifications for the identity and purity of food additives and proposals for the amendments to the International Numbering System for Food Additives; and the priority list of compounds for evaluation by JECFA. As part of its term of reference, the 41st CCFA endorsed the majority of provisions for food additives and processing aids forwarded by the Committees on Processed Fruits and Vegetables, Nutrition and Food for Special Dietary Uses and Fats and Oils and by the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia. Due to time constraints, the Committee agreed to consider a further draft of the Guidelines and Principles for the Use of Processing Aids and the matters related to the presentation of food additive provisions in Codex commodity standards at its next session.

Annamaria Bruno, Codex Secretariat

Introducing CODEX CONTACT POINTS

Photo credits: © CCP Tajikistan



CCP Tajikistan

“It is our great pleasure to be the 180th member of the Codex Community. We extend our greetings to all members and hope for a productive collaboration. It is important that food safety is one of the main activities pursued by FAO and WHO to prevent food borne diseases. The Sanitary and Epidemiology Surveillance Service (SSESS) of Ministry of Health of Tajikistan along with other ministries carry out routine activities to protect the population against different diseases (including food borne) and a multisectoral approach is of paramount priority. The fast economic

“
180th CODEX
member
”

development and growing needs to protect consumers have imposed new requirements to find best solutions on food safety on the one hand to simultaneously protect consumers but avoid overly severe restrictions for producers.

Many questions arise when we are dealing with activities to protect consumers against food borne diseases every day. We have capacities and knowledge to avoid many problems but more work

is needed to bridge gaps in the protection of consumers. From the experience of having worked with an international nongovernmental organization Merlin, UNDP

and SSESS the idea came up to manage the process of solving foodborne challenges by advocating Tajikistan’s membership in the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Many supporters in other ministries were found and a team named “Codex team” was established. The team acted like the critical mass that advocated and pursued the accession to the Codex Community and Tajikistan’s membership is the result of those efforts. Our team is willing to reinforce collaborative activities among ministries, private organizations, and non-governmental organizations to successfully achieve food safety in Tajikistan. After being appointed as Codex Contact Point in February 2009, we realized that the next challenge would be establishing the National Codex Committee with membership of respective ministries and other stakeholders. We also hope that participation in Codex Committee’s meetings



CCP Tajikistan

where we seek ways of solving particular issues for our country will enable us to create a conducive environment for producer performance and customer protection.

Wish you all the best,

*Kosim Kurbonov
Codex Contact Point for Tajikistan*

CCP Syria

The Syrian Codex Contact Point was founded in the Syrian Arab Organization for Standardization and Metrology (SASMO) and is supervised by a group of engineers and specialists. The Codex Contact Point performs the following tasks: 1- receiving the E-mails from the Codex Secretariat and reading the content. 2- Rating the E-mails received according to area. 3- Re-send this E-mails to all the members of the National Codex Commission in Syria. 4- Continually communicate with the Codex Secretariat concerning any questions or comments. Sending proposals on subject important to Syria, which have been studied so that the Syrian point of view can be clarified and taken into account in the preparation of international standards. 5- Classification and conservation the brochures and the booklets of the Codex committees.

Codex Contact Point for Syria



Mohamad Alkhyal, Tharah Koubaily, Abed Alateef Mansoura © CCP Syria

Introducing CODEX CONTACT POINTS

CCP Kenya

Ms Alice Okelo Onyango is the officer of the CCP in Kenya which is located within the Kenya Bureau of Standards in Nairobi. The Kenya Bureau of Standards started its activities in the late 1970s but, as it was for other similar offices, it had not been really functional at the beginning. The development of the structure and its programmes could increase considerably with the support of the Trust Fund in 2004 and had been animated with a renewed vigour in 2007 upon the arrival of the new

cereals, beverages etc), on animal feeds, fats and oils, vegetables, drinking water, salt, sugar, water treatment chemicals and others. Attention is given to "calibration" since measurement is considered to be a fundamental requirement for quality products; the CCP is emphasizing the application of the Standardization Mark (SM) through the Kenya Bureau of Standards to guarantee the local product quality. The CCP organizes workshops and seminars aimed at sensitizing common people, that is consumers, and producers and traders on the positive impact that Standards can have not only on the local users' health but on the national economic development. Ms Onyango is the officer responsible for Codex Standards related matters, for dealing with every-day office workload, for spreading up-to-date informative materials



Alice Okelo Onyango © CODEX

and for keeping contacts with other CCPs and the Codex office in Rome on a regular basis. She is the person responsible for the arrangements of the above-mentioned workshops and seminars in the country and her personal believes is that, after so many meetings have been held, it is time to become more effective and to make efforts to have Codex Standards included into the national budgets. Thus, a lot has been done so far but still a lot is to be done! .

Valeria Scorza, Codex Secretariat

“
A lot has been done so far but still a lot is to be done!
”

Director whose major interest has been to strengthen the importance of standards in food production and trade. The laboratories in the centre are fully operational and equipped to carry out various tests, including on food products (meat, dairy,

CCP Netherlands

Nature and Food Quality since 2004. Tanja is responsible for all preparations of Dutch Codex meetings and creates Dutch position papers for EC meetings. To be as transparent as possible, different ministries, industry and consumer organizations are invited for these Dutch Codex meetings. Three times a year she organizes a meeting for all heads of delegation of the different Codex meetings, these meetings are used to exchange experiences and discuss strategic subjects. As it is very important to inform all different parties about Codex matters, the ministry has set up a Dutch Codex website www.codexalimentarius.nl. The CCP is responsible for this site and also creates a Codex Newsletter approximately six times a year. The CCP is the contact point in the Netherlands for all questions regarding Codex matters. She works closely with the EC Codex Secretariat and the Codex Secretariat in Rome. The CCP is also organizing the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods. At the moment she works four days a week but after her maternity leave, she will work 3 days a week on Codex matters.

“
CODEX member since 1963
”

Codex Contact Point for Netherlands



In the Netherlands, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports are both responsible for Codex matters.

The Dutch Codex Secretariat is within the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and consists of a Codex coordinator and a Codex Contact Point (CCP), both are working within the department of Food Quality and Animal Health.

Tanja Akesson is the CCP and has held this position since the beginning of 2006. She has worked with the Ministry of Agriculture,

Introducing CODEX CONTACT POINTS

CCP Ghana



Mr. John Oppong-Otoo, Ms. Genevieve Ofosuhemaa

Ms Genevieve Ofosuhemaa Baah and Mr John Oppong-Otoo are the team of the Codex Contact Point in Accra, located in the premises of the Ghana Standards Board. It is a series of one-storey blocks, the open-space areas inside are divided into small smart and tidy offices. The structure includes laboratories for food quality control, drugs analysis and so on, the information and documents centre.



Ms Genevieve Ofosuhemaa

Genevieve has been the key person for the practical arrangements of the 18th Session of the CCAFRICA that has been held in Ghana from 24 to 27 February 2009. She welcomed the Codex Secretariat upon their arrival in Accra with her reassuring smile perfectly reflecting her personal believe that everything would work smoothly. On our way to the International Conference Centre, she said she had started to work with the Ghana Standards Board about

fourteen years ago.

At the very beginning, she had been sitting in a long room full of documents to which nobody seemed to pay the proper attention. Piling up papers on Codex Alimentarius, a quite unknown programme at that time. She said that the country

problems had been so many that Codex appeared to be far away from either being relevant to them or offering any solution. Suddenly, or better, slowly month after month, by going through the contents of the documents, a new consciousness arose of the real impact that Codex could have on the enhancement of the economy not only of the country but of the whole region. It had not been easy at the beginning; the idea of introducing food standards and codes had to face the general scepticism that was defeated by the gradual better understanding of the meaning of Codex and its food standards. She said that the tenacious attitude and enthusiasm of the staff of the CCP had been playing an important role in spreading around the country information on Codex activities

“

What was believed to be impossible can be possible

”

and in convincing that they could do it. Indeed, the continuous new requests for membership, which have been received up to eve of the CCAFRICA, is a proof of the ever increasing interest in Codex

programme, which is by now considered as a real asset to the development of the economy of most of the African countries. What was believed to be impossible can be possible, indeed, and she added that she is very proud of the personal contributions she could give and still keeps on giving to the work of the Ghana Standards Board in its capacity as the Codex National Contact Point for Ghana.



Mr John Oppong-Otoo

John assists Genevieve in managing all the arrangements for the committees, subcommittees and related workshops for Africa, including preparation of documents, invitations and logistics. He joined the Codex Contact Point office almost two years ago, on 1 March 2007, and despite his young age and relatively limited working experience with Codex, he is fully acquainted with the office work. He is a biochemist and he was rewarded with a fellowship last year. Because of his skills, he can give his written contributions during the preparation of some of the documents for the various meetings that are held in the region during the year. He likes his job and his enthusiasm spurs him to perform all possible tasks to make sure that things run smoothly and assist his colleague the best way he can. He thinks that a lot can be done with the joint efforts of the countries members of the CCAFRICA and the proper application of the Codex Standards. He and Genevieve monitor the Codex email account and all the other incoming/outgoing communications/queries; they use to deal with almost all requests on a very autonomous basis.

Valeria Scorza, Codex Secretariat

What work has Codex undertaken on vitamin and mineral supplements?

In the early 1990s, the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) began discussions on guidelines for vitamin and mineral supplements. This Committee is responsible for studying nutritional issues referred by the Codex Alimentarius Commission; drafting provisions, as appropriate, on the nutritional aspects of all foods; and developing standards, guidelines, or related texts for foods for special dietary uses. The Guidelines were adopted in 2005. The Guidelines apply only to supplements that contain vitamins and/or minerals, where these products are regulated as foods. The Guidelines address the composition of vitamin and mineral supplements, including the safety, purity, and bioavailability of the sources of vitamins and minerals. The Guidelines do not specify upper limits for vitamins and minerals in supplements. Instead, they provide criteria for establishing maximum

Vitamins and mineral supplements

amounts of vitamins and minerals per daily portion of supplement consumed, as recommended by the manufacturer. The criteria specify that maximum amounts should be established by scientific risk assessment based on generally accepted scientific data and taking into consideration, as appropriate, the varying degrees of sensitivity of different consumer groups. The Guidelines also address the packaging and labelling of vitamin and mineral supplements. We encourage you to read the complete text of the Guidelines at http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/standards/10206/cxg_055e.pdf

Will Codex make all nutritional supplements only available by prescription? Will Codex ban all supplements and make vitamins illegal the same way heroin is illegal?

Will all natural herbs and alternative remedies be banned by Codex?

These are some of the many unfounded rumours about Codex that can be found on the internet. The Guidelines for Vitamin and Mineral Food Supplements (CAC/GL 55-2005) adopted in 2005 do not contain provisions for the prescription or prohibition of any nutrient supplements. They do not deal with natural herbs and remedies at all.

Why are there so many rumours about Codex on the internet? Where do they come from?

These rumours started some years back when one of Codex Committees began work on guidelines for vitamin and mineral supplements. They appear to be linked to advocacy groups who wrongly believe that Codex is a threat to freedom of choice especially concerning vitamin and mineral supplements. These rumours are self-reproducing through chain email messages and other low-cost means of communication.

Genetically modified food

Is Codex promoting genetically-modified food (GM foods) and irradiated food? What about organic or halal foods?

Codex is strongly committed to promote safe foods. Amongst safe foods, Codex does not give any preference to certain kinds of foods over others. Such choice belongs to consumers. Codex has adopted principles and guidelines to assess food safety of foods derived from recombinant-DNA plants, animals and microorganisms. If a government chooses to build a regulatory mechanism to address the food safety of so-called GM foods, then they can use Codex text as a basis for it. This being said, each government is free to adopt its own policy as to the use of GM organisms in the agriculture and other sectors. At the moment, there are no internationally-agreed recommendations on the food labelling of GM foods. Governments are therefore applying their own regulations. Codex has developed standards and

a code of practice to effectively apply the irradiation technology to improve food safety, together with guidance on the labelling of irradiated foods. However, it is left to governments to determine their own approach to the use of food irradiation. Codex has adopted international recommendations on the labelling of "organic foods" and "Halal foods", in order to protect consumers from deceptive trade practices. These Codex texts are widely used by countries.

Can I trust Codex?

Codex bases its standards on the best available scientific knowledge at the time, and updates them as necessary. This is because science develops continuously and Codex decisions have to be reviewed in light of new events and discoveries. This is what the whole Codex procedure is about - to offer a neutral international forum for discussion and decision. Developing a Codex standard is a long and thorough process. In case of doubts it is likely that Codex will not develop a standard or take a longer time to build consensus especially when there are very different opinions among member governments.

Will Codex require all fruits and vegetables even organically grown ones to be irradiated and sprayed with pesticides?

No. Codex guidelines and standards deal with the safe and appropriate use of irradiation and pesticides. Codex does not prescribe the use of these techniques which is up to national legislation. At the moment, the market for irradiated food is very small and its use is mainly for herbs and spices (see the video "The pepper trail" for more information about spices <http://www.youtube.com/CodexAlim>).

I have heard that the Codex will become law on 31st December 2009. Is it true?

This is an unfounded rumour: The standards, guidelines and codes adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission are voluntary and do not therefore contain implementation deadlines or dates, nor can the Commission turn them into binding law.

INSIDE THE CODEX SECRETARIAT

Photo credits © CODEX



Raquel Imbermann and Florence de Martino, Codex Secretariat

Documents are the main mean of communication of Codex. Most of them will be issued in English, French and Spanish, in many cases translated by host governments sometimes by FAO translators. Raquel and Florence work on quality control (linguistic and format) of documents coming from translation and their distribution on the Codex website and through the Codex lists. Many messages that you receive with the sender Codex-docs come actually from them.



RAQUEL IMBERMANN from Venezuela, joined the Codex staff twelve years ago. Raquel deals with editing of all documents in Spanish and translate urgent matters when it is necessary.



FLORENCE MARTIN DE MARTINO, a French national, has recently joined the Codex staff and deals with editing of all French documents and when required with the translation of small parts of these documents.

Who are YOU?

Introducing CODEX CONTACT POINTS

There are already 181 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 the 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 by the end of May and we'll publish in the upcoming Codex Newsletters.

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.

Your frequently asked questions in the near future will also be uploaded on the Codex Website and will be available in French and Spanish as well.

Photo credits: © Codex Secretariat

CONTACTS



**World Health
Organization**

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla
00153 Rome, Italy
Telephone: +39(06)5705.1;
Telefax: +39(06)5705.4593;
Telex: 610181 FAOI
E-mail: Codex@fao.org



www.codexalimentarius.net