



Report of the U.S. Delegate, 11th Session, Codex Committee on North America and the South West Pacific

*Sept 28 - Oct 1, 2010
Nuku'alofa, Tonga*

The 11th Session of the [Codex Committee for North America and the South West Pacific \(CCNASWP\)](#), held from September 28-October 1, 2010, largely focused on issues referred from the 33rd Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) held in July 2010, including: Private Standards, a Processed Cheese Standard, and Traceability in Foods. There was also further discussion on the 2008-2013 Codex Strategic Plan and the 2008-2013 CCNASWP Strategic Plan. There were also renewed proposals for commodity standards for Kava and Nonu (Noni), two products largely consumed and traded by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs). One day prior to the Session, the FAO/WHO held a Technical Workshop entitled "Food Labeling and Date Marking." Further details on these and other items considered by the 11th Session of CCNASWP are given below.

The 11th Session of CCNASWP was attended by 25 delegates representing 13 member countries, one observer from one Member country outside of the Region (Philippines), one non-Member observer organization and representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The United States was represented by Marie Maratos, International Issues Analyst in the U.S. Codex office, FSIS, USDA.

The full report of the 11th Session is currently available on the Codex (www.codexalimentarius.net) and will soon be made available on the U.S. Codex website (<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/international-affairs/us-codex-alimentarius/recent-delegation-reports>).

Private Standards

The existence and proliferation of private standards was one of the issues referred to the coordinating committee from the 33rd Session of the CAC. The Committee recognized that most Member problems stemmed from a lack of mutual recognition of standards by private standards holders, cost increases regarding compliance and certification, and a lack of transparency and/or consultation in the development of such standards.

The majority of the PICs pointed out their limited experience in terms of compliance with private standards. They also noted the financial implications associated with meeting such standards, including the need to send samples overseas to accredited laboratories and for increased capacity building within their respective countries.

The United States welcomed the experiences raised by Members during the recent Codex meetings, including the 33rd Session of the CAC and the 11th Session of CCNASWP. The United States reiterated that Members should help ensure that Codex standard setting is efficient and addresses the needs of Members so that Codex standards are available for their use. With this in mind, the United States encouraged Members to identify gaps in Codex standards and channel suggestions for new work consistent with the mandate and procedures of Codex through the appropriate Codex Committee(s). The United States also encouraged Codex Members to meet with private sector standards developing organizations to promote Codex standards being taken into account in their work.

Processed Cheese

The 33rd Session of the CAC also referred the question on the necessity of a standard on processed cheese to the coordinating committees, since there are a variety of processed cheese production methods currently in use throughout the world.

The United States did not support the development of either an international or a regional Codex standard for processed cheese. The delegate underlined that the existing key differences with processed cheese were extensively deliberated in the Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP) without resolution, and as a result the only possible outcome was to discontinue work on this issue.

Due to varying production methods, permitted ingredients, additives, composition, and nomenclature used to distinguish products in the marketplace, the Committee agreed that it was best to discontinue work on the international standard for processed cheese. Moreover, the Committee agreed that regional standards would not reflect the product differences currently available in the market and would result in possible trade impediments in the future.

Traceability in Foods



The 32nd Session of the CAC endorsed the recommendation of the Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) that the Coordinating Committees discuss the need for further guidance on traceability/product tracing. The outcomes of these discussions will be presented at the 34th Session of the Commission in July 2011.

At this Session of CCNASWP, the United States stipulated that it was premature to propose new work for guidance on traceability/product tracing. After some discussion, the Committee agreed that there was no need, at this time, for further guidance on traceability/product tracing.

CCNASWP Strategic Plan 2008-2013

A preliminary CCNASWP Strategic Plan had been developed at the 9th Session of CCNASWP in October 2006; the revised CCNASWP Strategic Plan was then presented to the 10th Session in October 2008 for consideration. At this Session, the Delegation of Tonga introduced the report on the status of implementation of the Strategic Plan for CCNASWP 2008-2013.

Specifically, the plan focuses on, among other things, improving the coordination and communication of the Region's activities in Codex, with particular emphasis on the engagement of the PICs in developing their knowledge of issues coming before the Codex Committees. It also focuses on the need for developing country positions and submitting country comments to Circular Letters (CLs) on issues that matter to the PICs. Finally, it focuses on enhancing effective participation by the PICs in Codex, particularly through use of the Codex Trust Fund (CTF).

The CCNASWP Strategic Plan also includes provisions for strengthening the exchange of scientific and technical expertise among the developed and developing countries of the Region. The United States reaffirmed its commitment to helping other CCNASWP members with the scientific analysis in support of standards development. The delegates also discussed the need to enhance mentoring opportunities within the Region, but to not necessarily replace direct bilateral contacts.

The CCNASWP Strategic Plan seeks to develop the capability of Codex Contact Points within the Region. Until now, some Codex Contact Points have had difficulty circulating documents to their stakeholders and obtaining country positions and draft responses prior to the allotted deadlines. In order to enhance their capabilities, the Committee decided to upload all CLs on the CCNASWP website (www.ccnaswp.org) so that stakeholders and other interested parties can access the documents directly.

Codex Strategic Plan 2013-2018

The 33rd Session of the CAC agreed to circulate a questionnaire to the coordinating committees with regard to the Codex Strategic Plan of 2013-2018. The questionnaire focused on a variety of topics, including the relevance of the existing goals, the challenges Codex faces, and the goals/activities for the next plan.

The United States affirmed that all of the existing goals in the Codex Strategic Plan were relevant for the current circumstances, however the actions to achieve the objectives would need to be reviewed to take into account the challenges and priorities of future work. In this regard, the Committee identified certain challenges to future Codex work, including the influence of non-science factors, the need for effective participation of developing countries, and the strengthening of management capacity.

The United States further affirmed that the current Strategic Plan provided an adequate framework for dealing with the food safety consequences of climate change and new production technologies (e.g., nanotechnology). Therefore, when such matters arise in the future, they will be best dealt with in the relevant Committee. The CCNASWP delegates agreed that the current Strategic Plan already provided a sufficient structure for dealing with the challenges of scientific and technological developments.

Codex Trust Fund

The United States agreed with the Commission's observations that the Codex Trust Fund (CTF) has greatly benefited developing countries in increasing their participation in Codex. The United States encouraged the Commission to continue its support of the CTF and to assist developing countries in submitting work of relevance to them.

The United States indicated that the niche for the CTF lies in capacity building of national structures in developing countries to ensure effective participation (e.g., strengthening awareness and training in Codex operations). As such, the United States stated that greater emphasis should be given to Objectives 2 and 3 in order to improve the quality of their participation in Codex. Technical workshops, like the one FAO/WHO held on September 27th on "Food Labeling and Date Marking," prove useful in widening and strengthening developing country participation in Codex. After some discussion, the Committee agreed that there should be a shift in emphasis from Objective 1 to Objectives 2 and 3 (with more focus on Objective 2).



The Committee agreed that the CTF eligibility criteria were still valid, but that consideration should be given to the quality of participation. The United States stated that the CTF should monitor post-graduation participation and have some flexibility in providing assistance to countries that are no longer eligible for the CTF. The Committee agreed on the need for flexibility in the application of the eligibility criteria to ensure that graduate countries continue to participate in Codex. The United States also proposed that participant reports could help identify trends and issues regarding participation numbers. Based on all of the above, the Committee felt that it was premature to make any recommendations on the CTF's lifespan since an analysis of countries' participation and the implementation of the mid-term review were still needed.

Kava Standard

At the 10th Session of CCNASWP in October 2008, the Coordinating Committee agreed that prior to considering the standardization of Kava for food, further scientific research would be needed to clarify safety issues. At that Session, the WHO Representative presented a report (CX/NASWP 08/10/7), noting the uncertain safety of Kava. The report also noted that appropriate measures needed to be applied for the prevention of health risks arising from Kava consumption. Moreover, it indicated that it was premature to treat Kava as a food due to the effects attributed to its pharmacological properties.

In preparation for the 11th Session of CCNASWP, the PICs, working via an electronic Working Group, developed a Discussion Paper that included a Project Document, proposing an international standard for Kava in Codex.

Unfortunately, many of the core questions previously raised by the WHO were still not addressed in the Discussion Paper. Consequently, the WHO Representative tabled a Conference Room Document (CRD 2) containing the report they presented at the 10th Session on the inadequate safety assessment on Kava.

Several delegations pointed out that a number of health-related scientific and technical questions still needed to be answered. The delegates also noted the importance of determining the scope of Kava, since its usage varies among food, herbal medicine, tobacco and alcohol throughout the PICs. After some discussion, the Committee agreed that the PICs would need to further expand upon the Discussion Paper for the next session of CCNASWP. Tonga offered to lead the electronic Working Group to collect the remaining requested information on Kava.

Nonu (Noni) Standard

On the proposal of Tonga, the Committee agreed to consider a Discussion Paper on the development of a standard for Nonu (also known in some PICs as Noni). The PICs tabled a Conference Room Document (CRD 5) for their Discussion Paper on developing a commodity standard for Nonu. Similar to the Kava Discussion Paper however, the Coordinating Committee noted that there was a need to better clarify the nature, scope, safety, and intended use of Nonu. The Committee also noted that a number of scientific and technical issues needed to be resolved prior to proceeding with the development of a standard for Nonu. After some discussion, the Committee agreed to establish an electronic Working Group, led by Tonga, to revise the Discussion Paper, including the Project Document, for consideration at the next Session of CCNASWP.

FAO/WHO

During the Session, the WHO Representative informed the Coordinating Committee that the Food Secure Pacific Framework for Action was consistent with the goals of the CCNASWP Strategic Plan. The FAO Representative advised the Committee that the Pacific Food Safety and Quality Legislation Expert (PFSQLE) group was finalizing lists of competent authorities in countries from which food was exported to the Pacific as well as of laboratories in the region that could support countries with food analyses. The FAO representative also indicated a desire to host a NASWP Codex Contact Point meeting in December or January to foster better relations within the region.

The FAO Representative also introduced the outcomes from the FAO/WHO Technical Workshop on "Food Labeling and Date Marking" held on September 27th, as presented in CRD 7. He recalled the objectives of the workshop, which were to familiarize delegates with Codex labeling requirements, to provide an overview of current food labeling and date marking within the region's trading partners, and to facilitate harmonization of labeling requirements across the Pacific.

The Committee identified several priority areas for ongoing and future FAO capacity development activities, including: strengthening countries' analytical capabilities to verify compliance of imported food, training of food inspectors, assisting small businesses in meeting export requirements, and educating consumers.

New Coordinator

The Committee unanimously agreed, at the proposal of the Delegation of Samoa, to recommend Papua New Guinea as the next Coordinator for CCNASWP. Once Papua New Guinea assumes the Coordinator role, they will be tasked



with preparing a draft revised Strategic Plan for the CCNASWP 2014-2018, for consideration at the 12th Session of CCNASWP scheduled for 2012.