



## Report of the U.S. Delegate, 21st Session, Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems

October 13-17, 2014

Brisbane, Australia

The 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) convened October 13-17, 2014 in Brisbane, Australia. The session was chaired by Australia and attended by delegates from 53 Member countries, one Member Organization (the European Union) and six international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The United States was represented by U.S. Delegate Mary Stanley, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service; Camille Brewer, U.S. Food and Drug Administration; two additional governmental advisors; and one non-governmental advisor.

### Highlights

The Committee agreed to undertake new work in four areas:

- Exchange of information (including questionnaires) between countries to support food import and export;
- Guidance for monitoring the performance of national food control systems;
- Revision of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations (CAC/GL 19-1995)*; and,
- Revision of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejections of Imported Food (CAC/GL 25-1997)*.

The Committee also agreed to support continuous updating of the discussion paper on [Consideration of Emerging Issues and Future Directions for the Work of CCFICS](#), to include this document as a standing agenda item, and to use the document as a tool to identify new work. The European Union will take responsibility for the document until the next session, including:

- Maintaining the sections on the history of CCFICS and the horizon scan up-to-date;
  - Developing criteria to assist preliminary assessment and identification of priority areas that the Committee will work on in the future; and
  - Considering the effect of CCFICS work on sustainable access to safe food.
- In addition, the following discussion papers will be prepared for the next session:

- System comparability/equivalence (led by New Zealand); and
- Possible use of electronic certificates by competent authorities, including migration to paperless certification (led by the Netherlands).

A summary of the discussion of these items and other matters considered by the Committee is presented below. The official report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Session of CCFICS can be found at <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/meetings-reports/en>.

### Proposed New Work

#### *Exchange of information (including questionnaires) between countries to support food import and export*

At the last Session of CCFICS, Costa Rica, on behalf of the Codex Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC), introduced revisions to the original proposed new work on the use of questionnaires by an importing country to assess the competency of an exporting country's food control system. The Committee generally supported the new work, but agreed clarification of the precise scope of the work was needed. The Committee expressed a preference that the work be focused on the exchange of information between competent authorities of importing and exporting countries and initially limited to questionnaires relating to providing assurances in instances of new food trade. It was agreed that an electronic working group, led by Costa Rica, would revise the original project document and prepare a detailed outline of work for consideration by the next Session of CCFICS. The development of the revised discussion paper would also be advised by workshops held in Costa Rica and Belgium, to discuss the scope and to develop a better understanding of the issue.



During this session, the Committee reaffirmed its support of the new work and agreed that the scope should not be limited to new trade, given the amount of existing trade that is subject to information exchanges between countries. The document should focus on the exchange and management of information between importing and exporting countries and its scope should be limited to relevant food categories, based on risk. A project document will be submitted through the Executive Committee for critical review and approval as new work by the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (2015). An electronic working group (eWG) will be organized by New Zealand to prepare the proposed draft standard for consideration at the next Session. The eWG will be co-chaired by Brazil and Mexico and work in English and Spanish. A physical working group session may be convened.

#### ***Monitoring the performance of national food control systems***

At the last Session of CCFICS, the United States supplemented its proposal for new work on the use of performance measures to enable countries to evaluate their national food control systems, taking into consideration a survey of member countries on how they currently assess and manage the performance of their national food control systems (NFCS), including examples of performance indicators used. Based on the low response to the survey and extensive discussion during plenary, the Committee agreed that the U.S. should revise the Discussion Paper and the work should focus primarily on a country's assessment of its own system. An electronic working group, led by the U.S., was established to revise the project document and to prepare an outline of the new work for consideration at this meeting. The development of the revised discussion paper also reflected discussions at workshops in Costa Rica (December 2013) and Belgium (February 2014) to develop a better understanding of the issue.

During the current Session, Member countries expressed general support for new work in this area, recognizing that international guidance, including a consistent framework and understanding of the terminology used, would be helpful since several countries have already started working on monitoring their food control systems. FAO, WHO, and OIE are prepared to collaborate with CCFICS in the development of this new work, if it is approved, given similar work that has already been undertaken in each of these organizations. One Member country suggested that educational workshops to help inform countries as to the nature and use of performance measures could be held in conjunction with FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committee sessions.

The Committee agreed to develop guidance to assist the competent authority (ies) of a NFCS to develop appropriate tools (e.g., measurement mechanisms, indicators, analysis, and evaluations) which can help monitor, evaluate, and improve its own system. A project document will be submitted for critical review by CCEXEC and approval as new work by the CAC at its 2015 session. Assuming the new work is approved, an electronic working group (eWG) will be organized by the United States, working in English only, with the possibility of a physical working group meeting, to prepare a proposed draft standard for circulation for comments at Step 3 and consideration at the next CCFICS Session.

#### ***Revision to the Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations***

During the previous CCFICS Session, the Committee agreed on the importance of undertaking new work to revise the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). In addition to updating the text to include references to the global food safety emergency information exchange program (INFOSAN), it was agreed that the guidance should be extended to include information on the role of stakeholders in handling food safety emergency situations and the processes used in handling food safety emergency situations.

During this Session, the United States introduced the report from the electronic working group that confirmed the outline presented in CCFICS 20 provided a satisfactory basis to begin the revision of the document. During the discussion, the Committee noted that the revisions should take into account any gaps in the international environment, including available information from FAO and WHO relative to International Food Safety Authority Network (INFOSAN), Emergency Prevention System for Food Safety (EMPRES Food Safety), and International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR). It was also noted by the representative from the World Customs Organization (WCO) that the SAFE Framework of Standards to Secure and Facilitate Global Trade and Trade Recovery Guidelines are publicly available to help Member countries secure supply chains and to respond to incidents, including information exchange between Customs, other government agencies, and the private sector.

The Committee agreed to revise the existing *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) to include information relating to the roles of various parties



(government, industry, consumers) involved in food safety emergency situations and to include guidance on the process of managing food safety emergency situations, as well as updating and/or expanding the existing guidance as necessary. A project document will be submitted for critical review by CCEXEC and approval as new work by the CAC at its 2015 session. Assuming the new work is approved, an electronic working group (eWG) will be organized by the European Union to prepare a proposed draft standard for circulation for comments at Step 3 and consideration at the next CCFICS Session. The working group will be co-chaired by Chile and work in English, French and Spanish, with the possibility of a physical working group meeting before the next CCFICS session.

#### ***Draft Amendments to Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejection of Imported Food***

At the last Session, the Committee agreed to limit inclusion of the term “feed” to those situations where feed could have an impact on food safety, consistent with the scope of Codex. The Committee did not reach complete agreement on the changes recommended for the *Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejection of Imported Foods* (CAC/GL 25-1997) and agreed to reconsider the text at its next session after revision by the electronic working group, led by the United States, taking into account comments made at the session.

During this Session, the United States introduced the report of the CCFICS electronic working group, recalling the specific proposals from an electronic working group on future work on animal feeding established by CAC to include feed in the scope of CAC/GL 25-1997. The Committee noted there were shortcomings in the guidelines that went beyond the mandate to include animal feed, including the lack of consideration for the importance of informing the competent authorities of the exporting country of the reasons for rejections of food.

The Committee agreed to revise the existing guidelines to ensure adequate guidance is provided to competent authorities of importing and exporting countries, as well as other relevant parties, on the exchange of information and subsequent interactions on rejections of imported food and, where relevant, feed. A project document for new work in this area was drafted during the session for critical review by CCEXEC and approval by the CAC at its July 2015 session. If the work is approved, an electronic working group (eWG) will be organized by Australia to prepare a proposal for circulation for comment and consideration at the next Session. The eWG will be co-chaired by Canada, working in English only, with the possibility of a physical working group meeting in English, French, and Spanish.

#### **Consideration of Emerging Issues and Future Directions for the Work of CCFICS**

The United States introduced the strategic vision discussion paper, which included discussion of relationships to the Codex Strategic Plan, a history of CCFICS, a summary of the discussions held at the 20<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFICS (2013), a horizon scan of emerging issues and their potential impact on the work of CCFICS, as well as possible new work. The Chairperson proposed, and the Committee agreed, that the document should be kept up-to-date and used as a tool to identify new work. The European Union will take responsibility for the document until CCFICS 22 (2016) and will maintain the sections on the history of CCFICS and the horizon scan; develop criteria to assist preliminary assessment and identification of priority areas for future Committee work; and consider the impact of CCFICS work on sustainable access to safe food.

The committee agreed to the development of discussion papers on system comparability/equivalence (to be led by New Zealand) and the possible use of electronic certificates by competent authorities, including migration to paperless certification (led by the Netherlands).

#### **Other Matters**

##### ***Halal***

The Chairperson recalled that when discussing a project document submitted by Egypt, the Executive Committee had recognized the importance and growing volume of trade and consumption of halal food worldwide and had recommended that the project document be re-scoped to identify gaps in existing relevant Codex texts, and that the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) and CCFICS should be consulted to assist the CCEXEC and the Commission in taking a decision on whether to undertake new work. Given that a revised project document was submitted to CCFL (scheduled to meet the week after CCFICS), the Chairperson proposed to hold a brief exchange on the topic and possible relevance to CCFICS.



The Delegation of Lebanon introduced a conference room document (CRD11) on behalf of Lebanon and Egypt that included the project proposal for new work in CCFL ([CX/FL 14/42/8](#)). It was acknowledged that a document, for submission to CCFICS, will be completed in the upcoming session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNEA), taking into consideration the discussions held in CCFICS and CCFL. The delegation also urged the Committee to consider the use of Arabic language in all discussions related to this topic to allow the widest possible participation of interested parties, which the Chair agreed to consider.

Generally, the Committee recognized the importance of halal food trade, though the project proposal did not identify gaps in existing Codex standards that established a role for CCFICS or other Codex committees in elaborating further guidance within the scope of Codex. It was agreed that more reflection was needed in regard to what international guidance should include and what would be the role of CCFICS.

#### *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Export Certificate Working Group Status Update*

At a side event/informational session conducted in conjunction with the CCFICs meeting, the United States provided a status update on the APEC Export Certificate Working Group. The purpose was to share information on the work to date and to determine areas of overlap that would benefit from closer coordination between the CCFICS and APEC delegates. The APEC Export Certificate Work is closely linked to work under the mandate of CCFICS.

The session began with a brief history of the APEC Export Certificate work to date, including a recap of the 2010 Roundtable, the 2012 Workshop and the 2014 completion of the APEC Export Certificate Roadmap that was presented September 2014 at a Special Session of the APEC Food Safety Cooperation Forum (FSCF) in Beijing, China. The APEC Export Certificate Roadmap is an action plan for three areas of work: a certificate compendium to demonstrate the multitude of documents required per shipment, an export dictionary to create a common understanding of export terminology and a proposal for an electronic certification package. The FSCF endorsed continued work in these areas as well as new work around risk profiles for food categories.

During the discussion, it was noted that the number of documents required per shipment for food products can be excessive and should be reviewed to determine whether the number of required documents could be harmonized/streamlined or eliminated. The concept of having an export dictionary to ensure that the industry and regulators have a common understanding and expectation of required information and terminology was well received. There was interest in work within APEC on electronic certification, in particular, the value in ensuring that any electronic certification standard package be developed with input from the widest group of interested stakeholders, including the World Customs Organization, the IPPC, OIE and other interested parties. Two potential deliverables identified in the APEC work include: (1) an e-cert resource library housed on an APEC website that will become a repository for relevant information related to electronic certification, and (2) an APEC forum for discussion on electronic certification issues, and areas of concern (e.g., resources required to develop electronic certification systems). Moving forward, the APEC Export Certificate Working group will continue to report on their efforts to CCFICS.

#### **Next Session**

The 22nd Session of CCFICs is tentatively scheduled to take place in approximately 18 months at a time and place to be announced.