



## Delegate's Report, 44th Session, Codex Committee on Food Labelling

October 16-20, 2017  
Asuncion, Paraguay

The 44<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) was held in Asunción, Paraguay, October 16-20, 2017. The Session was chaired by Ms. Lyzette Lamondin of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and co-chaired by Dr. Laura Mendoza of the National Institute of Food and Nutrition, Paraguay. The U.S. delegation was headed by Ms. Felicia Billingslea of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, with support provided by Mr. Jeff Canavan (alternate U.S. Delegate) of the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, six additional government advisors, and two non-government advisors.

The meeting was successful in resolving remaining issues related to date marking and forwarding the revision of the General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods (GSLPF) to the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) for final adoption at its July 2018 session. Other matters discussed at the session will require further work and attention, including a proposal from the World Health Organization secretariat that CCFL consider new work on labeling of alcoholic beverages.

### SUMMARY/HIGHLIGHTS:

- The Committee agreed to retain the list of exemptions from the date marking provisions of the GSLPF without change, noting further that the list was illustrative only, not exhaustive, and that the exemptions would not apply if food safety were compromised. This resolved the remaining issues in the document, and it was forwarded to the CAC for final adoption.
- CCFL agreed to take up new work on *Front of Package Labeling* (subject to approval by the CAC), but did not agree to new work on consumer preference claims or a number of other topics discussed in the plenary, including alcohol labeling. Several of these proposals will be the subject of discussion papers to be reviewed at the next session of CCFL. The Russian Federation will prepare the discussion paper on labeling of alcoholic beverages, with assistance from the European Union (EU), Ghana, India, and Senegal.
- Work on a standalone guidance document for labeling *non-retail containers* will continue to be the focus of an electronic working group (eWG) led by India and co-chaired by Costa Rica and the United States.

The official report of the meeting, REP18/FL, can be found on the website of the Codex Alimentarius Commission at [www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/en/](http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/en/). The following paragraphs discuss the conclusions of the Committee in more detail.



## MEETING SUMMARY

### *Date marking (Revision of the GSLPF), Agenda Item 5*

At its last session, the Committee concluded the only outstanding issues requiring further consideration were the draft criteria for exemptions from date marking. The Committee agreed to focus its discussions on this section of the document, both in plenary and in an in-session working group led by Canada.

The Committee amended the chapeau section to clarify that exemptions would not apply if food safety were compromised, and to provide flexibility to Competent Authorities to apply the criteria depending on their needs. The Committee considered language submitted by the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene and agreed the following text: *Where safety is not compromised and quality does not deteriorate because the nature of the food is such that it cannot support microbial growth (e.g., alcohol, salt, acidity, low water activity under intended or stated storage conditions.)*

After some discussion, the Committee agreed to retain the list of exemptions without any amendments, inserted a footnote to indicate that the list was illustrative, and agreed to forward the proposed draft revision to CAC for final adoption at Step 8 at its 41<sup>st</sup> Session (CAC41, July 2018), noting that there may be a need to standardize abbreviations for date marks in the future. The Russian Federation expressed a reservation based on their view that all foods deteriorate over time and that the list of exemptions included many food categories that could pose safety risks to consumers.

### *Discussion Paper on Labeling of Non-retail Containers (Agenda Item 6)*

As eWG chair, India introduced this agenda item, summarized the work of the eWG, and posed the question of whether this guidance should be a stand-alone document or should be inserted in the GSLPF in order to further proceed with work on the guidance.

The United States position was that the document could best be incorporated into the GSLPF, which would improve consistency in the text, minimize the need for cross-referencing another document, reduce redundancies, and better assist commodity committees in developing labelling requirements by only requiring reference to single document. Incorporating text on non-retail labelling into the GSLPF would require only minor amendments to the title and scope of the GSLPF and could be done without opening up any other parts of the general standard.

Despite these points, the Committee agreed to keep the guidance as a stand-alone document, to use cross-references to relevant Codex texts in the final document to ensure consistency, and to re-establish an eWG, chaired by India and co-chaired by Costa Rica and the United States, working in English and Spanish, to continue developing the guidance for consideration at the next session, taking into account comments submitted at this session and the views expressed in plenary. The Committee agreed that consideration would be given to convening a physical working



group prior to the next session to consider comments and prepare a revised proposal for consideration.

In light of the fact that many commodity standards also have provisions about labeling non-retail containers, CCFL agreed to inform commodity committees of its ongoing work and that current provisions in other standards might need to be reconsidered in light of the final guidance developed by CCFL.

#### *Discussion Paper on Front of Pack Labeling (Agenda Item 7)*

Costa Rica, as Chair of the eWG, introduced the item and recalled that the mandate of the eWG focused on three broad aspects: stock-taking of the existing systems of FOP, the need for development of principles for FOP, and preparation of a discussion paper. Costa Rica highlighted the recommendation of the eWG to start new work to develop harmonized guidelines on FOP. The Chair of the Committee drew the attention of CCFL to the workshop to raise awareness of FOP held in the margins of the session and noted that the large number of attendees demonstrated that there was a lot of interest in the subject. She invited comments on the discussion paper to determine whether there was support for starting new work. The Committee expressed broad support for developing guidance on use of simplified nutrition information on the front of packages.

The Committee considered a revised project document, clarified the scope, and identified the main aspects to be covered. The Committee further clarified that the main aspects to be covered should be broad and flexible enough to allow further discussion to take place in the eWG. The Committee also noted that World Health Organization reviews on nutrition labelling as well as any relevant Codex texts, including the Guidelines on Nutrition Labelling, would be considered in the development of the guidance.

The Committee agreed to start new work to develop guidelines on FOP systems, and to submit the project document for approval to CAC41. Subject to approval of the new work, the Committee agreed to establish an eWG, chaired by Costa Rica and co-chaired by New Zealand, working in English and Spanish, to prepare proposed draft guidelines and to make recommendations on the placement of the guidelines, for circulation for comments and consideration at the next session of the Committee.

#### *Discussion Paper on Consumer Preference Claims (Agenda Item 8)*

Turkey summarized the main findings of the discussion paper. The Committee agreed that, although the information provided in the discussion paper was useful, there was no need to start new work at this time.

#### *Future Work and Direction for CCFL (Agenda Item 9)*

Canada introduced the discussion paper and noted that it covered previous, current and potential future suggestions for new work by the Committee. The Committee considered



the items identified as potential future work and noted broad support for them, and in particular for the following: internet sales/e-commerce; allergen labeling; innovation – use of technology in food labelling; alcoholic beverage labelling; criteria for the definition of “high in” nutritional descriptors for fats, sugars and sodium; and labelling of foods in multipack format.

While there was broad support for work on these items, the United States and some others raised concerns about the proposed work on alcoholic beverage labeling, namely that some of the points raised in the WHO discussion paper were outside the mandate and traditional scope of CCFL work, (e.g., health warnings on labels). These issues should be dealt with by national governments and should not be the subject of any future work. There was already considerable work on alcoholic beverage labeling in other international organizations, and Codex work was therefore not necessary at this time. The United States submitted a Conference Room Document (CRD16) outlining its position. Other delegations expressed the view that a comprehensive review of national legislation and work in other international fora was needed. In introducing the discussion paper, the WHO representative stated his view that labeling had unique potential to provide accurate information to consumers to protect their health at the points of sale and consumption, including information on alcohol content, caloric value, ingredients and health risks associated with alcohol consumption.

Some African countries highlighted the need for work on alcoholic beverage labelling due to increased availability and consumption of alcoholic beverages in their countries. The existing labelling regimes in such countries did not provide sufficient information, such as alcohol content; in some instances, alcohol was being offered in quantities as little as 100 ml without any labelling. The Committee noted that any work to be undertaken should be within the purview of CCFL and that “information on the existing state of play would be needed to further develop any new work.” (REP 18/FL, Paragraph 57).

The Committee agreed to develop discussion papers for consideration at the next session, with the following lead countries:

- Internet sales/e-commerce (United Kingdom, with assistance from Chile, India, Japan, and Ghana)
- Allergen labelling (Australia, with assistance from the United Kingdom and the United States)
- Innovation – use of technology in food labelling (Canada)
- Alcoholic beverage labelling (Russian Federation with assistance from the EU, Ghana, India and Senegal)
- Criteria for the definition of “high in” nutritional descriptors for fats, sugars and sodium (Canada and India)
- Labelling of foods in joint presentation and multipack formats (Colombia)



### *Other Issues*

The Committee declined to advise the Committee on Fats and Oils (CCFO) on criteria for determining high/mid oleic acid vegetable oils, concluding that this was a compositional/technical issue best resolved by CCFO.

CCFL also declined to consider a discussion paper on “biopesticides, biofertilizers and biostimulants,” pending its consideration by the Committee on Pesticide Residues.

The Committee reviewed and endorsed labeling provisions for a number of regional and commodity standards, including standards for

- Laver
- Yacon
- Unrefined shea butter
- Cumin
- Dried thyme
- Black, white and green pepper
- Fish oil
- Doogh
- Dairy permeate powders
- Annexes for certain quick frozen vegetables in the Standard for Quick Frozen Vegetables.

### *Next Session*

The 45<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFL will be held in approximately 18 months, with final arrangements subject to confirmation by the Canadian and Codex Secretariats.