



**U.S. Delegate's Report, 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH)  
January 21-25, 2019  
Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Kerala, India**

**Introduction**

The Fourth Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH4) was held in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum), Kerala, India, from January 21- 25, 2019. Dr. M. R. Sudharshan, former Director of Research, Spices Board of India, chaired the session. The Session was attended by 26 member countries, one member organization (the European Union) and one observer organization.

The United States was represented by Delegate Dorian LaFond, Agricultural Marketing Service/Specialty Crops Program, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Alternate Delegate Aparna Tatavarthy, Spices and Seasoning Mixes Team, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (CFSAN), Food and Drug Administration (FDA); and Marie Maratos of the U.S. Codex Office, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The Governor of the State of Kerala, Shri Justice (retired) P. Sathasivam officially opened the session. He emphasized the relevance of the CCSCH's work to the global trade in spices, along with the livelihood of the multitude of small producers. Other welcoming addresses included those from Mr. Shri Suresh Prabhu, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Civil Aviation, Government of India; Mrs. Rita Teatota, Chairperson of the Food Safety and Standards Board of India; and Dr. M.K. Shanmuga Sundaram, Secretary of the Spices Board of India.

This was a very successful meeting for the United States as the CCSCH accepted most of the proposals presented by the United States, including further exploration of the Grouping Format for the Standard Layout, as presented in a Conference Room Document (CRD 03) on the Draft Group Standard for Dried Fruits and Berries. This CRD was the basis of discussion on the group standard template. The CCSCH requested the United States to continue developing the template, taking into consideration the points raised during the discussion and recommendations made for further discussion at the next session (CCSCH5, in approximately 18 months). The Committee agreed that the grouping format would be implemented in a phased manner.

U.S. interventions on Tolerances for Defects Allowed resulted in many producing/exporting countries' supporting the view that defects must be based on product characteristics, production methods, established trade practices, and consumer safety. Otherwise, if only one factor is taken into consideration, the standard becomes an impediment to well-established trade practices.



CCSCH4 completed one standard and will submit it to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, set for July 2019 (CAC42), for final adoption. In addition, five draft standards were recommended for advancement to Step 5 (allowing for another round of comments), while two draft standards were returned to Step 2, for further redrafting.

The full report of CCSCH4, including the texts of the proposed standards, can be found in REP 19/SCH, posted on the Codex website at:

<http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/committee/en/?committee=CCSCH>

### **Meeting Highlights**

- The CCSCH accepted a U.S. proposal for composition requirement (minimum 80.0% of the name listed) in all CCSCH standards when trade names are used.
- The Committee re-affirmed that food additives, namely anticaking agents, may be used in the ground/powdered forms of Spices and Culinary Herbs (SCH) to maintain their free-flowing characteristics. It aligned the text referencing the *General Standards for Food Additives* (GSFA) with the format proposed in the *Codex Procedural Manual*. The Committee agreed to forward the following generic statement to the Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) for endorsement: “Anticaking agents may be used in the powdered form of the product in accordance with Table 3 of the *General Standard for Food Additives* (CXS 192-1995).”
- The CCSCH noted the concerns regarding the need to address pyrrolizidine alkaloid contamination from weeds and agreed to insert a reference in Section 5 (Contaminants) to all appropriate standards on the *Code of Practice for Weed Control to Prevent and Reduce Pyrrolizidine Alkaloid Contamination in Food and Feed* (CXC 74-2014).
- The revision of the labeling requirements in the standards discussed was quite complicated. Some delegations sought to use labelling requirements to gain trade advantages by seeking to impose mandatory indications of crop year, region of production, country of origin/geographical indications and scientific names/species. The Codex Committee on Food Labeling (CCFL) may be asked to evaluate the revised requirements.
- In discussions on Physical Characteristics/Tolerances for Defects, some delegations insisted on lower defects than ones recommended by the United States without any scientific justification or implementation history/published guidelines. These delegations did not take into consideration product characteristics, production methods, and/or trade practices. The United States is concerned that if these factors are not taken into consideration in setting the Tolerances for Defects Allowed, the Codex standards developed in CCSCH will become irrelevant and an impediment to trade.



### **Draft Standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Garlic**

- Substantial progress was made on this draft standard at CCSCH4. The Styles section was adjusted to include a definition for “whole” for solo garlic and intact cloves. All the other provisions were aligned with the requirements of the Group Standard layout format. Since all outstanding issues were addressed, the CCSCH agreed to forward the draft standard to the CAC42 for final adoption at Step 5/8 (accelerated procedure).

### **Draft Standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Oregano**

- There was extensive discussion again at this session regarding what should be covered by this standard. CCSCH agreed that the draft standard should cover the different plant species traded as oregano, both *lippia* spp. and *origanum* spp.
- The classification of oregano into three grades/classes was made optional to better reflect current trade practices. The Committee agreed that when oregano is traded as ‘unclassified/ungraded,’ the minimum Chemical Characteristics and Tolerances for Defects Allowed/Physical Characteristics in Class II apply as the minimum requirement.
- CCSCH also adjusted the Tolerances for Defects Allowed/Physical Characteristics and Chemical Characteristics; however, differences persist within the CCSCH on the appropriate levels of tolerances for certain defects (insect fragments, other excreta, etc.).
- The particle size requirement in powdered styles was broadened to reflect different name and size screens used in trade, and the Committee agreed that size requirements would only be applied upon request, supported by documentary evidence that a specific particle size was requested.
- Based on the amount of work still outstanding, the Committee agreed to advance the draft standard to Step 5 for another round of comments and to re-establish the electronic Working Group (EWG) to continue development of the draft standard.
- The United States looks forward to further discussion on the Defects Allowed/Physical Characteristics to have the draft standard for oregano reflect the needs of all Codex members and current trade practices.

### **Draft Standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Ginger**

- Substantial progress was made on the standard at the session. More specifically, the CCSCH amended the product definition in line with the revised Group Standard Format, presented by the United States, that more closely reflects naming practices in trade-common name, trade name, and scientific name. The different trade names (Yellow, White, Blue Hawaiian and Baby Ginger) were not included, but will be further evaluated in preparation for CCSCH5 (September 2020).
- The Styles section was adjusted to reflect the product characteristics which included a definition for “Whole Ginger.”



- The residues from processing aids (Sulphur dioxide and Calcium dioxide) were not resolved. Some delegations wanted more in-depth review of the necessity and if processing aids alter the nature of the product. There was even some discussion regarding whether such products would even fall within the purview of the CCSCH.
- Since there are still outstanding issues, the United States supports the submission of this draft standard to CAC42 for adoption at Step 5. The United States also supports forwarding to the Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) for further comment on the use and residues from bleaching agents.

### **Draft Standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Basil, Draft Standard for Cloves, Draft Standard for Saffron**

- These three draft standards were discussed within the framework of the Grouping Standard Layout Template; however, the chemical and physical characteristics remain as the unresolved sections in all three standards.
- The CCSCH agreed to establish EWGs for each draft standard to further develop the text for consideration at the next session. Some of the considerations for the EWGs include:
  - Draft standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Basil: inclusion of Field basil (*Salvia occidentalis*) and Sacred basil (*Pimpinella anisoidis*) was opposed by some delegations.
  - Draft standard for Saffron: levels of picocrocin and safranal markers led to a deep discussion during the session that warrants further exploration.
- As there are still a number of critical issues to resolve, the Committee agreed to submit these three draft standards to CAC42 for adoption at Step 5 and allow for another round of comments.

### **Draft Standard for Dried and/or Dehydrated Chili and Paprika, Draft Standard for Nutmeg**

- These two standards were discussed within the framework of the Grouping Template as they were aligned with the standard layout; however, they will require further basic development since there was no consensus on the Chemical and Physical Characteristics sections of both standards, including how some of the chemical requirements are expressed and the use of processing aids for bleaching purposes and for color retention.
- Consequently, CCSCH returned both draft standards for re-drafting at Step 2 in EWG.

### **Working Group (WG) on Priorities and Group Standards**

- An in-session WG, led by the United States, on the grouping approach to Standardization and Work Priorities was tasked with considering proposals for new work, deciding on a method for implementing and elaborating group standards, and finalizing the group standard template/layout.



- The United States used the CRD on the draft Group Standard for Dried Fruits and Berries (CRD 03) to lead a discussion to evaluate the Group Standard Layout. The CRD included general requirements for the subgroup of spices (spices with the same plant part used), with Annexes covering specific chemical or physical characteristics (e.g., tolerances for defects) for each spice or herb within the group.
- The United States, as WG Chair, explained that the project proposal requirements for the development of individual Codex commodity standards, per the guidelines in the *Codex Procedural Manual*, are not compatible with the development of group standards and that this should be brought to the attention of the CAC. Also, because standardization elaboration is demand driven, it is not practical to elaborate standards for only the most economically important spices and culinary herbs (SCH) within a group. Hence, the grouping format helps ensure that no identified SCH are omitted from standard development.
- The WG made a number of recommendations, including confirmation that the six groups based on the part of the plant the SCH is derived from is still valid and can be updated as necessary.
- Once presented to plenary, the CCSCH reconfirmed its decision to develop standards based on the parts of the plant the SCH is derived from rather than individual standards for each named commodity. The CCSCH also agreed to the proposed grouping strategy of elaborating general requirements for a group of spices or herbs falling under the same plant part, with Annexes covering the specific chemical or physical characteristics (e.g., tolerances of defects) for each spice or herb within the group.
- We expect that the Group Standard format will be phased in on the work of the CCSCH.
- CCSCH also requested the United States to continue developing the Group Standard template, taking into consideration the points raised during the discussion and recommendations made for further discussion at CCSCH5.
- The United States continues to advocate the grouping strategy for developing standards in CCSCH.

### **Date and Place of the Next Session**

CCSCH5 will take place in approximately 18 months. Final arrangements will be subject to confirmation by the host government (India) in consultation with the Codex Secretariat.