



U.S. Delegate's Report of the 3rd Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs

The Third Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH) was held in Chennai, India, from 6 to 10 February 2017. Dr. M. R. Sudharshan, former Director of Research, Spices Board of India, chaired the session. The Session was attended by 36 Member countries, one Member organization (the European Union) and four Observer organizations.

The United States was represented by Delegate Dorian LaFond, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Marie Maratos of the U.S. Codex Office, Food Safety and Inspection Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Mrs. Rita Teatota, India's Commerce Secretary, officially opened the session by stating the global importance of culinary herbs and spices in both food and non-food sectors. She noted the tremendous growth in the spice trade, the need to harmonize quality standards and the importance of eliminating trade distortions.

This was a very successful meeting for the United States, as the CCSCH accepted all of the proposals presented by the United States. The two Discussion Papers prepared by the United States (relating to the use of a glossary of standard terms and practical definitions for "further processing"), along with the conclusions of the Priorities and the Grouping in-session working groups chaired by the United States, were well received by the Committee. CCSCH also completed work on two standards, which will be presented for final adoption at the July 2017 session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), and agreed to propose new work on nine additional standards. The U.S. delegation's experience, outreach efforts, active membership in every CCSCH working group, and ability to present positions and comments clearly and effectively resulted in the CCSCH seeking out U.S. input/assistance and leadership to resolve some complicated technical and procedural issues in this fairly new Codex Committee.

The full report of the 3rd Session of the CCSCH, including the texts of the standards proposed for adoption at the July 2017 CAC, can be found in REP 16/SCH, posted on the Codex website at: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings-reports/detail/en/?meeting=CCSCH&session=3>.

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Discussion Papers prepared by the United States

- **Glossary of Terms for Use in CCSCH Standards:** The work was accepted by the CCSCH without any changes and was immediately used in the draft standards being elaborated. The Committee also agreed to maintain this document as an internal reference tool to be used as required when drafting future standards.



- **The Definition of “Further Processing” within the Scope of CCSCH Standards** – This work on the proposed definitions for use in CCSCH “Further Processing” and “Industrial Processing” were accepted by the CCSCH without any changes and were immediately used in the draft standards being elaborated.

Draft Standard for Cumin

- Substantial progress was made on the standard at the session. More specifically, the CCSCH adopted the revised scope of the standard, deleted the term “further processing” and included an exclusion clause for industrial processing. It also accepted the justification provided by the United States on production, handling systems, and trade practices to include more parameters/defects along with numerical limits within the *Table of Physical Defects/ Tolerances for Defects Allowed*. In addition, the committee agreed to the use of a general reference to the *Codex General Standard for Food Additives* (GSFA) regulating the use and type of anticaking agents.
- Since all outstanding issues were addressed at this session, the CCSCH agreed to forward the draft Standard to the CAC for final adoption at Step 8. It also agreed to forward the additional methods for endorsement and request the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CCMAS) to propose alternative equivalent analytical methods that could be used.
- Upon further review, the United States would like some additional clarification surrounding the total defects allowed in the *Table of Physical Defects/ Tolerances for Defects Allowed* prior to final adoption at Step 8 at the upcoming CAC (July 2017).

Draft Standard for Dried Thyme

- Similar to the Draft Standard for Cumin, substantial progress was made on this standard at the session. The CCSCH aligned the scope with the proposed changes to the cumin standard-- deleting the term “further processing” and including an exclusion clause for industrial processing. It did not, however, broaden the Scope of the standard to include other plant species commonly traded as thyme. It is expected that through the proposed “Grouping format” for standards other plant species traded as thyme will eventually be standardized as well. The CCSCH accepted the justification provided by the United States on production, handling systems, and trade practices to include more parameters/defects along with numerical limits within the *Table of Physical Defects/ Tolerances for Defects Allowed*. In addition, the committee agreed to the use of a general reference to the *Codex General Standard for Food Additives* (GSFA) regulating the use and type of anticaking agents
- Since all outstanding issues were addressed at this session, the CCSCH agreed to forward the draft Standard to the CAC for final adoption at Step 8.
- Upon further review, the United States would like some additional clarification surrounding the total defects allowed in the *Table of Physical Defects/*



Tolerances for Defects Allowed prior to final adoption at Step 8 at the upcoming CAC (July 2017).

Draft Standard for Black White and Green Peppers

- Similar to the two draft standards mentioned above, substantial progress was made on this standard at the session. The CCSCH aligned the scope with the proposed changes to the other two standards, deleting the term “further processing” and including an exclusion clause for industrial processing. With regard to classification, the Committee agreed to maintain only three classes in line with current trade practices.
- Since all outstanding issues were addressed at this session, the CCSCH agreed to forward the draft Standard to the CAC for final adoption at Step 5/8. Provisions for food additives, labelling and methods of analysis will be referred for endorsement by the Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA), Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) and CCMAS, respectively.
- Based on further input following the CCSCH however, the United States would like to propose some additional changes and edits to the draft standard, in particular to Table 2. As such, we believe standard should advance only to Step 5 for adoption, rather than to Step 5/8, so that the CCSCH may address these issues at the next session.

Draft Standard for Oregano

- After discussion of the appropriate scope of the oregano draft standard (whether it should cover different plant species traded as oregano or the *origanum* species only), the CCSCH decided to return the proposed standard for redrafting at Step 2, to include all products commercially traded as oregano. This would allow for the development of a single standard with separate provisions for each species where necessary. This position was supported by the United States delegation as well as industry representatives at the session.
- The U.S. delegation informed the CCSCH that despite its full participation in the electronic Working Group (eWG) and timely submission of written comments, these were never considered by the eWG chairs. Similar concerns were expressed by other delegations.
- The Committee agreed to re-establish the eWG to rewrite the proposed standard with the following precise terms of reference:
 - i. To examine the documents already developed in the Committee;
 - ii. To prepare a revised proposed draft standard for all products traded as oregano;
 - iii. To consider how a draft standard could be, subsequently, incorporated into a grouping under the new “Grouping” system being developed in the Committee.



- The United States is pleased to see this draft standard returned to Step 2/3 for redrafting to ensure that the draft standard on oregano will reflect the needs of all Codex members and current trade practices.

Grouping (of Spices and Culinary Herbs (SCH)) Approach to Standardization

- The proposed grouping strategy involves elaborating general requirements for a group of spices or herbs falling under the same plant part, with Annexes covering the specific chemical or physical requirements (e.g., tolerances of defects) for each spice or herb within the group.
- The Committee agreed to develop group standards based on the following plant parts as previously proposed by the United States at the 2nd CCSCS Session (2015): dried floral parts; dried fruits and berries; dried seeds; dried leaves; bark; dried rhizomes, roots and bulbs; culinary herbs; and plant products that do not fall into any of the identified categories.
- The current list of spices and culinary herbs contain 113 species and is not considered exhaustive; it can regularly be updated.
- Though the 3rd Session approved the elaboration of nine new standards, the United States believes there is an opportunity to demonstrate how standardization can be achieved based on the groups outlined above.
- The Committee agreed to inform the CAC of the grouping strategy for developing horizontal SCH standards which would enable the Committee to standardize all 113 SCH in a timely manner.
- The United States supports the grouping strategy for developing standards in the CCSCS.

Date and Place of the Next Session

- The 4th Session of the CCSCS will take place in approximately 18 months, possibly in Nigeria. Final arrangements will be subject to confirmation by the host government (India) in consultation with the Codex Secretariat.