



20th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems

February 18-22, 2013
Chiang Mai, Thailand

The United States is pleased with the outcome of the 20th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS). The Committee:

- Completed work on the *Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems*, recommending adoption by the Codex Alimentarius Commission at Steps 5/8.
- Agreed in principle to undertake new work on three areas, though also agreeing that further discussion and clarification of the precise nature of the work was still necessary on all items. The three areas are:
 - The use of questionnaires and/or other mechanisms that an importing country may use to assess the competency of an exporting country's food safety system (or parts thereof);
 - The use of performance measures to monitor the regulatory performance of a national food control system; and,
 - A revision to the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations*.

As part of Codex's 50th year celebration, the Committee, held a discussion on emerging challenges and the role of CCFICS. It was agreed to develop a Discussion Paper to address the topic of where food safety control systems and their associated food import and export inspection and certification systems might be in the next 10-20 years. This paper will focus on areas related to providing assurances for effective and efficient controls related to the safety of food, enhanced use of information technology and the relationship with border and customs provisions (e.g. single window) and how this might translate into new work for CCFICS.

The 20th Session of CCFICS was attended by approximately 200 delegates from approximately 60 Member countries, one Member organization (the European Union) and eight international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The United States was represented by: the U.S. Delegate, Mary Stanley, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service; the U.S. Alternate Delegate, Michael Wehr, U.S. Food and Drug Administration; four governmental advisors; and two non-governmental advisors.

A detailed summary of the discussions on both of these items and on other matters considered by the Committee is presented below. The full report of the Session can be



found in REP 13/FICS on the Codex website,
www.codexalimentarius.org.

Principles and Guidelines for National Food Control Systems

The Committee agreed to work on the development of guidance for what constitutes a competent and complete national food control system at its 17th (2008) Session and, working from an original draft prepared by Australia, proceeded through extensive discussion and work including three physical working groups. The United States, recognizing the critical and important nature of this work, was extensively involved in the document's development to ensure that all major components of a national food control system in the document and the extent of guidance was sufficient to allow a country to understand what was required for a competent system. At the last (19th, 2011) Session of CCFICS, agreement was reached on Sections 1-3 of the document (Introduction, Scope, Principles) and these three sections were adopted at the 2012 Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission at Step 5. During 2012, a physical working group was held to finalize Section 4 of the document.

At this 20th Session of the CCFICS, the majority of the meeting was spent carrying out a paragraph-by-paragraph final review of the document. Numerous technical changes were made along with some minor reordering the document for a proper logic and flow, though no substantive changes were made.

The Committee completed work on the document and forwarded it onto the Codex Alimentarius Commission at its next (2013) Session for adoption at Steps 5/8.

Proposed New Work

The majority of the rest of the Session was spent discussing three proposals for new work.

Questionnaires Directed at Exporting Countries

At the last Session of CCFICS, Costa Rica, on behalf of the Codex Regional Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC), proposed new work on the use of questionnaires by an importing country to assess the competency of an exporting country's food control system. CCLAC, as well as other countries, expressed concern about the number and extent of use of these questionnaires, their diversity/lack of uniformity, the burden they placed on importing countries and the need for work by CCFICS to provide some guidance and consistency in this area.

There was general agreement by the Committee at this Session of CCFICS that work on the burden of questionnaires relating to providing of assurances on food safety control systems should be undertaken. However, after extensive discussion, there were mixed views as to what should be the precise scope of the work. For example, whether



the work should be limited to questionnaires relating to assessing the national food control system (or parts thereof) in connection to new areas of food trade, or whether the work should extend to the use of questionnaires for other purposes (e.g., audits, systems recognition).

CCFICS agreed that it was important that new work should be undertaken in this area but that clarification of the precise scope of the work was needed. The Committee expressed a preference was indicated 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.

Monitoring Regulatory Performance

At the last Session of CCFICS, the United States proposed new work on the use of performance measures to enable countries to evaluate their national food control systems or that of their trading partners. An electronic working group led by the U.S. was established to develop a survey to identify how countries currently assess and manage the performance of their food control systems. A Discussion Paper, including the results of this survey, was submitted for this session, identifying the types of performance measures currently used by countries to assess a national food control system.

Countries expressed mixed views on whether to undertake new work on this subject. Many delegations indicated a preference for completing the work on the guidance relating to national food control systems (see above) and for gaining experience with that guidance before proceeding to work on performance measures. Other countries recognizing noted the importance and value of better global understanding of the use of performance measures and that, recognizing there was a need for education in this area, it would be beneficial to begin work on this area. Many countries expressed concern about the use of performance measures in assessing the capability of another country's food control system and that the work should focus only on the country's assessment of its own system.

After extensive discussion, the Committee agreed that the U.S. should revise the Discussion Paper and to focus the work primarily on a country's assessment of its own system. There was also an indication by countries that the work should, in addition to applying to the new guidance on national food control systems, also provide guidance on implementing paragraphs 24-29 (control programs and operations) of the Codex *Principles and Guidelines for the Design, Operation, Assessment and Accreditation of Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems* (CAC/GL 26-1997).

The Committee was in general agreement that new work should be undertaken in this



area. The U.S. will lead an electronic working group to revise the proposed Project Document, taking into account the discussion from the Session and to develop an outline for a proposed set of Principles and Guidelines for Monitoring Regulatory Performance of National Food Control systems.

The Committee also agreed to hold an educational session at the next Session of CCFICS to help inform countries as to the nature and use of performance measures. Additionally, the value of holding information sessions or workshops in other fora (e.g., Codex Regional Coordinating Committees) was also mentioned.

Revision to the Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations and on the Inclusion of the Term "Feed" in CCFICS texts on Emergencies and Rejections to Address Feed.

At the last Session of CCFICS, the U.S. agreed to develop a Discussion Paper that would consider three items:

1. The inclusion of the term "feed" in the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) and the *Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejection of Imported Foods* (CAC/GL 25-1997);
2. The merging of the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) and the *Codex Guidelines for the Exchange of Information between Countries on Rejection of Imported Foods* (CAC/GL 25-1997); and,
3. The revision of the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995) to update the text to include references to global food safety emergency information exchange program (i.e. INFOSAN) and to extend the guidance to include information on the role of stakeholders in handling food safety emergency situations and the processes used in handling food safety emergency situations.

The Committee agreed with the recommendation presented in the Discussion Paper not to merge the two documents.

The Committee also agreed with the recommendation in the Discussion Paper to limit the inclusion of the term "feed" in the two papers to those situations only where feed impacted on food safety. In this regard, the Committee agreed, with minor changes, to the changes recommended for the *Codex Principles and Guidelines for the Exchange of Information in Food Safety Emergency Situations* (CAC/GL 19-1995). However, the Committee could not come to complete agreement to 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 U.S., taking into account comments made at this session of CCFICS.

The Committee agreed to 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 global food safety emergency information exchange program (i.e., INFOSAN), the guidance will 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. As in past discussions on this topic, there were concerns raised related to including risk management (e.g. the use of measures to control specific hazards), and suggestions that the work be limited to procedures used to manage food safety control situations. The U.S. was asked to bring a revised Discussion Paper back containing a detailed outline of the proposed revision of CAC/GL 19-1995) for consideration by the next Session of CCFICS.

Other Matters

The Committee responded to an inquiry from the Codex Committee on Fish and Fish Products (CCFFP) as to whether there was specific guidance in CCFICS texts relating to exchange of information between importing and exporting countries with respect to technical food standards matters. The Committee indicated that existing Codex texts provided such guidance, and in particular, guidance presented in the Codex *Guidelines for Food Import Control Systems* (CAC/GL 47-2003).

The Committee received reports from FAO and WHO on their work in areas relevant to CCFICS.

50th Anniversary Celebration

The Committee had a relatively short but important discussion with respect to the ongoing 50th Anniversary recognition of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The focus of the discussion was on emerging challenges and the future with respect to the work of CCFICS. The U.S. noted the importance of considering what food control systems might look like in the next 10-20 years, particularly with respect to providing assurances in relation to safety assurances for imported and exported foods, and how such assurances could be provided (e.g., systems recognition, use of third parties, preventive approaches). The U.S. also noted that CCFICS could develop a strategy paper addressing the challenges identified by Members for consideration by the Committee. Australia noted the need to take into account global food security (sufficiency), the substantial enhanced use of Information Technology (IT) systems, particularly for electronic certification, and the need to review all existing CCFICS-developed texts with to update the guidance and all gaps. The EU noted the need to address effective and efficient controls as global trade and risk increase while resources decrease, without losing consumer confidence. New Zealand noted the need to take



into account the area of systems recognition. The World Customs Organization (WCO) noted the need to broadly look at border and customs provisions (e.g., product classifications, single window) with respect to food import and export inspection and certification systems and how these areas might be integrated into the work of CCFICS.

The Committee agreed to prepare a strategic vision discussion paper focusing on the above and other areas for presentation and discussion at the next Session of CCFICS. The United States was asked to lead the development of this paper.

Date of the Next Session of CCFICS

The 21st Session of CCFICs is tentatively scheduled to be held in approximately 18 months' time at a time and place to be announced.