



## **Report of the U.S. Delegate, 47th Session, Codex Committee on Food Hygiene**

**November 9-13, 2015**

**Boston, Massachusetts, USA**

The 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH), Chaired by Dr. Emilio Esteban, USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, was attended by over 200 delegates representing 75 member countries, one member organization (the European Union (EU)), and nine international intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). The United States was represented by the Delegate, Ms. Jenny Scott, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition; Co-Alternate Delegates Dr. Kerry Dearfield, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service, and Dr. Andrew Yeung, FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition; seven government advisors; and seven non-government advisors.

The session was opened by Ms. Mary Frances Lowe, the U.S. Codex Manager, USDA; Mr. Brian Ronholm, Deputy Undersecretary for Food Safety, USDA; and Dr. Susan Mayne, Director, FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. Each presenter emphasized the importance of the work of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene. The meeting was highly successful – three documents (two of which were co-chaired by the U.S.) were forwarded to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption at Step 5/8.

### **Highlights**

The 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH):

- Completed work on the *Guidelines for the Control of Nontyphoidal Salmonella in Beef and Pork Meat* and forwarded the document for adoption at Step 5/8 by the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) in July 2016.
- Completed work on *Guidelines on the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Foodborne Parasites* and forwarded the document for adoption at Step 5/8 by the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the CAC.
- Completed work on the Annexes to the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Low-Moisture Foods*, including annexes on microbiological criteria and on environmental monitoring, and forwarded the document for adoption at Step 5/8 by the 39<sup>th</sup> Session of the CAC.
- Agreed to establish an electronic working group, led by France, the United States, India, Chile, and Ghana, to prepare a document updating the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* and its Annex: *Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point System and*

*Guidelines for its Application* (HACCP Annex) for consideration by the 48<sup>th</sup> session of CCFH in 2016.

- Agreed to establish an electronic working group, led by Brazil and France, to continue work on revising the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*.
- Agreed to request scientific advice from FAO/WHO to address issues related to water (e.g., when to use clean water and when to use potable water).
- Agreed to request scientific advice from FAO/WHO on verotoxigenic *E. coli* (VTEC) in preparation for future work in this area.

The 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH was enhanced by several “Side Events” – an FAO “Update on Animal Feed Work in FAO;” an FDA presentation on the “Final Rule on Preventive Controls for Human Food;” and an International Commission on Microbiological Specifications for Foods (ICMSF) session on “Whole Genome Sequencing (WGS).” The last session was aimed at raising awareness among CCFH delegates on the potential uses of WGS. All these sessions were well attended.

A summary of the results of the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH is given below. The full report of the Session can be found on the Codex Website, [www.codexalimentarius.org](http://www.codexalimentarius.org).

## Meeting Summary

### **Proposed Draft Guidelines for the Control of Nontyphoidal *Salmonella* Spp. in Beef and Pork Meat**

At the 45<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2013), the Committee agreed to begin new work on *Guidelines for the Control of Nontyphoidal Salmonella spp. in Beef and Pork Meat* via an electronic working group (eWG) led by the U.S. and co-chaired by Denmark. A draft document was circulated for comment prior to the 46<sup>th</sup> Session (2014) but was not discussed in detail at the meeting. Prior to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH, an electronic working group and a physical working group, both led by the U.S. and Denmark, worked to revise the document, giving consideration to the comments received. In addition, in September 2015 FAO/WHO held an Expert Meeting that reviewed the technical basis of the mitigation/intervention measures proposed by the working groups and verified the measures included in the final document. Another physical working group was held just prior to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session to consider a revised version that took into account many of the comments submitted in response to circulation of the document prior to the meeting. A final in-session working group completed the revisions and the document was then considered section by section by the full Committee. The major issues included providing for an antemortem inspection step (which the Committee agreed to include with the lairage step), bacteriophage treatment of the hide (which was included after explanation that such a step would not be required), and the addition of text related to feed withdrawal prior to slaughter. In addition, a number of changes were made for consistency between the beef and the pork sections, where this was applicable. In accordance with Codex procedures, all the



references were removed from the document, but they have been captured in the Annex of the report of the FAO/WHO Expert Meeting, which is available in draft and will be issued in a final version early 2016.

The Committee agreed to forward the proposed draft Guidelines for adoption at Step 5/8 by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Dominican Republic expressed a reservation on the grounds of needing more time to consider the revised document. Completion of this document was the highest priority for the U.S. Delegation. This work was completed ahead of schedule, in large part due to the cooperative relationship developed between the U.S. and Denmark during and between the many working sessions needed to complete the effort.

### **Proposed Draft Guidelines on the Application of the General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Foodborne Parasites**

At the 45<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2013), the Committee agreed to start new work on *Guidelines on the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Foodborne Parasites*. The Committee agreed to establish a physical working group (which was held in Japan in May 2014), led by Japan and Canada, to discuss and prepare proposals for the structure and approach for the document, as well as for possible annexes, and an electronic working group, led by Japan and Canada, to develop the proposed draft Guidelines based on the proposals of the physical working group. At the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2014), the work was progressed by a physical working group and discussions in plenary. The 46<sup>th</sup> Session established an electronic working group, led by Japan and Canada, to prepare revised draft guidelines for circulation for comments prior to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH. The U.S. participated in all these activities, including submitting comments on the draft. A physical working group met just prior to the session to address issues related to the document.

The document was considered section by section in plenary. Major issues included definitions, ranking the examples of parasites for commodities to reflect the ranking of an FAO/WHO Expert meeting, and deletion of provisions considered impracticable (such as excluding domestic and wild animals and unauthorized persons from barns and outdoor areas; not allowing dairy herds to graze in areas where Felidae were found; and fencing around ponds to control animals). An example of using candling to inspect for fishborne parasites was deleted based on U.S. comments that the measure had little impact on food safety.

The Committee agreed to forward the proposed draft Guidelines for adoption at Step 5/8 by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. Although the U.S. believes that there are aspects of the document that could be improved, overall, we are satisfied with the

outcome of the discussions, and we believe the document was improved by many U.S. suggestions.

The remaining issue on parasites is with respect to the recently completed *Guidelines on Control of Trichinella spp. in Meat of Suidae* and *Guidelines on Control of Taenia saginata in Meat of Domestic Cattle*. The intent has been to make these documents annexes to the *Guidelines on the Application of General Principles of Food Hygiene to the Control of Foodborne Parasites*, in order to compile the guidance on foodborne parasites into a single document. The Codex Secretariat will prepare a proposal for next year on how to merge these documents.

### **Proposed Draft Annexes to the Code of Hygienic Practice for Low-Moisture Foods**

At the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2014), the Committee agreed to forward the proposed draft *Code of Hygienic Practice for Low-Moisture Foods* to the 38<sup>th</sup> Session of the CAC (2015) for adoption at Step 5/8. (CAC38 adopted the Code.) The Committee further agreed to establish an electronic working group, with Canada and the U.S. as co-chairs, to review existing codes dealing with low-moisture foods and determine if they can be incorporated as annexes; to consider the development of an annex on examples of microbiological criteria for different low-moisture food categories; and to consider the annex on environmental monitoring to determine when to refer to *Salmonella*, when to refer to Enterobacteriaceae, and when to refer to both.

Canada and the U.S., with input from the electronic working group, had prepared the annexes as requested and had developed a Conference Room Document (CRD) that addressed many of the comments submitted in response to circulation of the draft prior to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH. As a result of meetings the U.S. held with various delegations prior to the session, we learned that both the EU and Japan had concerns with Annex I, the annex with example microbiological criteria. In particular there were concerns that the criteria could be applied to all low-moisture foods. There was also concern among a number of delegations about the commodity annexes other than the one for spices, with some delegations wanting to delete them and others wanting to add provisions to them. These concerns were significant enough that the document was unlikely to progress without significant revisions. The U.S. and Canada agreed to propose that the annexes on commodities other than spices be deleted and that the relevant Codes of Hygienic Practice for these low-moisture foods (peanuts, desiccated coconut and dried fruits and vegetables) be retained in their current form pending later review and updating. The U.S. also drafted text to add to Annex I to clarify that the microbiological criteria are examples that could be applied when deemed appropriate, to emphasize that microbiological testing is not appropriate for all low-moisture foods, and to indicate that the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria Related to Foods* should be followed in determining whether a



microbiological criterion for *Salmonella* would be deemed necessary and would contribute to the protection of public health. As a result of these suggestions and some additional modifications made during plenary discussion, the Committee agreed to move the document forward.

The Committee agreed to forward the proposed draft Annex I (Examples of Microbiological Criteria for Low-Moisture Foods when Deemed Appropriate in Accordance with the Principles and Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria Related to Foods (CAC/GL 21-1997)) and Annex II (Guidance for the Establishment of Environmental Monitoring Programs for *Salmonella* spp. and Other Enterobacteriaceae in Low-Moisture Food Processing Areas) for final adoption at Step 5/8 by the Codex Alimentarius Commission at its July 2016 session.. The Committee further agreed to forward Annex III (Annex on Spices and Dried Aromatic Herbs) to the Commission for adoption (this annex was previously adopted by the Commission as a Code of Hygienic Practice and thus only needs to be adopted as an annex.)

### **Proposed Revision of the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables***

Under the leadership of Brazil, with the assistance of France, the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* has been undergoing reorganization to remove redundancies and to move certain provisions that are broadly applicable from the annexes to the main code. The 46<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2014) agreed to establish an electronic working group, led by Brazil and France, to continue to remove redundancies but ensure changes are editorial; to identify additional, non-editorial changes, and to prepare a discussion paper on the scope of the work for the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH. Concerns have been expressed that moving commodity-specific provisions from the annexes and applying them more broadly resulted in more stringent control measures than necessary in some cases. In addition, some new text seems to have been included. A discussion paper and project document were submitted and considered under new work for CCFH.

### **Proposed Revision of the *General Principles of Food Hygiene (CAC/RCP 1-1969)* and Its HACCP Annex**

At the 46<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH (2014) the Committee agreed to establish an electronic working group, led by France and Thailand, to prepare a proposal to revise the scope of the work on the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* and its HACCP Annex for consideration by the 47<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH. A discussion paper and project document were submitted and considered under new work for CCFH.

## **Recommended New Work for CCFH**

Based on an established process for addressing new work proposals, a CCFH *Ad Hoc* Working Group for the Establishment of CCFH Work Priorities, led by the United States, met immediately prior to the 47<sup>th</sup> Session and considered the following:

- A discussion paper and project document by France and Thailand on the need to revise the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* (CAC/RCP 1-1969; GPFH) and its Annex: *Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) System and Guidelines for its Application* (HACCP Annex), and
- A discussion paper and project document by Brazil and France to revise the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CAC/RCP 53-2003).

### **Revision of the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* and its HACCP Annex**

Most delegations agreed that the GPFH and its HACCP annex are very important documents and there is a need to revise the current GPFH and its HACCP annex to give consideration to issues outlined in the discussion paper. While some delegations would like to include managerial aspects in the revision, one delegation (Thailand) suggested the focus of the GPFH and its HACCP annex should be on hygiene and safety and not focus on managerial aspects. Several delegations preferred to keep the text of any revision as simple as possible to allow for flexibility in accommodating the different sizes and nature of food businesses.

The working group agreed to recommend to plenary that CCFH consider establishing a working group to revise the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* (CAC/RCP 1-1969) and its HACCP annex as the highest priority.

The Committee agreed with the working group recommendation to start new work on the revision of the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* and its HACCP annex and to establish an electronic working group, chaired by France and co-chaired by Chile, Ghana, India and the United States of America, working in English, Spanish and French, to prepare the proposed draft revision of the General Principles for circulation for comments and consideration at the next session of the Committee. The Committee further agreed to consider convening a physical working group at the next session to prepare a revised proposal on the basis of the comments submitted. It is likely that this will be an in-session working group so that the work will be inclusive of all delegations.

### **Revision of the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables***

The working group also supported revision to the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* as new work. One delegation (Thailand) expressed concern that moving provisions designed for “high risk” fruits such as melons and berries to the main code actually changes the context of the code.

The working group agreed to recommend to plenary that CCFH consider establishing a working group to revise the *Code of Hygienic Practices for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* as second priority.

The Committee agreed with the working group to start new work on the revision of the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* and to establish an electronic working group, co-chaired by Brazil and France, working in English only, to prepare a revised draft code for circulation for comments and consideration at the next session of the Committee.

### **Discussion of Work on Verotoxigenic *E. coli***

While there is not yet a project document, interest has been expressed in doing work on verotoxigenic *E. coli*. Noting that FAO/WHO would like to have more time to develop its scientific advice, the working group considered whether CCFH should seek scientific advice from FAO/WHO on verotoxigenic *E. coli*, which is one of the top-ranking topics in the forward workplan.

Several delegations agreed that verotoxigenic *E. coli* is important to public health, with documented foodborne disease outbreaks, and there is a need to seek scientific advice proactively from FAO/WHO. The working group agreed to recommend to plenary that CCFH consider requesting FAO/WHO to develop a literature review on verotoxigenic *E. coli*, which will allow CCFH to decide on whether to move forward with the development of a project document. (See “Request for Scientific Advice” for action taken.)

### **Request for Scientific Advice**

#### **Scientific advice to help clarify the use of clean, potable and other types of water in the *General Principles Food Hygiene* and other hygiene texts**

The issue of the use of “clean water” versus “potable water” has been an issue in several CCFH documents. The Committee agreed to request FAO and WHO to undertake a review of the existing FAO and WHO guidelines and related texts on water and water quality to determine whether they cover all aspects of water use relevant to food production and processing, including water used in primary production (including use of recycled and waste water), water in contact with food or used as an ingredient, and water used in enclosed systems in food operations (e.g. heating, cooling)). This work should identify gaps and provide information that can be included in the revision of the GPFH.

#### **Verotoxigenic *E. coli* (VTEC) / Shiga toxigenic *E.coli* (STEC)**

The Committee agreed with the working group that VTEC/STEC was an important issue to address and agreed to request that FAO and WHO develop a report compiling and synthesizing the information available on the following aspects of VTEC/STECs:



- a. The global burden of disease attribution based on outbreak data;
- b. Hazard identification and characterization of VTECs/STECs, including information on genetic profiles and virulence; and
- c. Current monitoring and assurance programs, including the status of the currently available methodology (commercially available and validated for regulatory purposes) for monitoring of VTECs/STECs in food as basis for management and control.

### **Forward Workplan and Working Group on New Work Priorities**

The Forward Workplan was adjusted to delete two items to reflect the new work agreed to by the Committee.

Noting that the Forward Plan included development of annexes on tomatoes and carrots to the *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables*, the Committee agreed to request the electronic working group revising the code to consider whether there was a need for these annexes.

The Committee agreed to re-establish the working group on CCFH work priorities, which will meet at the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee and will be chaired by the U.S.

### **Next Session of CCFH**

The 48<sup>th</sup> Session of CCFH is tentatively scheduled for November 7-11, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA.