



U.S. Delegate's Report, Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products (CCMMP) Meeting of the Physical Working Group (pWG) on Processed Cheese

**December 8-10, 2015
Montevideo, Uruguay**

The purpose of the pWG meeting was to discuss outstanding issues outlined in Circular Letter CL2015/22-MMP issued in July 2015 regarding a proposed General Standard for Processed Cheese. In addition to discussing the technical aspects of a proposed standard, the pWG also reviewed procedural issues associated with advancement through the Codex process for adoption.

Seventeen member countries, one member organization (the European Union (EU)) and two observer organizations (the International Dairy Federation (IDF) and the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)) attended the working group. The United States was represented by the Delegate, Mr. Chris Thompson, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service; Mr. Ken Lowery, U.S. Codex Office; and two non-government advisors.

In general, the U.S. delegation was satisfied with the results of the pWG session, in particular with respect to progress toward the development of provisions that would protect U.S. consumers from being misled in terms of the quality of products that are labelled as "processed cheese." At the same time, it appears that considerable work remains to be done before consensus is likely to be reached on a proposed standard for final adoption by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC). [At its 38th Session (July 2015), the CAC confirmed that the work should be completed by 2016, consistent with the project document approved by the CAC in 2014. See Paragraph 85, REP15/CAC, available on the Codex website at <http://www.codexalimentarius.org/meetings-reports/en/?y=2015&mf=07>.

Highlights/Meeting Summary

Key issues of importance to the U.S. included: 1) the scope of the standard, 2) minimum cheese content requirements for products included in the standard, and 3) the use of certain food additives in processed cheese products covered by the standard. While considerable discussion occurred regarding the proposed standard, the United States believes there are a number of outstanding issues where divergent views remain. These issues and other important topics discussed at the pWG meeting included:

- *Scope of the standard:* Of essential importance to the U.S. was the determination of products not covered by the standard. The U.S. effectively argued that the standard will not apply to “processed cheese spreads.”
- *Essential Composition and Quality Factors:* Also critical to the U.S. position was the determination of the minimum cheese content of the processed cheese, specifically minimum cheese content for a high quality processed cheese. Allowance for a high quality processed cheese was achieved through the recognition of three processed cheese groups, including Group 3.1.1, Processed cheese with a minimum cheese content of 75%. On the opposite end of the spectrum is Group 3.1.3, Processed cheese designated with the qualifier “spreadable.” The specifications for this group were substantially debated. The U.S. contended that any product within any processed cheese group should contain a substantial amount of cheese. Several other delegations agreed with the U.S. on this matter. France and few other delegations argued that the minimum cheese content for “spreadables” should be as low as 25% of the total raw materials used on a dry matter basis in the final product.
- *Food Additives:* Limiting the use of stabilizers and thickeners was of significant importance to the U.S. The U.S. argued that the use of stabilizers and thickeners is not technologically justified in *bona fide* processed cheese. The EU position was that stabilizers and thickeners should be allowed in all of the proposed groupings/classes of processed cheeses.

Modification of the provisions in the draft standard with respect either of the first two issues described above would have significant impact on several other sections of the proposed standard, including the labeling section.

Considerable discussion occurred on the last day of the pWG during the adoption of the final report and proposed standard. The lengthy debates during this portion of the meeting provided a strong indication that considerable work remains to reach consensus on this proposed standard.

Next Steps

Due to the limited number of member countries in attendance, and the fact that CCMMP is operating via correspondence, the Chair announced during his opening comments that the product of the pWG meeting would be electronically distributed with a request for comments to all members of the CCMMP. These comments will be summarized, incorporated into the proposed standard and re-distributed electronically to all CCMMP members for another round of comments.

If consensus is achieved at the conclusion of the second round of comments, the proposed standard will be submitted at Step 8 (for final adoption) to the 39th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2016).



The full report of the pWG meeting and the proposed standard can be found on the Codex Website, [CL 2015-34\(E\)](#) . Comments are due not later than February 20, 2016 and will be submitted through country Codex Contact Points and/or Official Codex Observer Organizations.