

U.S. Delegate's Report
5th Session of the
Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs
(Virtual)
April 22-29, 2021

The 5th Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH5) met virtually April 22 – 29, 2021. Overall, 275 participants attended the meeting, representing 65 Member Countries, one Member Organization (the European Union), and observers from 11 international inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations agencies.

The United States was represented by Delegate Dorian LaFond of the Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture; Alternate Delegate Dr. Aparna Tatavarthy of the Food and Drug Administration/Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition; and Heather Selig and Marie Maratos Bhat, International Issues Analysts in the U.S. Codex Office.

The United States achieved most of its objectives at this 5th CCSCH Session as U.S. leadership effectively addressed items on the meeting's agenda. The Committee completed work on four standards for final adoption and agreed to recommend approval of the U.S. proposal for new work on a group standard for spices derived from dried fruits and berries by the 44th Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC44, scheduled for November 2021). The recommended approval of work on the Group Standard implements the previous decisions of CCSCH and CAC to use a grouping approach to develop standards more efficiently and expeditiously. The U.S. delegation maintained its integrity and reliability by utilizing practical problem-solving capabilities, technical expertise, diplomacy, and international standards development leadership skills.

Highlights

CCSCH5 resolved all outstanding issues and completed work on the following four standards and agreed to forward them for final adoption at Step 8 by CAC44:

- Standard for Dried Oregano

CCSCH5 reconfirmed its decision from the two previous sessions that the standard should include both plant species recognized as oregano in international trade, Mexican oregano (*Lippia spp.L*) and *Origanum spp. L*. Due to the lack of validated methods of analysis and sampling to facilitate the evaluation of insect fragments in the crushed/rubbed and ground/powdered styles, CCSCH5 deleted the allowances in the draft standard.

- Standard for Dried and Dehydrated Ginger

The committee transferred the bleaching agents calcium oxide and sulfur dioxide to Section 4 (Food Additives) from Annex I, based on the explanation provided by the Codex Secretariat, referencing the Codex *Procedural Manual*, which states processing aids should be listed in that section of commodity standards.

- Standard for Dried Cloves

The committee resolved the classification issues and submitted the methods of analysis and the physical characteristics sampling plan for endorsement by the Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CCMAS).

- Standard for Dried Basil

The committee resolved the product definition/common name issue, aligned the food additive provisions with other CCSCCH standards, and completed work on the sections on labelling, physical characteristics (defects allowed) and verification of methods of analysis and sampling.

Overarching Issues

Methods of Analysis. The United States delegation led the discussion on identification of the appropriate methods of analysis and sampling in all standards considered by CCSCCH5. The United States and India worked closely to revise the Conference Room Document (CRD06 Rev) on methods of analysis and sampling. The lack of validated methods of analysis for certain physical characteristics (defects allowed) in the powdered/ground style in the spices and culinary herbs discussed was a recurring issue in the four completed standards and the other three draft standards.

The United States expressed concerns about the negative impact of the absence of allowances for some of the named defects in trade, i.e., insect fragments and mammalian and other excreta. The United States was concerned that leaving a blank or not defining N/A (not applicable) for certain defects due to the lack of data could be misinterpreted as “not permitted” or “zero.” Therefore, the United States proposed that N/A be defined in the footnotes as: “*Not applicable, means that this form of the above product has not been evaluated for this provision, and currently there are no values. N/A does not refer to zero.*” CCSCCH5 accepted the United States’ proposal and the interpretation of N/A.

Country of origin/country of harvest labeling. This issue was referred to and considered by the 45th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL45, 2019), which confirmed the applicability of the Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Food (GSLPF, CXS 1-1985). However, the issue of requiring country of origin and/or country of harvest labeling in CCSCCH standards continued to be contentious. Some delegations (mainly the European Union member countries present, the United Kingdom, Chile, Turkey, and the Islamic Republic of Iran) supported the mandatory inclusion of both provisions, citing economic

advantages, while others (including the United States) supported the inclusion of the country of origin as directed by the GSLPF and recommended by CCFL. Since the CGSLPF does not include “country of harvest,” indication of country of harvest is optional. CCSCH5 concurred with CCFL45 and made the labelling of country of origin mandatory and the labelling of country of harvest and/or geographical region where grown optional for all CCSCH standards going forward.

New work.

CCSCH5 approved proposals for new work on three new standards:

- Spices Derived from Dried Fruits and Berries, submitted by the United States
- Small Cardamom, combining two separate proposals submitted by India and the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Turmeric, submitted by India

Following is a brief summary of other major issues discussed at the session. The formal report of CCSCH5 (REP 21/SCH) is posted on the Codex website at: <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings-reports/en/>

Meeting Summary

Standard retained at Step 7 (not forwarded to CAC44 for adoption)

Proposed Draft Standard for Saffron: There was no consensus on Section 8 (Labelling) and Appendix I (Chemical and Physical Characteristics). Some member delegations (European Union members present, UK, Morocco, Egypt, and the Islamic Republic of Iran) insisted that the country of harvest should be mandatory due to the high economic value of saffron, while others (including Brazil, Canada, Ghana, Jamaica, India, Nigeria, and the United States) insisted that the CCSCH should adhere to CCFL45 guidance and therefore, this provision should be optional. Additionally, the lack of scientific justification for the proposed chemical characteristics and the absence of clarity on the proposed classes in the Physical Characteristics table resulted in this standard being retained at Step 7.

Standard advanced to Step 5 for interim adoption by CAC44 (allowing for another round of consideration by the Committee)

Proposed Draft Standard for Nutmeg: The draft standard was discussed, and some technical corrections were made. The Chemical and Physical Characteristics tables in Annexes I and II were amended to better reflect international trade practices. Annex III of the draft standard on methods of analysis and sampling was amended and forwarded to CCMAS41 (2021) for review.

Standard Returned for redrafting (Step 2)

Proposed Draft Standard for Dried or Dehydrated Chilli Pepper and Paprika: Almost every section of this draft standard was amended based on comments submitted in the electronic working group and plenary discussions that highlighted differences in national and regional food safety and trade practices. The committee members agreed that this draft standard should be

returned to Step 2 for redrafting to allow more time for harmonizing the provisions/texts and taking into consideration the written comments submitted as CRDs and those raised during the plenary session.

Proposals for New Work, Standard Layout and Group Standards

The United States chaired an In-session Working Group (IWG) on the Priorities, Standard Layout, and Group Standards. The IWG recommended the submission of three new work proposals, including the first proposal for a group standard, to CAC44 for approval. The IWG also recommended simplification of named defects by combining them using the general heading of “foreign matter” in the Physical Characteristics table, thereby deleting unpleasant named defects (insect fragments, mammalian, and other excreta) from the standards from the next session onwards. The United States objected to the proposal on combining these defects as “foreign matter” and pointed out that each defect has unique units of measurement, for example excreta is in mg/kg, insect fragments is captured as number/10g, dead insects is number/100g, mold is in % w/w. It is unclear how these differences will be calculated, captured, and combined.

CCSCH5 endorsed the recommendations of the IWG for new work proposals and agreed to create a small working group, chaired by the United States, to revise the standard layout template, taking into consideration the relevant discussions at CCSCH5, and make recommendations to the next session of CCSCH.

Date and Place of the Next Session

The date and place of CCSCH6 will be determined by the host government (India) in consultation with the Codex Secretariat.