

**REPORT OF THE UNITED STATES DELEGATE TO THE
6th SESSION OF THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON SPICES AND CULINARY HERBS
September 26 – 30 and October 3, 2022
Virtual**

The 6th Session of the Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH6) convened virtually from September 26 to 30, with report adoption on October 3, 2022. The session was chaired by India and attended by 62 Member countries, 1 Member organization (the European Union), and 5 Observer organizations. The U.S. delegation was led by Delegate Mr. Dorian LaFond, Agricultural Marketing Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Alternate Delegate Dr. Aparna Tatavarthy, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and included 1 government advisor from the U.S. Codex Office.

Mr. Steve Wearne, Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), delivered opening remarks. Mr. Rajesh Bhushan, Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India and Chairperson, Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, opened the meeting. Dr. M. R. Sudharshan, former Research Director, Spices Board India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, chaired the meeting.

HIGHLIGHTS

CCSCH6 was a productive and successful meeting. The majority of the United States' objectives were realized, with standards for nutmeg, chilli pepper and paprika, and small cardamom advancing to the 45th Session of the CAC (CAC45) for final adoption. Although the standard for saffron was also advanced for final adoption, the United States expressed reservations to two provisions within the standard: inclusion of "Extra Class" and mandatory Country of Harvest labeling. These provisions lack a technical or scientific basis and may impose unnecessary burdens on trade. The standards for nutmeg, chilli pepper and paprika, and small cardamom, on the other hand, are well-aligned with U.S. data and reflect U.S. proposals.

The Committee made significant progress on the draft group standard for spices derived from dried fruits and berries, advancing it to the 45th Session of the CAC (CAC45) for interim adoption at Step 5. The United States continued to lead the update of the standard template/layout, which will enhance the ability of CCSCH to efficiently develop group standards. Actively participating in virtual working groups meetings prior to and during the plenary sessions proved to be useful in resolving many of the outstanding issues and, notwithstanding the request for development of an independent vanilla standard, the approach of developing group standards has gained significant support. The U.S. Codex Office also led outreach to Members from the FAO/WHO Regional Coordinating Committees for Africa (CCAFRICA) and Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC) and the European Union prior to the meeting. This outreach and the sharing of U.S. positions yielded positive results, and the

United States was regularly consulted on resolution of complicated issues arising from the discussions.

The meeting summary below covers the most significant agenda items and issues from the 6th Session of the CCSCH. The full official report of the Session can be found on the [Codex Website](#).

MEETING SUMMARY

Standards Advancing to Step 8 (Final Adoption)

a. Draft Standard for Saffron: The draft standard was completed over two U.S. objections:

- (i) *Inclusion of Extra Class* – The United States expressed its reservation to the inclusion of “Extra Class” in this standard, noting that this provision is neither science based nor included in major published international or national standards that provided a reference basis for the draft standard. “Extra Class” is not internationally implemented and/or recognized. Greece and Iran were the main drivers behind the inclusion of the Extra Class, supported by the European Union (EU), India, Turkey, Kenya, Syria, France, Uganda, Mexico, Ghana, Saudi Arabia, Japan, UK, Colombia, and Egypt. The chair supported this position even though he acknowledged that there is no scientific or trade basis for Extra Class. Canada, Jamaica, and Nigeria supported the U.S. position.
- (ii) *Mandatory labeling of the Country of Harvest* – The United States expressed its reservation to mandatory Country of Harvest labeling, noting that mandatory declaration of the Country of Harvest would impose extra burden and risk to food businesses and pointing out that only the Country of Origin could be verified based on legal documents accompanying a given consignment. Country of Harvest cannot be scientifically verified or implemented by inspectors and thus mandatory labelling would not help in preventing food fraud. Furthermore, mandatory declaration of Country of Harvest reverses previous decisions by CCSCH and is inconsistent with advice from the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) and the Codex *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* (CXS 1-1985). It imposes a mandatory requirement that is inconsistent with other spice and herb standards that have already been adopted. Nonetheless, the following Members supported mandatory country of harvest labeling: EU, Morocco, Colombia, Greece, UK, Syria, France, Iran, and Japan. Supporters of the U.S. position included Canada, Jamaica, and Mexico. The chair asked the United States to reconsider its reservations to both “Extra Class” and mandatory Country of Harvest labeling.

b. Draft Standard for Nutmeg: This draft standard was completed, as much of the development was carried out in electronic working groups between the 5th and 6th Sessions of CCSCH. The draft standard incorporates most of the defects allowed consistent with FDA Defect Action Levels and those from the American Spice Trade Association (ASTA) that are

used in international trade. The U.S. positions on defects in whole styles (inshell and kernels) were included.

- c. Draft Standard for Dried or Dehydrated Chilli Peppers and Paprika:** This draft standard was completed at CCSCH6. Development of the standard began at CCSCH4 in 2017 and had the highest numbers of CCSCH participants involved in the drafting process, reflecting the fact that dried chilli peppers and paprika are produced and used globally. The Committee agreed on the inclusion of hot paprika as a separate product and defined it as paprika having Scoville Heat Units (SHU) between 480 – 900, whereas paprika has SHU less than or equal to 480. There was significant resistance to including certain defects (rodent hair and insect fragments) in the ground/powdered form of dried chilli and paprika. However, the United States presented the current data from ASTA, which convinced the Committee to consider the reality of trade practices and include these defects in the standard. The Committee accepted several U.S. proposals including trade or varietal names as used in trade; definitions of powdered chilli peppers and paprika; and the defects allowed in whole styles.

Standards Advancing to Step 5/8 (Final Adoption)

- a. Draft Standard for Small Cardamom:** The CCSCH6 agreed to retain the name “Cardamom” as the trade name to differentiate it from Large/Black cardamom. Changes that required further discussion and review were made to many sections of the draft standard based on Member comments and trade practices. The United States supported advancing the draft standard to Step 5/8 for final adoption by CAC45.

Standards Advancing to Step 5 (Interim Adoption)

- a. Draft Group Standard for Spices Derived from Dried Fruits and Berries (Allspice, Juniper Berry, Star Anise, and Vanilla):** The United States leads the development of this standard as an example of a group standard that would expedite the development of CCSCH standards, compared to the approach of developing individual standards for each spice. The CAC and the Codex Executive Committee have commended the group standard approach.

At CCSCH6, major African, South Asian, and Pacific vanilla-producing countries, supported by the European Union, advocated creating a separate individual standard for vanilla. No decision was taken by the Committee, and the issue is expected to be discussed further at the next session. The draft provisions for vanilla were placed in Part B in the same grouping document and returned to Step 2/3 for further work by the working group led by the United States and co-led by Madagascar and Mexico. Provisions for the other three spices belonging to this group (Allspice, Star Anise, and Juniper Berries) were discussed, amended where necessary, and advanced for adoption by CAC45 at Step 5 (interim adoption).

Standards Returned to Step 2/3 for Redrafting

- a. **Draft Standard for Dried or Dehydrated Turmeric:** This draft standard was circulated late for CCSCH6, so it was not discussed by virtual working groups ahead of the session. It was returned to Step 2/3 for redrafting by a working group led by the Islamic Republic of Iran, for discussion at the next CCSCH session.
- b. **Draft Provisions for Vanilla:** As noted above, provisions for vanilla were excluded from the group standard that was forwarded to CAC45 for interim adoption at Step 5 and retained for further work.

Proposals for New Work

There were no formal proposals for new standards. The United States informed the Committee that it will prepare and submit a proposal for new work for a group standard covering the seven remaining products in the dried roots, rhizomes, and bulbs group upon release of a new Circular Letter requesting new work proposals, and called upon Members to provide relevant trade and scientific data to facilitate the work of CCSCH.

Update to the Template for Spices and Culinary Herbs

The United States led the update of the standard template/layout as part of the effort to enhance the CCSCH's ability to develop group standards. Two virtual working group (VWG) sessions were held during CCSCH6 to resolve outstanding issues. As recommended by the VWG, CCSCH6 agreed to include an introduction to the standard template, indicating its purpose and how it can be amended to reflect a product's specific characteristics and trade practices, and to rearrange the Chemical and Physical Characteristics tables. There was a brief discussion about the format for numbering tables in the Annex, however there was no further follow up to this point. CCSCH6 carefully reviewed the updated standard template and requested that concerns be submitted for consideration at CCSCH7.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE NEXT SESSION

The date and place of the 7th Session of the CCSCH will be determined by the host government (India) in consultation with the Codex Secretariat.