



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



FIFTH EDITION

# UNDERSTANDING CODEX



CODEX ALIMENTARIUS



World Health  
Organization



CODEX ALIMENTARIUS  
**UNDERSTANDING CODEX**



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the United Nations  
and World Health Organization  
*Rome 2018*

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# Preface

From the Internet, TV and newspapers, we receive a constant stream of unverifiable information about the health risks associated with the food we eat.

However, food safety only ever grabs the headlines if something goes seriously wrong on a large scale: most food safety incidents never get reported. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that as many as 600 million people, or almost 1 in 10, fall ill after consuming contaminated food each year – of these, 420,000 people die, including 125,000 children under the age of 5. In addition, millions are affected by food-related risk factors for non-communicable diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and obesity. Yet more people still are affected by hunger and malnutrition.

We all need food – food that is safe, sufficient and nutritious – to live full and healthy lives. In our increasingly urbanized and globalized world, it is also true that ever fewer of us produce or even prepare our own food. The food on our plate may have arrived from the other side of the world.

Food is a sensitive commodity like no other: it can be affected by contamination by microbes, heavy metals or toxins through production methods, soils or poor hygiene. Food can be even tampered with intentionally via food fraud – either for economic reasons or with the intention to cause harm.

Too much food can be as dangerous as not having enough, and a badly composed diet lacking vitamins and minerals can cause health problems. Information on which nutrients are good for us and which are not is at times conflicting, and changes over time. We need to know what is in a food to compose a healthy diet but we also need to care that it is important to know.

Population growth and climate change are important issues that have a direct effect on our food supply, and vice versa – how we grow, process and consume our food has implications for the environment. Animal and plant health play an essential role in human health.

As the United Nations charts the course towards the “world we want” through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, food safety and quality, a level playing field for trade, healthy and nutritious diets and consumer information all have significant potential to improve the world we live in.

Many substances used in food production find their way into food as residues. While pesticides protect plants against pests that may ruin our harvest and cause famines, their residue levels must be kept low to eliminate any risk to health. Similarly, residues of veterinary drugs used in animal production to keep animals healthy may end up in food, as may food additives, used to facilitate production.

What limits are safe? How are they decided? Who are the international players involved in assessing and managing risks to effectively protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade?

These are complex questions of crucial importance to the global food supply chain and they require global partnerships to assess and manage the risks. The United Nations system brings together world-class expertise through a collaborative science-based process to build the Codex Alimentarius – a compilation of international food standards, guidelines and codes of practice that is continuously evolving with the joint input of impartial scientific experts and equitable participation of countries representing over 99% of the world’s population.

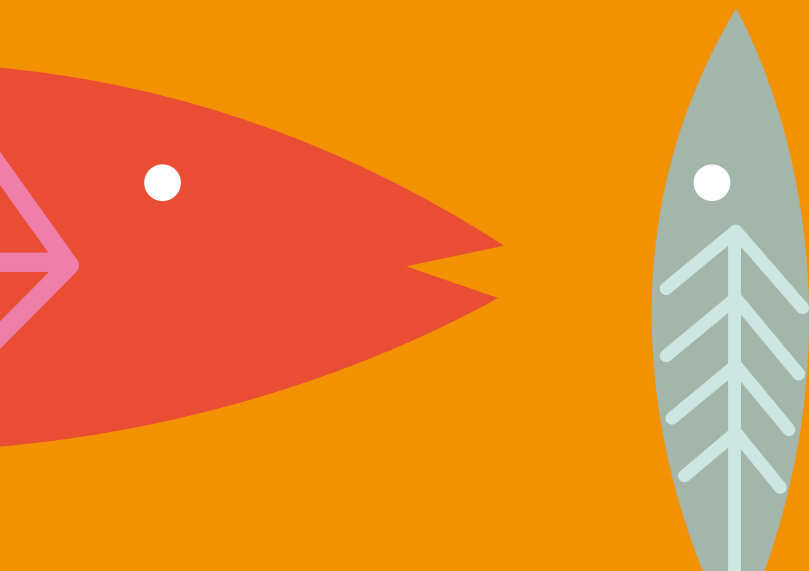
For more than five decades, Codex texts have contributed to the safety and quality of the food we eat. The Codex Alimentarius forms a global rule book that everyone in the food chain can follow. At the same time, the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s intricate but open and participatory standard-setting procedure – gathering together nations to deliberate science-based evidence side by side – also serves as a lifeline to build the capacity of countries working to strengthen their own national food safety control systems.

Codex standards are used as a benchmark in international trade agreements,

ensuring that trade can flow globally but not at the cost of health risks to consumers.

*Understanding Codex* will help readers build an informed view of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, how it works, and how we can all benefit from and can contribute to it. **91**

The safety and quality of food  
have always been instinctive  
concerns for humankind  
– the Codex Alimentarius  
constitutes a storehouse of  
valuable knowledge  
about how to trust and use  
the food we need to live  
healthy lives.





# 01. The origins of the Codex Alimentarius

## ANCIENT TIMES

**E**vidence from the earliest historical writings indicates that governing authorities have always been concerned with codifying rules to protect consumers from dishonest practices in the sale of food. Assyrian tablets described how to determine the correct weights and measures for food grains. Ancient Egyptian scrolls prescribed the labelling to be applied to certain foods. In ancient Athens, beer and wines were inspected for purity and soundness. The Romans had a well-organized State food control system to protect consumers against fraud and bad produce. In Europe during the Middle Ages, individual countries passed laws concerning the quality and safety of eggs, sausages, cheese, beer, wine and bread – and some of these ancient statutes still exist today.

## THE EMERGENCE OF SCIENCE AS THE BASIS FOR FOOD CODES

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the first general food laws adopted and basic food control systems put in place to monitor compliance. During the same period, food chemistry came to be recognized as a reputable discipline, and the determination of the “purity” of a food was primarily based on the chemical parameters of simple food composition. When harmful industrial chemicals were used to disguise the true colour or nature of food, the concept of “adulteration”

was extended to include the use of hazardous chemicals in food. Science had begun providing tools to unmask dishonest practices in the sale of food and to distinguish between safe and unsafe edible products.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In the Austro-Hungarian Empire between 1897 and 1911, a collection of standards and product descriptions for a wide variety of foods was developed as the Codex Alimentarius Austriacus. Although lacking legal force, it was used as a reference by the courts to determine standards of identity for specific foods. The present-day Codex Alimentarius traces its name back to the Austrian code.

## TRADE CONCERNS

As countries independently developed food laws and standards, differing sets of standards inevitably gave rise to trade barriers that were of increasing concern to food traders by the early twentieth century. Trade associations formed in response to these barriers and put pressure on governments to harmonize their various food standards and thereby facilitate trade in safe foods of a defined quality. The International Dairy Federation (IDF), founded in 1903, was one such association. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), established in 1947, and the International Standards Organization (ISO), founded in

1947, have also played instrumental roles in harmonizing standards to ensure quality and safety in trade.

When FAO and WHO were founded in the late 1940s, there was heightened international concern about the direction being taken in the field of food regulation. Countries were acting independently and there was little, if any, consultation among them with a view to harmonization.

### CONSUMER CONCERNS

In the 1940s, rapid progress was made in food science and technology. With the advent of more sensitive analytical tools, knowledge about the nature of food, its quality and associated health hazards also grew quickly. There was intense interest in food microbiology, food chemistry and associated disciplines, and new discoveries

were considered newsworthy. Articles about food at all levels flourished, and consumers were inundated with messages in popular magazines, the tabloid press and on the radio. Some were correct, some incorrect and some sensationalized – but the genuine interest in the topic reflected a shift in public consciousness about food and food safety.

Whereas, previously, consumers' concerns had extended only as far as "visibles" – underweight contents, size variations, misleading labelling and poor quality – they now embraced a fear of "invisibles" – potential health hazards due to micro-organisms, excessive pesticide residues, environmental contaminants and inappropriate food additives that could not be seen, smelled or tasted. With the emergence of well-organized and informed consumers' groups, both

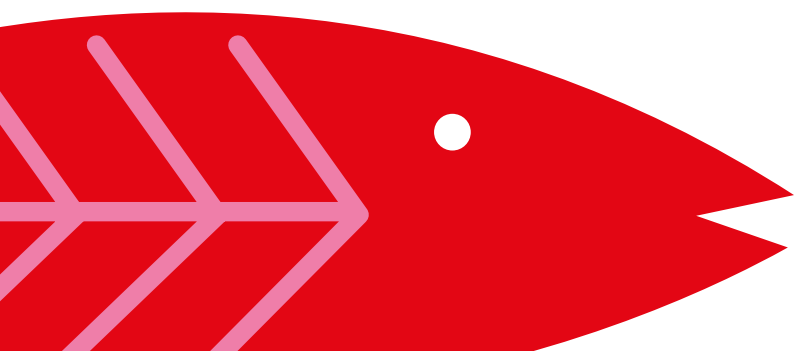
internationally and nationally, there was growing pressure on Governments worldwide to protect communities from poor-quality and hazardous foods.

### A DESIRE FOR INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Food regulators, traders, consumers and experts were looking increasingly to FAO and WHO for leadership in unravelling the complexity of the food regulations impeding trade while providing mostly inadequate protection for consumers. In 1953, the governing body of WHO, the World Health Assembly, stated that the widening use of chemicals in food presented a new public health problem, and it was proposed that the two Organizations should conduct relevant studies.

FAO and WHO convened the first joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Additives in 1955. That Conference led to the creation of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), which, after more than 60 years, still meets regularly. JECFA's work continues to be of fundamental importance to the Codex Alimentarius Commission's deliberations on standards and guidelines for food additives, contaminants and residues of veterinary drugs in foods. It has served as a model for many other FAO and WHO expert bodies, and for similar scientific advisory bodies at the national level or where countries have joined together in regional economic groupings.

*In the 1940s, rapid progress was made in food science and technology. With the advent of more sensitive analytical tools, knowledge about the nature of food grew quickly.*



## INTEGRATING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

While FAO and WHO deepened their involvement in food-related matters, a variety of committees set up by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also began working on standards for food commodities. In time, the work of those NGO committees was either assumed by, or continued jointly with, the appropriate Codex Alimentarius commodity committee, and, in some cases, the NGO committees themselves became Codex committees.

## INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATION AND COOPERATION

The landmark years in the foundation of the Codex Alimentarius were 1960-1963.

**October 1960:** the first FAO Regional Conference for Europe recognized: *“[t]he desirability of international agreement on minimum food standards and related questions (including labelling requirements, methods of analysis, etc.) ... as an important means of protecting the consumer’s health, of ensuring quality and of reducing trade barriers, particularly in the rapidly integrating market of Europe”.*

The Conference also underscored that: *“... coordination of the growing number of food standards programmes undertaken by many organizations presented a particular problem”.*

Within four months of the regional conference, FAO entered into discussions with WHO, UNECE, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

In 1955, the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition noted that: “... the increasing, and sometimes insufficiently controlled, use of food additives has become a matter of public and administrative concern...”

“... the existence of widely differing control measures may well form an undesirable deterrent to international trade.”

(OECD) and the Council of the Codex Alimentarius Europaeus (a regional European food code pursued by Austria from 1954-1958) with proposals that would lead to the establishment of an international food standards programme.

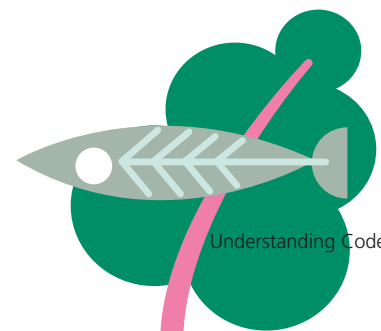
**November 1961:** the Eleventh Session of the FAO Conference passed a resolution that would lead to the establishment of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

**October 1962:** the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Conference convened in Geneva and established the framework for cooperation between the two agencies. The Codex Alimentarius Commission was to be the body responsible for implementing the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. All work of FAO/

WHO and other regional and international bodies dealing with food standards was gradually to be incorporated into the programme. The conference prepared the commission’s first session.

**May 1963:** the Sixteenth World Health Assembly approved the establishment of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme and adopted the Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission emerged following a four-year process and met for the first time in Rome from 25 June to 3 July 1963. That inaugural meeting is taken as the date that Codex came into being, and the Commission celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2013. 





Since 1963,  
thousands of experts  
from all over the world  
have built the Codex system  
of international  
food standards,  
bringing us closer to  
a world where food is safe,  
of good quality and available  
in every home.



# 02. Codex achievements



## A SINGLE INTERNATIONAL REFERENCE POINT

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) bring together food-related scientific knowledge and technological research with open international discussion and participatory decision-making. Around the world, they have raised the profile of issues relating to food safety.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has become the world's preeminent international food-standard-setting body – contributing to safe, good food for everyone.

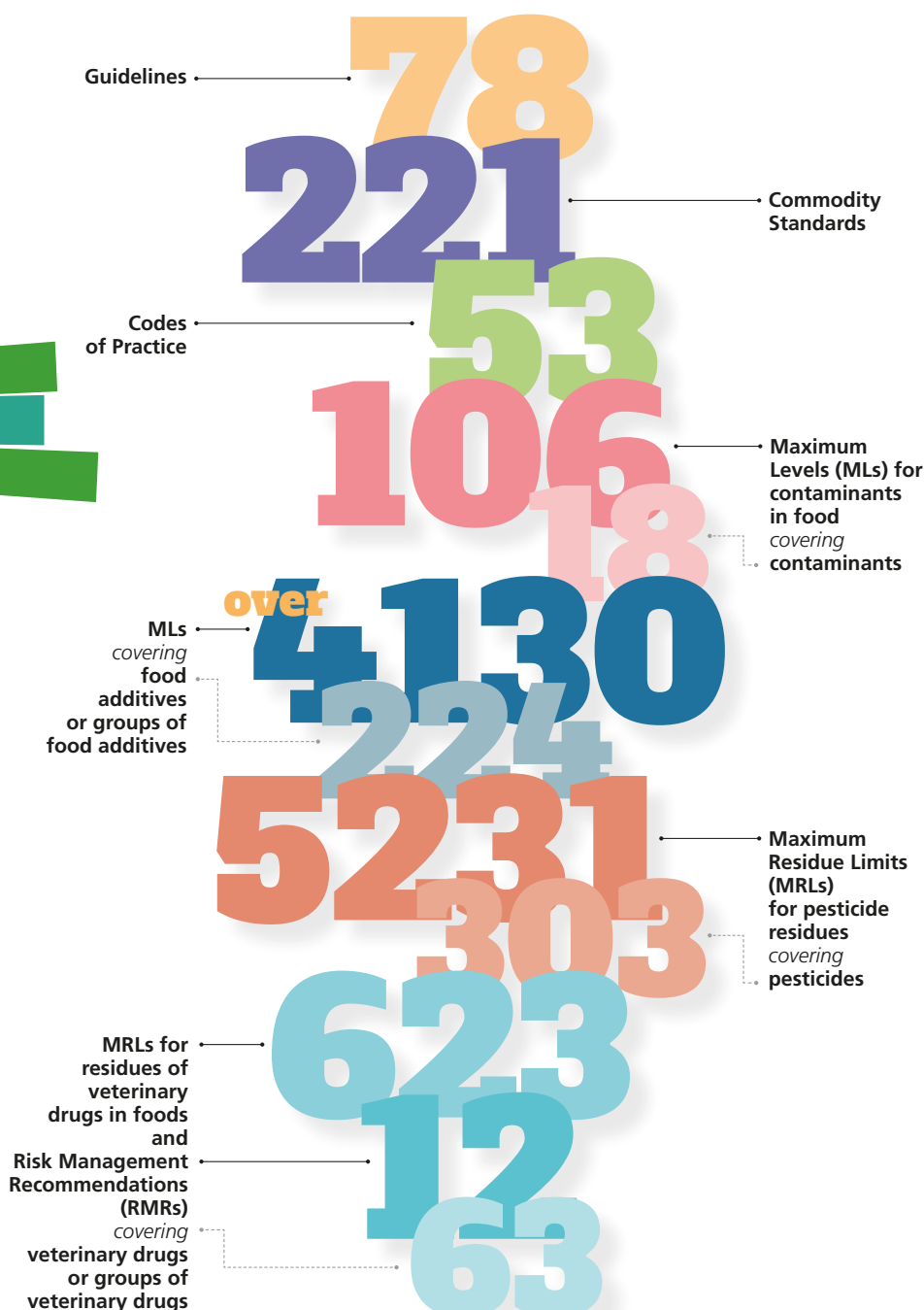
## GREATER NATIONAL AND GLOBAL AWARENESS OF FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY

Consumers and Governments are increasingly aware of food quality and safety issues, and the need to be selective about the foods being consumed. Consumers expect that their Government take legislative and regulatory action to ensure that only safe food of acceptable quality is sold and that the risk of food-borne health hazards is minimized.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has contributed significantly to securing the place of food on political agendas worldwide. Indeed, Governments today are highly conscious of the political consequences in store should they fail to heed consumers' concerns when it comes to the food they eat.

# The Codex scorecard

This table gives the number of Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice by subject matter as of July 2017 after the decisions of the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.



## INCREASED CONSUMER PROTECTION

The right to food for everyone is universally accepted but it is as important that people have the right to expect their food to be safe, good quality and suitable for consumption. This makes continued Codex work a necessity. Food-borne illnesses are at best unpleasant; at worst, they can be fatal.

Outbreaks of foodborne illness can damage trade and tourism and can lead to loss of earnings, unemployment and litigation. Poor-quality food can destroy the commercial credibility of suppliers, both nationally and internationally, while food spoilage is wasteful and costly, and can adversely affect trade and consumer confidence. Food rejections in trade lead to further food waste, which is difficult to tolerate in a world where many still suffer from hunger.

The positive effect of the Commission's work has also been enhanced by the outcomes of international conferences and meetings. National representatives to the United Nations General Assembly, the FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade organized in cooperation with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the FAO/WHO International Conferences on Nutrition, the FAO World Food Summit and the FAO Conference and WHO World Health Assembly have either encouraged or committed their countries to adopt measures ensuring the safety and quality of foods.

## BROADBASED COLLABORATION

The role of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is constantly evolving with the challenges in food production and trade. As science advances, new products and production methods arrive and the

world itself and its climate is changing, creating a food code and keeping it up-to-date is a virtually endless task. The food you buy sits atop the tip of an iceberg of expertise and skills of everyone working in the food chain.

Creating standards that protect consumers, ensure fair practices in the sale of food and facilitate trade is a process that involves specialists in numerous food-related scientific disciplines, together with consumers' organizations, production and processing industries, food-control administrators and traders.

Codex has at times been criticized as slow to complete its work, but developing food standards and compiling them as a code that is credible and authoritative requires extensive consultation. It also takes time for information to be collected and evaluated, for follow-up and verification and, at times, for consensus to be found satisfying differing views. Overall, it takes an average of 4.2 years to develop a Codex standard – and significantly less for pesticide MRLs or food additive levels.

### More than standards

The Codex Alimentarius is not the only result of the work of the Commission, although it is the most important.

By providing an international focal point and forum for informed dialogue on issues relevant to food, the Codex Alimentarius Commission builds networks of experts working on all relevant topics along the food chain. Within countries, participation in Codex has led to introduction of food legislation and Codex-based standards, and the establishment or strengthening of food control agencies to monitor compliance with such regulations.

The six regional FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees also provide vital geographical coverage to identify the challenges and needs particular to each region in the area of food standards and food control. These Committees have recently embarked on a process of revitalization, aimed at boosting their role as the preeminent fora for the discussion of food safety and quality issues at the regional level.

### EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES


A major global programme such as the Codex Alimentarius must review its work to ensure that the task of setting standards is being managed in the most effective way possible. Major changes in the 1990s, such as the creation of WTO and the role Codex was given in this context, led to a thorough evaluation of Codex in 2002, following which, the Codex Secretariat was upgraded to enhance its capacity for communication, independence and visibility. Further improvements included the holding of Commission meetings on yearly basis – as opposed to every two years – and the establishment of a standards management process under the responsibility of the Executive Committee with the aim of increasing the pace of standard setting.

The evaluation also recognized that only with full participation by all countries could Codex justify its international role as a standard-setting organization under the WTO SPS Agreement. The Codex Trust Fund was created, and, over 12 years, has assisted thousands of delegates from developing countries to attend Codex meetings and enhance their skills and knowledge relating to standard-setting, thereby strengthening their national food-control systems. In 2016 the successor initiative to the Trust Fund was born: an ambitious project that will also run for 12 years to make sure that no one is left behind and all countries can build the capacity to participate effectively in Codex.

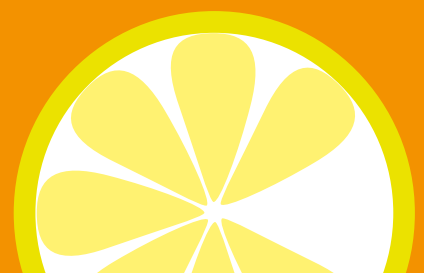
More recently, a 2015 global awareness survey on Codex underlined the need to further strengthen and target Codex communications. Codex is now responding to the ongoing evolution in the ways people access, search for and share information over the Internet and via social media.

In 2016, the Commission recognized that the improvement of work management should be a continuous process and therefore put in place a mechanism for the ongoing review of Codex work management, led by the Codex Secretariat in the context of the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan. ¶

*Codex is responding to the ongoing evolution in the ways people access and share information – over the Internet and via social media.*



Codex Alimentarius  
is a collection  
of international food  
standards, codes of practice  
and guidelines  
to protect the health  
of consumers  
and ensure fair practices  
in the food trade.





# 03. What is the Codex Alimentarius?

## STANDARDS, GUIDELINES AND CODES OF PRACTICE

**C**odex standards, guidelines and codes of practice (together referred to as “Codex texts”) are recommendations – meaning their application is voluntary. Member countries need to take legal steps at the national level to incorporate Codex guidance into their legislation or regulations for it to be enforceable. Some texts, such as codes of practice, are used extensively in training in order to achieve a change of behaviour in producers that will lead to safer food.

Codex general standards, guidelines and codes of practice apply horizontally to a variety of areas, food types and processes. These texts deal with hygienic practice, labelling, additives, inspection and certification, nutrition, and residues of veterinary drugs and of pesticides.

Codex commodity standards refer to specific products or food groups. In the 1960s, Codex took the approach of setting standards applicable to individual foods. This turned out to be impractical, both for keeping standards up-to-date and for their implementation, and gave way to the practice of creating group standards – for example, one general standard for fruit juices and nectars has now replaced the previous standards for individual fruit juices.

**Codex methods of analysis and sampling**, including those for contaminants and residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs in foods, are also considered Codex standards.

**Codex guidelines** fall into two major categories:

- principles that set out policy in certain key areas; and
- guidelines for the interpretation of principles or for the interpretation and extension of provisions of Codex general standards.



For food additives, contaminants, food hygiene and meat hygiene, the principles governing the regulation of these matters are built into the relevant Standards and Codes of Practice as well as in the texts of the Procedural Manual.


For labelling, specific guidelines extend the range of the Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods e.g. for health and nutrition claims, nutrition labelling etc.

**Codex codes of practice** also fall into two major categories:

The codes of hygienic practice which define the production, processing, manufacturing, transport and storage practices for individual foods or groups of foods that are considered essential to ensure the safety and suitability of food for consumption. For example, for food hygiene, the basic text is the Codex General Principles of Food Hygiene, which introduces the use of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) food safety management system – an approach for identifying and providing options to deal with hazards that is fundamental to modern food safety work. Another major code is the Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products.

Other codes aim at the prevention and/or reduction of chemical/mineral contaminants such as mycotoxins, acrylamide or heavy metals. All codes of practice are developed in close cooperation with practitioners.

### A PAPERLESS CODEX

The first Codex texts in the 1960s were printed volumes. Keeping pace with advances in electronic archiving technology, CD-ROMs were adopted in the 1990s. Today, every Codex standard is created and stored digitally and made publicly available on the Codex website in multiple languages as soon as it is adopted by the Commission. All documentation is also online and available to everyone. The Codex website has also become the hub for members and observers also to register for meetings, submit comments or participate in electronic working groups. 

# GENERAL STANDARDS

GENERAL STANDARDS, guidelines and codes of practice apply to all foods.

**Food additives are fully regulated** in the *Codex General Standard for Food Additives*. The standard clearly lays out the principles for using additives and defines the maximum use levels. This standard aims to become the sole reference for food additives in Codex. Additives differ from other substances dealt with in Codex in that they have been intentionally added to food to with a technological purpose. The standard is available as a database on the Codex website.

**Food hygiene** refers to avoiding microbiological contamination of food with harmful microorganisms. This is ensured by relevant Codex codes of hygienic practice for the commodity or group of commodities concerned, mainly following the overarching *Codex General Principles for Food Hygiene*. Some Codex standards contain microbiological criteria. However, the main scope of Codex work has been to give guidance to countries on how to set relevant microbiological criteria specific to their circumstances and avoid microbiological contamination.

**Other food contaminants** include chemicals, heavy metals and radioactive substances. They may enter into food from the soil (heavy metals), humidity (mycotoxins) or production processes (acrylamide). The *Codex General Standard for Contaminants in Food and Feed* defines principles and sets **limits** for a number of contaminants and several codes of practice give guidance on how to avoid contamination.

Each **COMMODITY STANDARD** refers to relevant general standards. Exceptions to the general standards should be rare.

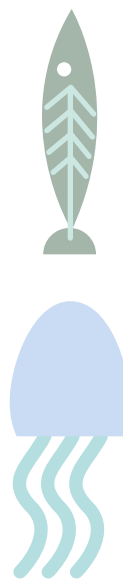
cereals, pulses (legumes) and derived products including vegetable proteins



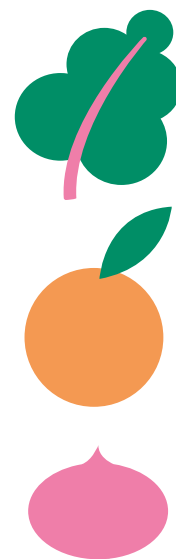
fats and oils and related products



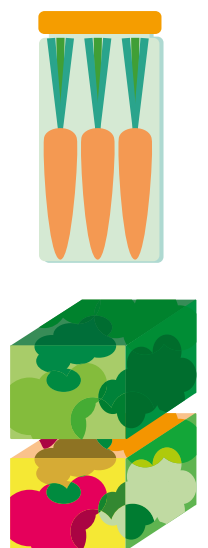
fish and fishery products



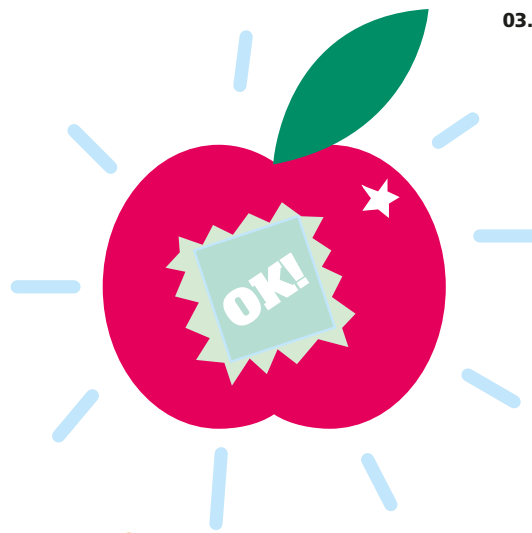
fresh fruits and vegetables



processed and quick-frozen fruits and vegetables



# COMMODITY STANDARDS



**Pesticide residues and residues of veterinary drugs** in foods are specific contaminants caused by products used in the production of food but not intended to be contained in it. These are regulated in Codex Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs), which are available as databases on the Codex website.

**Labelling** includes provisions on the name of the food and any **special requirements** to ensure that the consumer is not deceived or misled about the nature of the food. The *Codex General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* also contains requirements for the listing of ingredients and date-marking. The General Standard is extended by guidelines on nutrition labelling, nutrition and health claims, and general and production claims, for example on organic produce.

**Methods of Analysis and Sampling** contains a list of the **test methods** needed to ensure that the commodity conforms to the requirements of the standard. References are made to internationally recognized test methods that meet the Commission's criteria, for example, for accuracy and precision.

**Import and Export Inspection and Certification** defines principles of trading practices to facilitate international trade, with guidance on how to set up a food inspection and certification system, the use of certificates, communication in case of emergencies and principles for traceability.

The **nutritional** aspects of foods for labelling purposes are studied by the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses. This Committee gives guidance in its areas of expertise to the Committee on Food Labelling in addition to setting standards for special foods, such as gluten-free foods or foods for infants and small children. The Committee also deals with food fortification and food supplements.

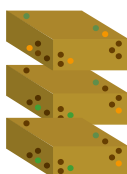
## GENERAL STANDARDS for ALL FOODS

**COMMODITY STANDARDS** define specific foods following a common format.

fruit juices



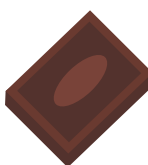
meat and meat products; soups and broths



milk and milk products



sugars, cocoa products and chocolate and other miscellaneous products



**Name means the common name of the food.**

**Scope** includes the name of the food to which the standard applies and, in most cases, the purpose for which the commodity will be used.

**Weights and measures** contains provisions such as fill of the container and the drained weight of the commodity.

**Description** includes a definition of the product or products covered with an indication, where appropriate, of the raw materials from which they are derived.

**Essential composition** includes information on the composition and identity characteristics of the commodity, along with any compulsory and optional ingredients.

**References to relevant general standards**



Codex internal rules  
and procedures define  
an open, inclusive,  
transparent and scientific  
standard-setting process  
working towards consensus.



# 04. How the Codex system works

## THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

**T**he Codex Alimentarius Commission was established by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to implement their joint food standards programme. It held its first session in 1963.

The legal basis for the Commission is contained in the ten articles that form the Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted by the FAO Conference and the World Health Assembly. The practical implementation of the Statutes is described in the Rules of Procedure. These fundamental texts together with other procedural guidance are published in the Procedural Manual.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission shall ... be responsible for making proposals to, and shall be consulted by, the Directors-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) on all matters pertaining to the implementation of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, the purpose of which is:

- (a) **protecting** the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade;
- (b) **promoting** coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations;
- (c) **determining** priorities and initiating and guiding the preparation of draft standards through and with the aid of appropriate organizations;
- (d) **finalizing** standards elaborated under (c) above and publishing them in a Codex Alimentarius either as regional or worldwide standards, together with international standards already finalized by other bodies under (b) above, wherever this is practicable;
- (e) **amending** published standards, as appropriate, in the light of developments.

Statutes of the  
Codex Alimentarius Commission  
ARTICLE 1.

## The Rules of Procedure

Conditions of membership of the Commission

Appointment of Commission officers, including the chairperson, three vicechairpersons, and a secretary, and prescribe their responsibilities

Appointment of regional coordinators

Establishment of an Executive Committee to meet between Commission sessions, to act on behalf of the Commission as its executive organ

Frequency and operation of Commission sessions

Nature of agendas for Commission sessions

Voting procedures

Observers

Preparation of Commission records and reports

Establishment of subsidiary bodies

Procedures to be adopted in the elaboration of standards;

Allocation of a budget and estimates of expenditure Languages used by the Commission

Languages used by the Commission

By October 2017, 99.8% of the world's population were represented in the Commission through 188 members: 187 countries and one member Organization (the European Union). Over 200 international governmental and non-governmental organizations are accredited observers of the Commission.

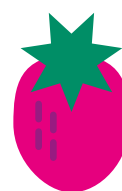
### Codex Alimentarius Commission

The Commission meets annually, alternating between FAO headquarters in Rome and WHO headquarters in Geneva. Typically more than 600 delegates, representing over 130 member Governments and 40 observer organizations attend the Commission.

The Commission elects a Chairperson and three Vice-Chairpersons from among its members at each session. An individual office-holder may be re-elected twice, thereby serving a maximum of three terms. Chairpersons are normally elected from among the three Vice-Chairs.

Each Codex member decides on which officials to appoint to participate on its behalf and on the composition of its delegation. A national delegation is normally headed by a senior official appointed by the Government and may also include representatives of the national food industry, consumer organizations and academic institutions.

Countries not yet members of the Commission may attend as observer countries.





Codex would have little authority in the field of international standard-setting if it did not welcome and acknowledge the valuable contributions made by observers. Governmental and non-governmental, public and private organizations alike play a vital role in ensuring Codex texts are of the highest quality and based on sound science. Expert technical bodies, industry and consumer associations contribute to the standard-setting process in a spirit of openness, collaboration and transparency. Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can apply for observer status in Codex in order to attend and put forward their views at every stage of the standard-setting process. Only the final decision on the adoption of a text is the prerogative of members alone.

Codex meetings are public: the Commission has long been audio-recorded and today is streamed live on the web. Members of the public and the press may attend Commission meetings.

#### **Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission**

The Executive Committee is the only body in Codex that has limited participation and whose sessions are not open to the public. Its sessions are audio-recorded and uploaded on the Codex website to ensure transparency.

The Executive Committee is composed of the Chair and the Vice-Chairs of the Commission. Seven members elected on a geographical basis (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East, North America, South-West Pacific) and six regional coordinators (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Near East, South-West Pacific).

The Executive Committee makes proposals to the Commission regarding general orientation, strategic planning and the programming of the work of the Commission. It also studies special problems and assists in the management of the Commission's programme of standard-development by conducting critical review of new work proposals and by monitoring progress in standard-development.

### **THE CODEX STANDARD-SETTING PROCEDURE**

The Codex standard-setting procedure, or "Codex step procedure", is designed to provide for consultation with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, but also contains a fast track to allow for urgent standards to be set within one year.

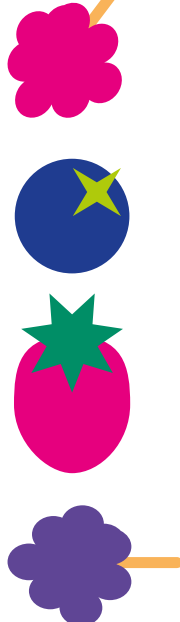
- A new Codex standard normally starts life as a discussion paper in the Commission or a subsidiary body. Any delegation (member or observer) may submit discussion papers. The formal submission of a proposal for a standard to be developed (project document) may be submitted either by a member or a subsidiary body of the Commission detailing the need for a standard, the timeframe for the work and its relative priority.
- The Commission decides whether to develop a standard based on a critical review of the project document by the Executive Committee. "Criteria for the Establishment of Work Priorities" exist to assist the Commission or Executive Committee in their decision-making and in selecting the subsidiary body to be responsible for steering the standard through its development. If necessary, a new subsidiary body – usually a specialized task force – may be created. **(Step 1)**

- The Secretariat arranges for the preparation of a proposed draft standard (usually through electronic working groups or drafting groups) **(Step 2)** and circulates it to members and observers for comments: today, this is done through the Codex Online Commenting System (OCS) – an purpose-built, web-based system, designed to facilitate broad and effective participation **(Step 3)**.
- The relevant subsidiary body considers the comments **(Step 4)** and may present the text to the Commission as a draft standard **(Step 5)**. The draft may also need to be referred to the Codex committee responsible for labelling, hygiene, additives, contaminants or methods of analysis for endorsement of any special advice in its area of expertise.
- Members and observers have another opportunity to comment on the draft standard **(Step 6)**. Their comments are considered by the body assigned the work and final amendments are made **(Step 7)**.
- Standards take an average of 4.2 years to develop. Once adopted by the Commission, the standard becomes part of the Codex Alimentarius. **(Step 8)**

#### **Keeping the Codex Alimentarius up to date**

The Commission and its subsidiary bodies are committed to keeping Codex standards and related texts up to date to ensure that they are consistent with current scientific knowledge and meet members' needs.

Most countries now require less-prescriptive standards – especially for commodities – than those developed in the 1970s and 1980s. The Commission keeps abreast of these changes, and it has been consolidating its many older,



detailed standards into new, more general or group standards. The benefits of this approach are that it widens coverage and allows for innovation in the development of new food products. This process of review and renewal strengthens the scientific basis for consumer protection.

The procedure for revision or consolidation follows that used for the initial preparation of a standard.

### SUBSIDIARY BODIES

All Codex subsidiary bodies report to the Commission and meet at intervals of between one and two years, in accordance with needs.

**Codex committees**, including ad hoc intergovernmental task forces, prepare draft standards for submission to the Commission. These committees are hosted by a member country, which is responsible for the committee's running costs and administration, and for providing its chairperson. Typically once assigned, the host country of a given committee does not change often, although the designation of host countries for the committees is a standing item on the agenda for the Commission.

Codex committees and task forces can deal with general subjects or specific commodities.

**Ad hoc Intergovernmental Task Forces** differ from Codex Committee in that they are established to achieve a clearly defined purpose within a fixed period of time.

#### General subject committees

– also known as “horizontal committees” – develop crosscutting concepts and principles applying to food in general, to specific foods or to groups of foods; endorse or review relevant provisions in Codex commodity standards; and, based on the advice of expert scientific bodies, develop major recommendations pertaining to consumer health and safety.

#### Commodity Committees

The responsibility for developing standards for specific foods or classes of food lies with the Commodity Committees, sometimes referred to as “vertical committees”.

FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees allow regions or groups of countries to coordinate food-standards activities in their region, including the development of regional standards. Coordinating committees meet every two years, and the member country responsible for the regional coordination may hold this position for two terms of two years.

## CODEx ADMINISTRATION

### The Secretariat of the Codex

**Alimentarius Commission**, hosted at FAO headquarters in Rome, Italy, provides coordination and liaison across the entire spectrum of Codex activities. Under the overall guidance of the Codex Secretary, a senior official appointed jointly by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO, the Secretariat comprises a small team of professional and technical officers and support staff.

Codex Food Standards Officers are responsible for the preparation, management and distribution of information from Codex committees to members and observers on matters such as proposed draft standards, revisions to texts and the publication of committee reports. Food Standards Officers are international specialists with diverse multidisciplinary backgrounds, such as food safety control, public health, standard setting, food technology, chemistry, microbiology or veterinary medicine.

The Codex Secretariat is also responsible for managing the coordination of work between committees, continuously monitors work planning for active and adjourned committees alike and ensures that Codex texts remain relevant and consistent with current scientific knowledge. Meetings of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Executive Committee are administered and serviced entirely by the Rome-based staff.

### FAO and WHO

The two founding organizations are responsible for managing the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme work in close harmony with the Codex Secretariat on all matters regarding the work of the Programme, and they guarantee that Codex has access to expertise and support in operational and technical areas ranging from nutrition and food safety to communication and legal services.

### National Host Secretariats

Most subsidiary committees are hosted, financially maintained and serviced by member governments. These bodies provide an immense in-kind contribution to the work of Codex. Member Governments also plan co-hosted meetings, often held in developing countries, to enhance both awareness of and participation in Codex work. The Codex Secretariat coordinates the activities and oversees the operations of these committees.

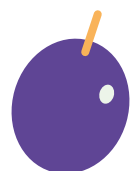
### Codex Contact Points

Each Codex member country nominates a Codex contact point (CCP), typically an official of a government ministry dealing with food administration. The CCP acts as the link between the Codex Secretariat and that member country, coordinating all relevant Codex activities at the national level. They act as the focal point for liaison with the food industry, consumers, traders and all other concerned parties and ensure that their Government receives an appropriate balance of policy and technical advice upon which to base decisions relating to the work of Codex. Many countries have national Codex committees, in addition, to contribute to coordination.

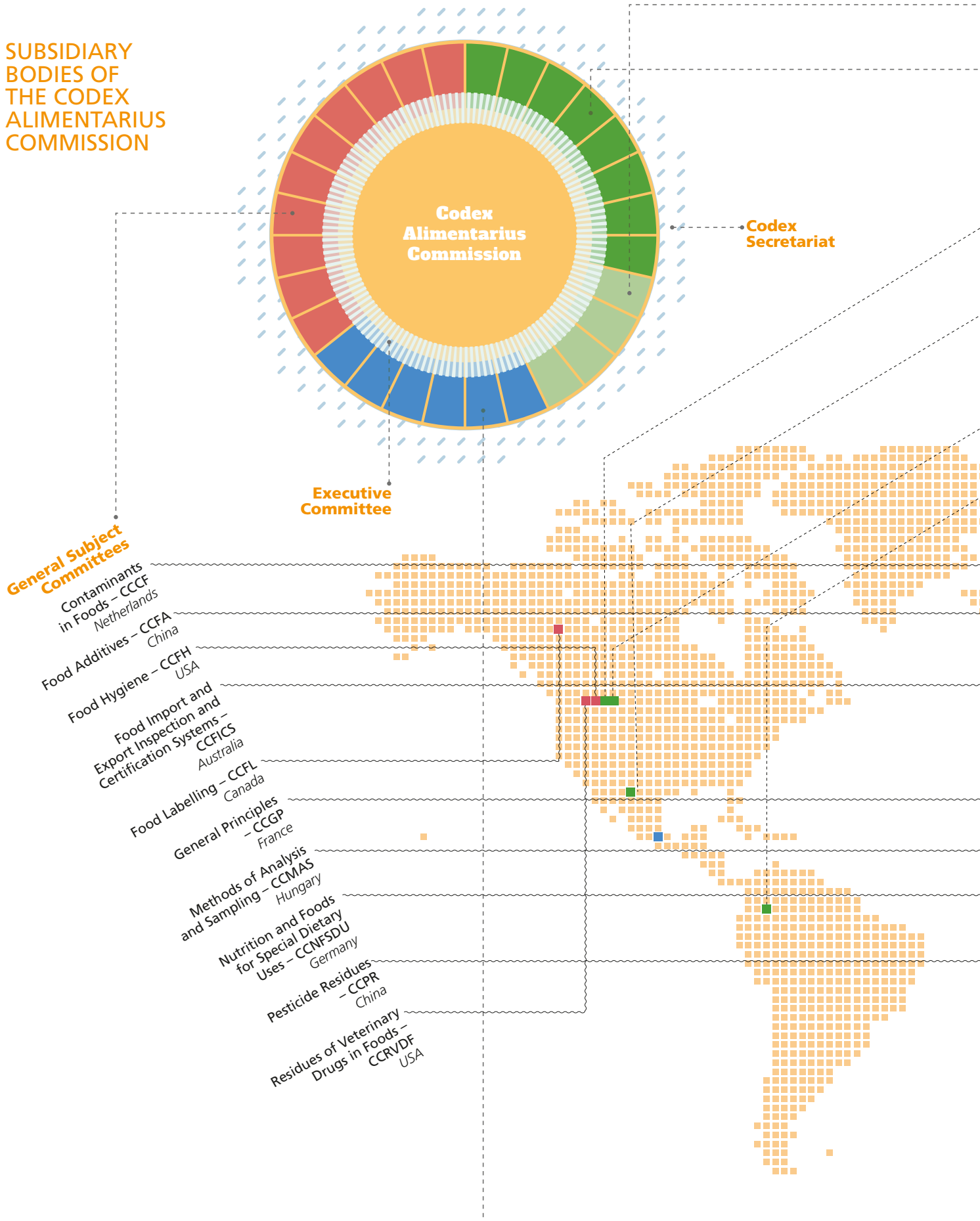
In recent years, Codex Contact Points have taken on new responsibilities in support of the Codex Secretariat's aim of offering more online services to members, such as an online registration system (ORS), online commenting system (OCS) and electronic working group platforms.

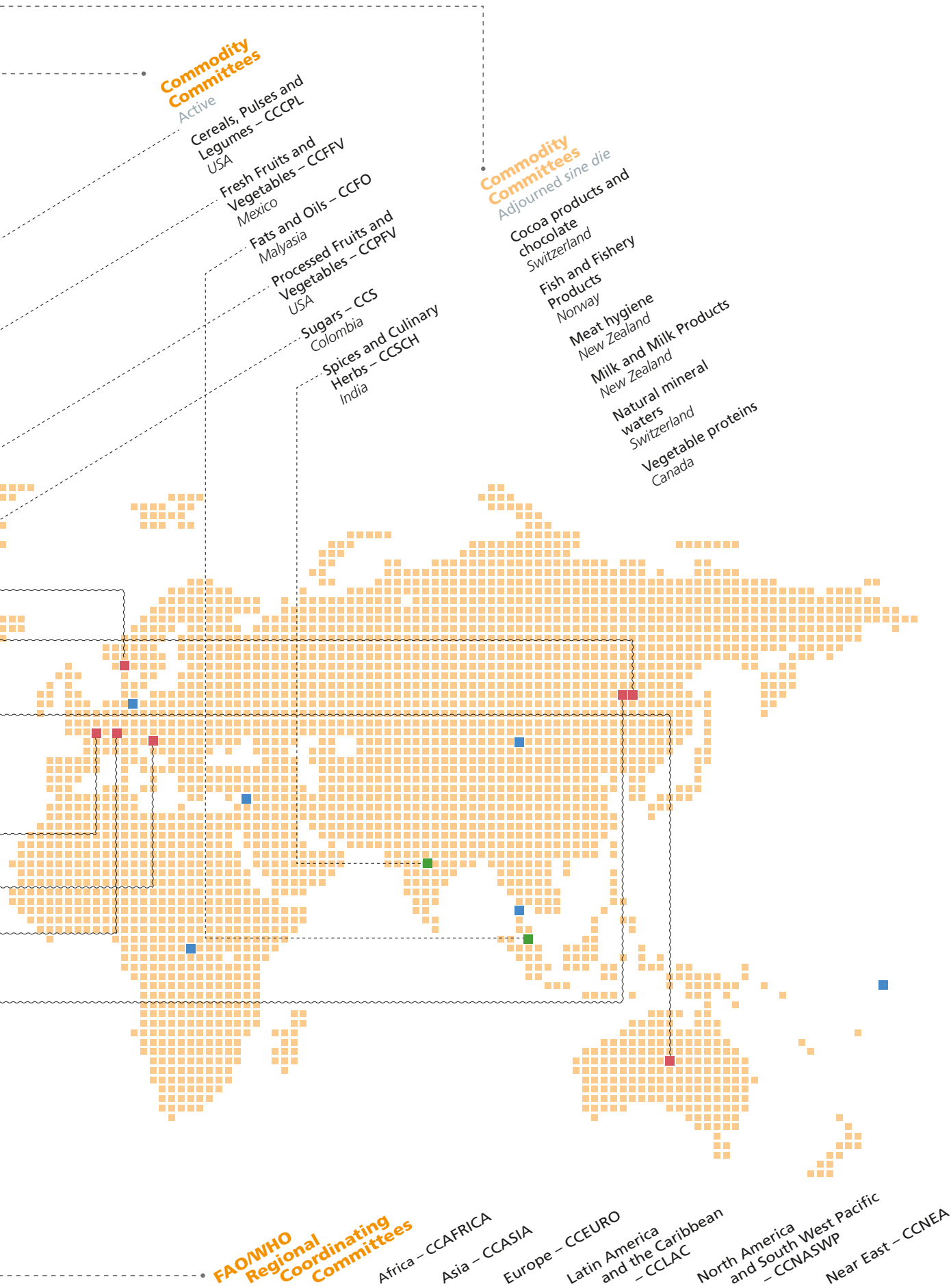
### Codex Chairs and Vice-Chairs


The group of Codex Chairs and Vice-Chairs is an informal group comprising the elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the Commission, the respective Chairs of the six FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (each appointed by the relevant Committee) and the chairs of Codex technical committees and task forces (appointed by the respective host Government). The Codex Secretariat invites this group at least twice a year to discuss and exchange best practices related to conducting committee work, facilitating debate and building consensus. ¶



**SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**







“The food standards,  
guidelines and  
other recommendations of the  
Codex Alimentarius  
shall be based on  
the principle of sound  
scientific analysis.”

– the first statement of principle  
concerning the role of science  
in the Codex decision-making process



# 05. Codex and science

## SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES FOR STANDARD-SETTING

**T**he foundation of Codex standards is sound scientific evidence. Experts and specialists in a wide range of disciplines have contributed to every aspect of the Codex Alimentarius to ensure that it upholds the most rigorous scientific standards. It is fair to say that the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission has provided a focal

point for food-related scientific research and investigation: the Commission and its expert advisory bodies in FAO and WHO together constitute an important international forum for the exchange of scientific information about food.

In 1995, the Commission adopted four Statements of Principle concerning the role of science in the Codex decision-making process and the extent to which other factors are taken into account. These principles were supplemented by the Statements of Principle Relating to the Role of Food Safety Risk Assessment (1997) and the Criteria for the Consideration of the Other Factors Referred to in the Second Statement of Principle (2001).

In 2003, the Commission adopted the comprehensive Working Principles for Risk Analysis for Application in the Framework of the Codex Alimentarius. Based on these principles, a similar text was developed for use by Governments (CAC/GL 62-2007).



## The main principles of developing scientific advice

### Excellence

Use of internationally recognized expertise, supported by the creation of a platform for global scientific discussion based on best practices for developing guidance

### Independence

Experts contribute in their own capacity and not on behalf of any government or institution, and are required to declare any potential conflicts of interest

### Transparency

Procedures and methods to ensure all interested parties understand the processes for the development of scientific advice and have access to the reports, safety assessments and evaluations, and other basic information

### Universality

To access the broad base of scientific data critical for international standard-setting activities, all institutions and interested parties throughout the world are invited to make data available – in support of this principle, the Codex Strategic Plan 2014–2019 seeks, inter alia, to “increase scientific input from developing countries”





## EXPERT BODIES AND CONSULTATIONS

The development of the Codex Alimentarius has given impetus to activity in the fields of food chemistry, food technology, food microbiology, mycology, and pesticide and veterinary drug residues. Much work is carried out in the form of collaborative studies among individual scientists, laboratories, institutions and universities, and joint FAO/WHO expert committees and consultations.

FAO and WHO expert bodies and meetings are independent of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, such that their work contributes significantly to the scientific credibility of the Commission's own work. Codex strictly adheres to the principle of ensuring the independence of scientific advice from the practical realities of risk management.

## SELECTION OF GLOBAL EXPERTISE

The membership of expert consultations is of critical importance. Any conclusions and recommendations depend to a very large degree on the objectivity, scientific skill and overall competence of the members who formulate them.

For this reason, great care is taken in the selection of the experts invited to participate through procedures that seek to ensure the excellence, independence and transparency of the advice provided by the FAO/WHO scientific committees. Expert must be pre-eminent specialists in their fields, impartial and indisputably objective in their judgement. They are appointed in a personal capacity, not as a representative of a government, organization or institution, and the input they provide is theirs alone. They are required to declare any potential conflict of interest regarding the substances they will be evaluating. Experts are invited to apply via a "call for experts" then subject to a rigorous selection process for eventual inclusion on rosters as appropriate. Scientists from all parts of the world, in particular from developing countries, are encouraged to apply.

## SCIENTIFIC ADVICE

Two expert groups – the Joint FAO/WHO Meetings on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) – have for many years produced internationally acclaimed data widely used by governments, industry and research centres worldwide. The safety assessments and evaluations they perform are based on the best scientific information available, compiling inputs from many authoritative sources, and producing publications that are considered international works of reference.

The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA) began its work in 2000, aiming to optimize the use of microbiological risk assessment as the scientific basis for risk management decisions relating to microbiological hazards in foods. Its assessments and other advice provide the scientific basis for the development of Codex standards, codes of hygienic practice and other guidelines in the area of food hygiene.



## Main FAO/WHO expert bodies

1955

**The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)** was established in 1955 to consider chemical, toxicological and other aspects of contaminants and residues of veterinary drugs in foods for human consumption. The Codex Committee on Food Additives, the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods and the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods identify food additives, contaminants and veterinary drug residues that should receive priority evaluation and refer them to JECFA for assessment before incorporating them into Codex standards.

1963

**Joint FAO/WHO Meetings on Pesticide Residues (JMPR)** began in 1963 following a decision that the Codex Alimentarius Commission should recommend maximum residue limits (MRLs) for pesticide and environmental contaminants in specific food products to ensure the safety of foods containing residues. It was also decided that JMPR should recommend methods of sampling and analysis. There is close cooperation between JMPR and the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR). CCPR identifies those substances requiring priority evaluation. After JMPR evaluation, CCPR discusses the recommended MRLs and, if acceptable, forwards them to the Commission for adoption.

2000

**Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA)** began work in 2000 to develop and provide advice to the Codex Alimentarius Commission on microbiological aspects of food safety. In addition to providing risk assessments, JEMRA develops guidance on related areas such as data collection and the application of risk assessment. JEMRA works most closely with the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene, but has also provided advice to other Codex committees, such as the Committee on Fish and Fishery Products.

2010

**Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Nutrition (JEMNU)** was established in 2010 with the aim of strengthen the role of FAO and WHO in providing scientific advice on nutrition to Member States and bodies, including the Codex Alimentarius Commission; in particular, its scientific advice is relied on significantly in setting nutrient reference values (NRVs), in particular through the work of the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses.



The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Nutrition (JEMNU) was established in 2010 following the model of JEMRA. JEMNU strengthens the role of FAO and WHO in providing scientific advice on nutrition to Member States and bodies such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission and in particular the Codex Committee for Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU). JEMNU convenes in response to a specific request from CCNFSDU or another Codex body. The joint FAO/WHO JEMNU secretariat identifies and invites relevant global experts to review and evaluate evidence and provide an objective assessment to Codex to enable its risk management processes to set suitable health-protective and trade-inclusive global nutrition standards.

Codex may also consider scientific advice from the **WHO Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group (NUGAG)**, established in 2010 at the request of the 63rd World Health Assembly, “to strengthen the evidence based on effective and safe nutrition actions to counteract

the public health effects of the double burden of malnutrition.” NUGAG’s work includes updating the dietary goals for the prevention of obesity and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) and the WHO guidelines on sugars and fatty acids.


One of the strengths of the Codex/FAO/WHO relationship in scientific matters is its flexibility. In recent years, FAO and WHO have held expert scientific consultations on a broad range of matters; not all of these have resulted in the development of new Codex standards, since, at times, the best way of managing a food-safety risk may be determined to be through other means. FAO and WHO also provide advice on how alternative means of risk management can be used.

### THE BROADER SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

FAO and WHO are not the only sources of scientific excellence on which Codex depends. Codex encourages other science-based intergovernmental organizations to contribute to the joint FAO and WHO scientific system. The

**International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)** provides advice and support on levels of radionuclide contamination in foods and on food irradiation. The **World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE)** provides advice on animal health, animal diseases affecting humans and the linkages between animal health and food safety.

Scientific advice is not free. Even though the selected experts work for free, the meetings of the scientific bodies are costly. In recent years, the availability of funding for scientific advice has diminished, impacting on the ability of FAO and WHO to convene the expert consultations required to provide the advice requested by Codex and Member States. Codex capacity to make progress in some of its standard-setting has consequently been impeded since adequately funded and supported scientific input is the driving force behind a major part of the work of Codex. Discussions are ongoing to find new ways to ensure the sustainable availability of scientific advice. ¶



The highest priority  
of the Codex Alimentarius  
Commission  
is to protect the health  
of consumers.



## 06. Codex and consumers

### COMMITMENT IN THE INTEREST OF CONSUMERS

Since its inception, the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies have made the protection of consumers their top priority in formulating food standards and performing related activities.

Other United Nations bodies have also recognized the importance of consumer protection. A 1985 resolution of the General Assembly led to the development of the 1986 *Guidelines for consumer protection*, which identified food as one of three priority areas of

essential concern for the health of consumers and highlighted the role of the Codex Alimentarius as the reference point for consumer protection when it comes to food.

In 1991, the FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade, organized in cooperation with the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, recommended continuing and strengthening consumer participation in food-related decision-making at the national and international levels.

To ensure that nutrition labelling is effective:

“In providing the consumer with information about a food so that a wise choice of food can be made ...”

the Purpose of  
the Codex Guidelines  
on Nutrition Labelling



*Codes of hygienic practice provide guidance on the production of food that is safe and suitable for consumption in order to protect the health of consumers.*

The first FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition (ICN1), held in 1992, recommended that consumers be protected through improved food quality and safety, and outlined measures to accomplish that recommendation.

In 1993, FAO held an expert consultation on the Integration of Consumer Interests in Food Control. The purpose of the consultation was to provide guidance and assistance to countries in the early stages of integrating consumer interests into their overall food control systems, as well as to improve such processes in countries where they were already under way.

A second FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition (ICN2) was held in Rome in November 2014, focusing global attention on the need to address malnutrition in all its forms. The Conference reaffirmed the commitments made at ICN1, the World Food Summits of 1996 and 2002, and the 2009 World Summit on Food Security. The Conference developed a **Declaration on Nutrition** and a voluntary **Framework for Action** to guide the implementation of its commitments.

## FOOD COMMODITY STANDARDS

The Codex format for commodity standards reflects the dual mandate of Codex to: **protect the health of consumers** and **ensure fair practices in the food trade**. The safety (e.g. references to general standards) and quality (e.g. essential composition and quality) of products should be acceptable. Labelling should not mislead consumers but assure them that food corresponds to their expectations and provide all relevant information they may need to make good use of the product. The Codex Alimentarius contains more than 200 standards in the format for individual foods or groups of foods.

## GENERAL STANDARDS, PRINCIPLES, GUIDELINES AND CODES OF PRACTICE

Codex General Standards, Guidelines and Codes apply to all food even if there is no specific Codex standard dedicated to a particular commodity.

The *General Standard for the Labelling of Prepackaged Foods* and its related guidelines aim to ensure honest practices in the sale of food while also providing guidance to consumers in their choice of products.

The general standards for food hygiene, food additives, contaminants and toxins in food, and for irradiated foods as well as maximum residue limits (MRLs) for pesticides and veterinary drugs protect consumer health.

Other general principles exist for the use of food additives, for food import and export inspection and certification regimes, and for the addition of essential nutrients to foods.

Codex codes of practice provide guidance on how to produce, handle and/or process food so that it is safe and suitable for human consumption. The *General Principles of Food Hygiene* are particularly important in protecting consumers as they lay a firm foundation for food safety and follow the food chain from primary production to final consumption, highlighting the key hygiene controls required at each stage. As such, they have contributed to saving lives every day, from the farm to the fork. Further codes aim to provide specific guidance to protect certain food groups from either microbiological, chemical or heavy-metal contamination.

## EMERGING CONSUMER CONCERNS

The globalization of the food trade has greatly increased the potential for food-borne illnesses to cross national borders. Likewise, modern forms of global communication, such as the Internet, mean information – and misinformation – can spread rapidly.

Codex must be able to respond appropriately to these instances to ensure that confidence in the food supply is not jeopardized. The first of the goals in the Codex Strategic Plan 2014–2019 is to “Establish international food standards that address current and emerging food issues”.

Codex has been at the forefront of identifying and addressing emerging food issues. For example, consumer concerns in the wake of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) crisis of the early 1990s led Codex to take up the question of the safety of feed for food-producing animals. The Commission

went even further than responding to the immediate crisis, and the resulting *Code of Practice on Good Animal Feeding* takes into account all relevant aspects of animal health and the environment. It applies to the production and use of all materials destined for animal feed and feed ingredients at all levels, whether produced industrially or on a farm. It also includes grazing or free-range feeding, forage crop production and aquaculture. Given the close interrelationship between animal health and food safety, there is a close working relationship between Codex and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), nonetheless recognizing their different mandates and overlapping areas of interest.

The *Codex Principles for the Risk Analysis of Foods Derived from Modern Biotechnology* were developed to guide a pre-market safety evaluation of these foods on a case-by-case basis. The Principles provide for post-market monitoring for potential effects on consumer health and nutritional effects. Two detailed guidelines on the conduct of safety assessments, one for foods from DNA-modified plants and the other for foods from DNA-modified micro-organisms, include consideration of both intended and unintended effects of the genetic modification and an assessment of possible allergenicity. The Codex guidelines have helped enhance international cooperation in the area of biotechnology.

Examples of other guidelines and codes of practice include: the *Guidelines for the Control of Campylobacter and Salmonella in Chicken Meat*, the *Code of Practice for the Reduction of Acrylamide in Foods*, the *Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Ethyl Carbamate Contamination in Stone Fruit Distillates* and the *Code of Practice for Weed Control to Prevent and Reduce Pyrrolizidine Alkaloid Contamination in Food and Feed*.

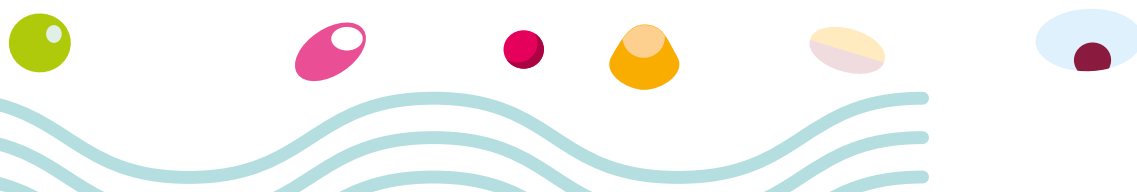
## CONSUMER PARTICIPATION

Codex has welcomed consumer participation since its inception, with consumers' organizations represented at its sessions since 1965. The involvement of consumers in the Commission's work has been the subject of explicit discussions within the Commission. Consumers' participation in decision-making in relation to food standards and the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, for instance, was an item on the agenda of the twentieth session of the Commission, which agreed on the need to continue working in close cooperation with consumers' organizations.

Due to its nature as an intergovernmental body, the Commission has limited scope to involve consumers directly in its food standardization and related work. This is why, at its twentieth session, the Commission invited governments to involve consumers more effectively in decision-making processes at the national level, recalling that: “*The Commission has continued to involve consumer interests in its work while recognizing that it is at the national level that consumers can [provide] their most valuable and effective input*”.

## INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED TO CONSUMERS

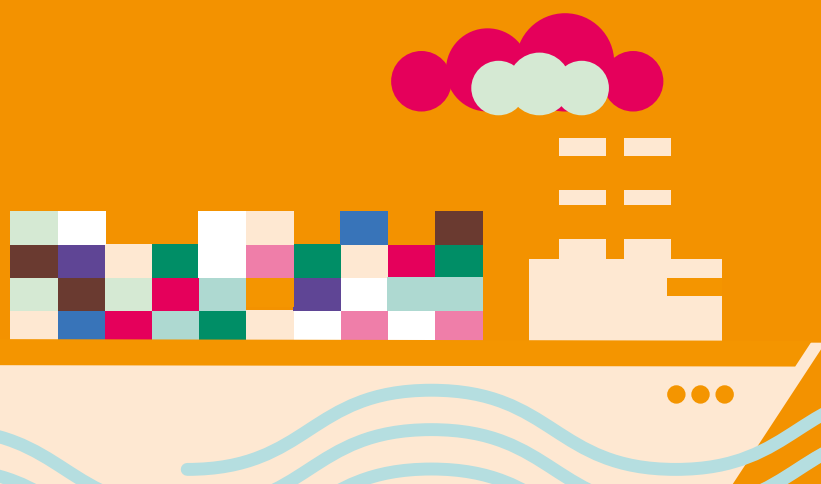
All Codex documents, including working papers, information papers and meeting reports are publicly available on the Codex website [www.codexalimentarius.org](http://www.codexalimentarius.org). In addition, the Codex Secretariat endeavours to reply to all requests from consumers ¶





The value  
of trade in food  
exceeded  
US\$1.7 trillion  
in 2015  
and continues  
to increase.

- FAO





# 07. Codex and trade

## CODEX IMPLICATIONS FOR TRADE

**A**mong the principal concerns of national Governments the world over is the need to ensure that food imported from other countries is safe and poses no threat to the health of consumers or the health and safety of their animal and plant populations. Consequently, importing countries have introduced laws and regulations to eliminate or minimize such threats. In the area of food, animal and plant control, there is a risk that such measures could lead to barriers to trade in food between countries.

Harmonization with a view to promoting free trade was among the concerns underpinning the evolution of Codex – the view that, if every country harmonized towards a single set of international food standards, all countries would encounter fewer barriers to trade, allowing food products to move more freely among countries. This benefits farmers and their households and contributes to reducing hunger and poverty. This concept is recognized in the General Principles of the Codex Alimentarius.

While many countries align with Codex, for others it can be difficult to integrate Codex standards fully into their national legislation. Varying legal procedures,

“The publication of the Codex Alimentarius is intended to guide and promote the elaboration and establishment of definitions and requirements for foods to assist in their harmonization and in doing so to facilitate international trade.”

The General Principles of  
the Codex Alimentarius

administrative mechanisms and political systems, and, at times, the influence of national attitudes and concepts of sovereign rights, can impede the progress of harmonization and the use of Codex standards.

The increasing level of participation by countries in the work of Codex shows that, despite these difficulties, countries value open technical discussion and agree that they are useful to find an international consensus towards which rules and regulations can evolve.

### **CODEX, TRADE AGREEMENTS AND THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION**

While many trade agreements have implications for food, two are of particular interest with respect to the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission – the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

The GATT Uruguay Round (1986–1994) Agreements represent a milestone in the multilateral trading system as they, for the first time, incorporated agriculture and food under operationally effective rules and disciplines. They recognized that measures adopted by national governments to protect the health of their consumers, animals and plants could become, in effect, barriers to trade in disguise, and that they could be discriminatory. Consequently, the SPS and

*As global trade rises an ever increasing number of countries see the value of Codex membership.*

TBT Agreements were included among the Multilateral Agreements on Trade in Goods, annexed to the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement, which established the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The SPS Agreement contains provisions with respect to measures that may be taken to protect animal, plant and human health. With regard to human health, it acknowledges that governments have the right to take sanitary and phytosanitary measures necessary for the protection of the health of their citizens. However, the Agreement requires them to apply those measures only to the extent required to protect human health. It does not permit member governments to discriminate by applying different requirements to different countries where the same or similar conditions prevail, unless there is sufficient scientific justification for doing so.

The SPS Agreement specifically identifies the standards, guidelines and recommendations established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission for food additives, veterinary drug and pesticide residues, contaminants, methods of analysis and sampling, and codes and guidelines of hygienic practice. This means that Codex standards are considered scientifically justified and are accepted as the benchmarks against which national measures and regulations are evaluated.

WTO members wishing to set stricter food-safety standards than Codex standards may be required to provide evidence as to the scientific and non-discriminatory nature of their measures, should a trade dispute arise. If there is a dispute between two members, WTO will encourage them to resolve the matter

amicably; only in rare cases are official dispute settlement procedures initiated at the request of members.


The WTO TBT Agreement seeks to ensure that technical regulations and standards, including packaging, marking and labelling requirements, and analytical procedures for assessing conformity with technical regulations and standards do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade. The TBT Agreement applies to all regulations and standards and is not specific to food.

The SPS and TBT Agreements both acknowledge the importance of harmonizing standards internationally to minimize or eliminate the risk of sanitary, phytosanitary and other technical standards becoming barriers to trade and encourage members, within the limits of their resources, “to play a full part” in the work of international standards organizations and their subsidiaries. This has boosted countries’ participation in Codex. Today, Codex standards are an integral part of the legal framework facilitating international trade through harmonization. Codex standards prevent, and assist in the resolution of, trade disputes before WTO in both SPS and TBT cases.

The Codex Secretariat works closely with the Secretariats of the SPS and TBT Agreements as well as the Secretariats of the other two “sisters” linked through the SPS Agreement – the International Plant Protection Convention and the World Animal Health Organisation – to support the implementation of the Agreements and assist in capacity-building activities.

## CODEX AND OTHER TRADE AGREEMENTS

Many bilateral and multilateral trade agreements make reference to the Codex Alimentarius. These include several forthcoming or recently negotiated trade agreements – such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), among twelve Pacific Rim countries; the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), between Canada and the European Union; and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), between the European Union and the United States of America.

Such agreements typically contain provisions relating to SPS measures and the standards adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission as points of reference – a trend in international trade agreements referring to food that seems set to continue, given the unique legitimacy the authoritative, science-based and participatory Codex process imparts to the final international standards it adopts. 





Codex helps  
developing countries  
to apply its standards,  
strengthen their national  
food control systems  
and take advantage of  
international food trade  
opportunities.



# 08. Codex and its partners

## BUILDING NATIONAL CAPACITIES

Countries must be equipped with adequate food laws, along with the technical and administrative infrastructure to implement and ensure compliance with Codex standards. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) provide relevant technical assistance, with contributions from countries that already have such capacity and from international financial institutions.

### Technical assistance

Enabling developing countries to strengthen their food control systems also contributes to improving their socio-economic status: a safer domestic food supply lessens the burden on health care systems, reduces absenteeism from work and school due to illness, and improves nutrition. It also enhances opportunities for countries to export food, thereby increasing their gross domestic product (GDP).

Assistance provided to developing countries has included:

- establishing, strengthening and optimizing national food control systems, including the formulation and revision of food legislation/regulations and food standards in accordance with Codex standards;
- establishing and strengthening food control agencies, and training in the

necessary technical and administrative skills to ensure their effective operation;

- strengthening laboratory analysis and food inspection capabilities;
- workshops and training courses to increase awareness of the Codex Alimentarius and the activities of the Commission, and to build capacities to formulate national positions and participate effectively in Codex meetings;
- conducting food-safety assessments;
- developing and publishing training manuals on food inspection and quality and safety assurance, particularly with respect to the application of the hazard analysis control control point (HACCP) system in the food-processing industry;
- assistance for needs assessments in food safety and quality;
- assistance in estimating the burden of food-borne disease;
- strengthening risk communication capabilities;
- guidance on producing safe foods; and
- training and guidance on improved surveillance of food-borne diseases.

### **Standards and Trade Development Facility**

Based at the headquarters of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) is a global programme for capacity-building and technical assistance in sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures related to trade. It was established in 2001 by FAO, the International Organisation for Animal Health, the World Bank, WHO and WTO to explore new technical and financial mechanisms for coordination and resource mobilization to assist developing countries in establishing and implementing appropriate measures.

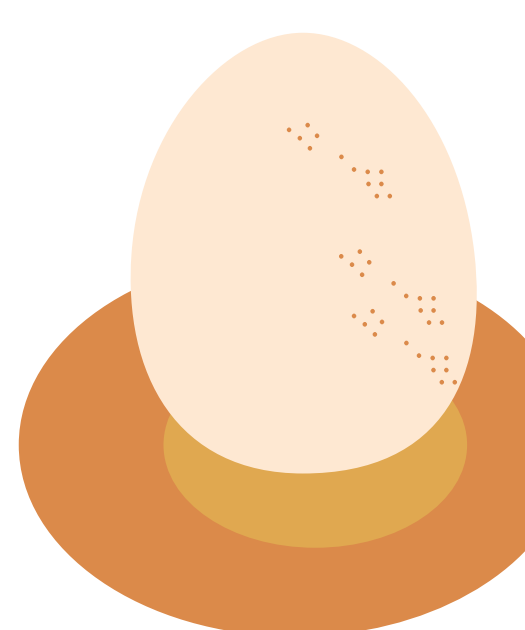
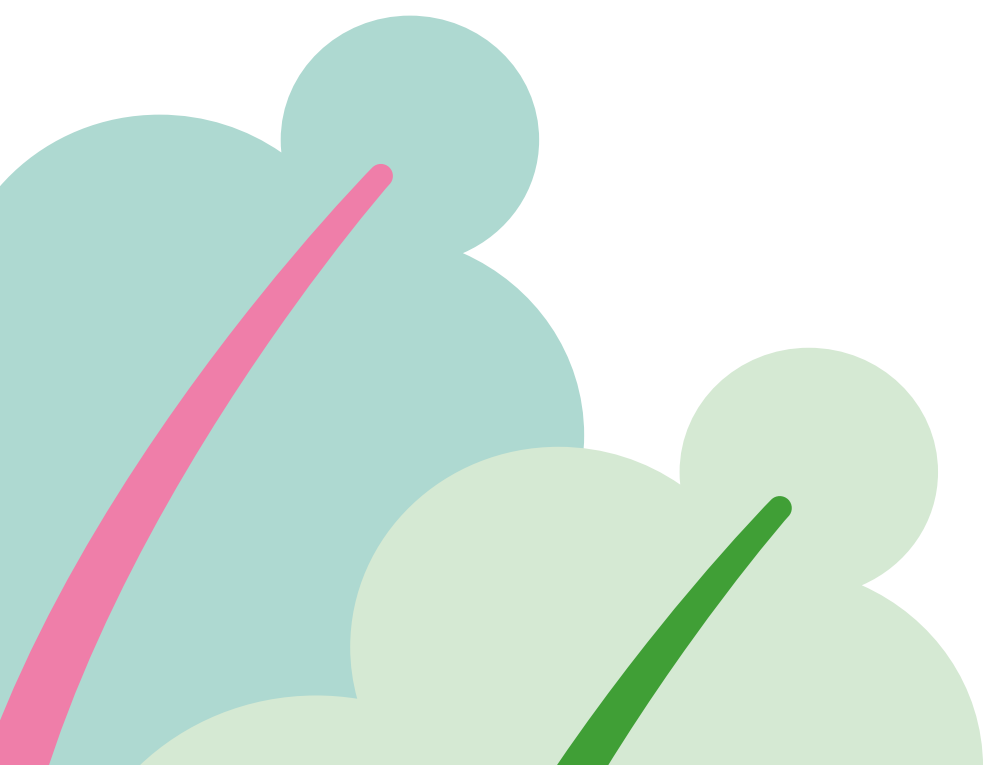
The Facility is both a financing and a coordinating mechanism. It provides grant financing for developing countries seeking to comply with international SPS standards and hence gain or maintain market access. It also provides a forum for dialogue on SPS technical assistance issues among its five partner organizations and interested donors.

### **Global Food Safety Partnership**

The Global Food Safety Partnership, operated under the World Bank, is a unique public-private initiative dedicated to improving the safety of food in middle-income and developing countries. The partnership's main goal is to promote and coordinate capacity building for improved food safety systems, agri-food value chains, and public health outcomes. The GFSP serves as a platform in which concerned international organizations, public sector agencies, private sector producers, processors and retailers, technical service providers, leading academic institutions, consumer groups, and other stakeholders can convene to work out synchronized, collaborative approaches to food safety issues rather than working separately and independently.

### **FAO/WHO TRUST FUND FOR PARTICIPATION IN CODEX**

Codex is strongest when as many countries as possible engage fully in the development of international food safety standards, resulting in a more inclusive, equitable and participatory global standard-setting body. When developing



countries and economies in transition participate fully and effectively in Codex they realize a “triple win” – improved consumer health all along the food supply chain, better access to international trade in food, and the economic benefits that come from both better health and increased opportunities.

In order to facilitate the fuller participation of all countries in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the first FAO/WHO Project and Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex – also known as the Codex Trust Fund – was launched in 2003 by the Directors-General of FAO and WHO, to cover the 12-year period from 2004 to 2015. The Codex Trust Fund enabled more than 2,300 more delegates to attend Codex meetings, and supported the provision of Codex training to over 1,000 people. Thereby, the Trust Fund served as a catalyst in highlighting the importance of Codex in protecting public health and enhancing trade opportunities for developing countries and economies in transition.

Building on the success of Codex Trust Fund, a successor initiative – the CTF2 – was launched in January 2016 and will run for another 12-year period (2016–2027). The focus of CTF2 shifts from widening participation in Codex to building strong,

solid and sustainable national capacity to engage in Codex. It will do so by supporting:

- One-to-three-year projects in individual countries or groups of countries tailored to meet their specific needs; and
- Tailored capacity development activities by FAO and WHO at the global, regional and subregional levels.

## INFORMATION-SHARING MECHANISMS


Access to information about food standards and food regulatory requirements is critical in today's world. Governments and traders need to know the requirements of their trading partners. Consumers and the media have the right to access safety assessments of potential hazards in the food supply. Everyone needs to know how to respond correctly in an emergency situation when something in the system goes wrong.

### **Codex: maintaining a dynamic online presence**

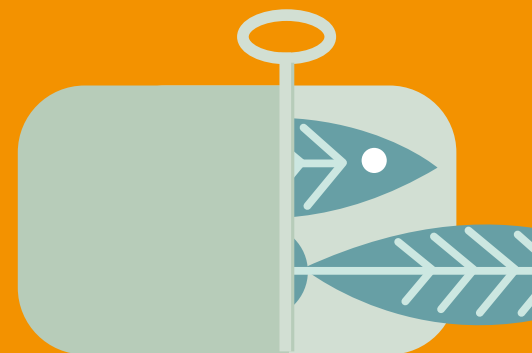
Keenly aware of the ongoing evolution in the way people around the world access and share information, and committed to the principle that the Codex Alimentarius constitutes a global public good and thus should be available to all, the Codex Secretariat has made it a priority to communicate in a dynamic and engaging way via the Internet and social media. Through the Codex website,

governments, consumers and the general public can access not only the repository of Codex standards and related texts, but also up-to-date information about the ongoing and forthcoming activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and all of its committees.

### **The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN)**

The International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) is a global network comprising national governments' food safety authorities, managed jointly by FAO and WHO through a Secretariat hosted by WHO. INFOSAN promotes the rapid exchange of food safety information internationally, promotes partnerships between countries and networks, and helps build the capacities of national food safety systems. An integral part of INFOSAN is the food safety emergency network – the mechanism for emergency information exchange recommended by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in its *Guideline on the Exchange of Information in Food Control Emergency Situations*. The INFOSAN Secretariat maintains a list of food safety emergency contact points and works to strengthen information exchange among national authorities in the case of international health emergencies. 

Our food system however  
it may evolve in the future  
will continue to rely  
on standards to guarantee  
safety, quality and  
sustainability.





# 09. Codex and the Future We Want

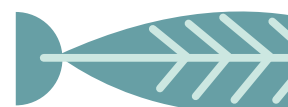
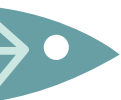
**T**o expand on an age-old saying, not only what we eat, but also how we produce and prepare that food, determine much about the world we live in. The interlinked challenges between food, health, environment and development are formidable in a world where, at the same time, some lack enough food, others eat too much of the wrong nutritional composition, putting their health at risk, and, still, food goes to waste in enormous quantities. There is a great deal to be done to correct these imbalances, not only to protect the health of consumers but also to find a more harmonious relationship between the productive capacities of our natural resource base, and our needs for nourishment, growth and economic development as humankind.

## **CODEX AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Striving to find new ways to “deliver as one” and reorient the resources of the international system, the United Nations has set out an ambitious road map in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

As the specialized hybrid body of the United Nations system devoted to food standards, Codex plays a unique role, bridging health, nutrition and agriculture. This puts Codex in a singular position to collaborate and contribute added value to the efforts of its partners. Through strong partnerships, Codex work can help attain key targets across the SDG range – from SDG2, reaching zero hunger, the priority of FAO and its sister Rome-based agencies, IFAD and WFP; to SDG3, good health and well-being for all, the focus of WHO; SDG12, responsible consumption and production; and SDG13, urgent climate action.

The agility of Codex as a targeted intergovernmental body with a small, responsive footprint, places it well to collaborate and strike up synergies under the crosscutting mandate of SDG17, revitalizing global partnership to achieve the goals.



## THE CODEX MODEL: A RECIPE FOR THE FUTURE?

Harnessing human ingenuity, new technologies, learning from traditional practices, and striking the balance to forge a path forward – these are the major challenges we will grapple with in the years and decades to come. Just as food is a commodity like no other, Codex is in a unique position to contribute meeting these challenges as it sets an example of a participatory multilateral process for collective action that is based on sound scientific advice and incorporates a broad range of voices.

In its achievements since the 1960s, Codex has a solid track record of achieving results by bringing together impartial scientific expertise from FAO and WHO, listening to a broad range of voices, to craft technical tools with real world impact. It also sets a standard for the United Nations system in terms of collaboration with a broader range of partners – from non-governmental organizations and research institutions, to consumers' organizations and the food industry. Such pragmatic engagement State and non-State actors alike, embracing the realities of the forces at work in the twenty-first century, equips Codex to tackle real world concerns and build the tools its stakeholders need. Building

on this flexibility and responsiveness to deliver better still on its core mandate of keeping consumers safe will further enable Codex to make a useful complementary contribution, where possible, as a catalyst in the global processes under way in the years and decades to come.

Internally, Codex will continue to focus on the priorities of streamlining procedures and speeding up the standard-setting process where possible – without, of course, sacrificing the commitment to scientific excellence, robust risk assessment and management, and participatory working methods. These are the pillars that have made Codex the legitimate international reference in food safety standards.

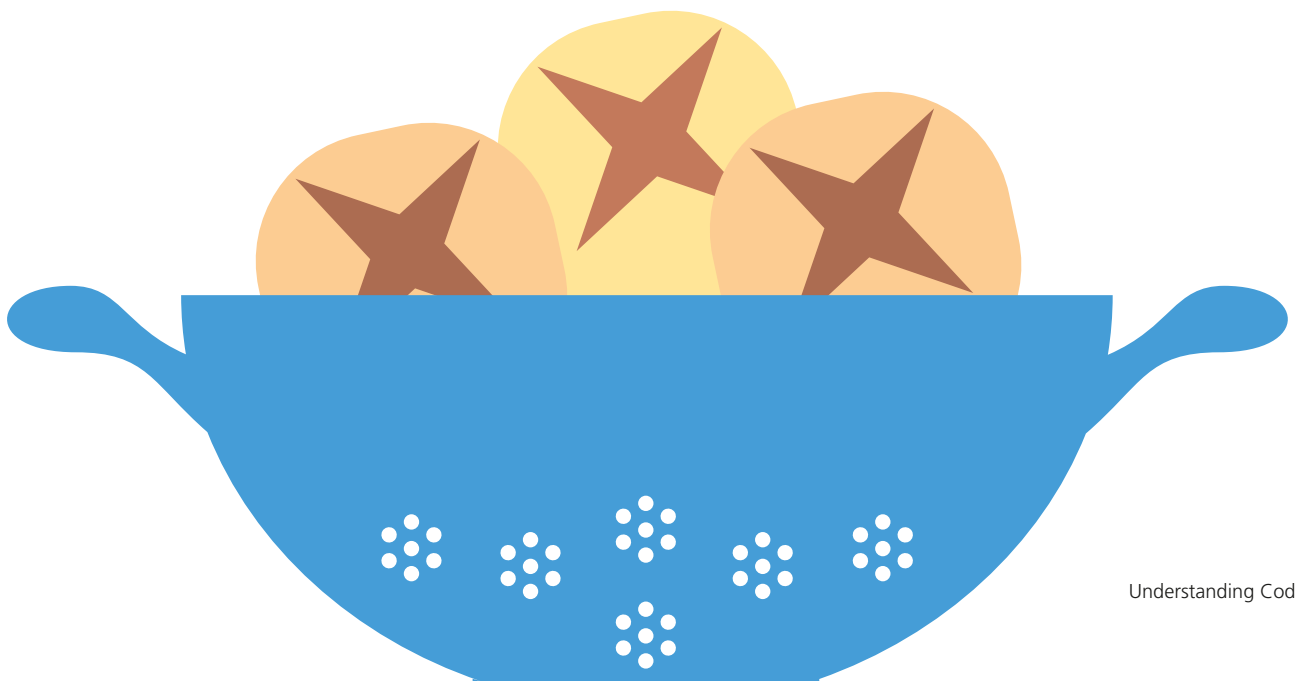
Codex also aspires to take a more proactive approach to new demands as agricultural practices and the food industry continue to undergo transformation, the global population expands and we are all vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Codex is keenly aware of a number of strategic needs – to contribute to concerted efforts to address mitigate

climate change and promote sustainability; to tackle emerging pathogens; to continue its work on antimicrobial resistance and food fraud; and to keep abreast of new technologies on the horizon.

## STEWARDSHIP FROM THE FARM TO THE FORK: KEEPING CONSUMERS INFORMED AND INVOLVED

Codex is equipped to make valuable contributions to these challenges. But, as with all initiatives under the auspices of the United Nations, the driving force remains the political will of Member States: your voice matters.

Codex ultimately belongs to the consumers in whose interests it works: it is a tool to provide world-class science-based guidance to you, your family, your neighbours and your community, to help you live the healthiest life you can. The Codex Secretariat is committed both to working to help its membership deliver on their mandate and respond to challenges on the horizon, and seeking new synergies and opportunities for partnership, communicating about its work, helping consumers access and use information, and finding new ways to empower all of us contribute to the future we want. **91**





# UNDERSTANDING CODEX

**T**he best traditions of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have encouraged food-related scientific and technological research as well as discussion. In doing so, they have lifted the world community's awareness of food safety and related issues to unprecedented heights. The Codex Alimentarius Commission, established by the two Organizations in the 1960s, has become the single most important international reference point for developments associated with food standards.

Throughout much of the world, an increasing number of consumers and governments are becoming aware of food quality and safety issues and are realizing the need to be selective about the foods being consumed. It is now common for consumers to demand that their governments take legislative action to ensure that only safe food of acceptable quality is sold and that the risk of food-borne health hazards is minimized . ¶

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