


Enhancing participation in Codex activities

**An FAO/WHO
training package**





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Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United Nations

World Health Organization

2005

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{ Foreword

FAO, WHO and the Joint Food Standards Programme

The Codex Alimentarius Commission was established by FAO and WHO to develop international food standards, guidelines and recommendations to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in the food trade. This collection of food standards, entitled the “Codex Alimentarius”, or the food code, has become the global reference point for consumers, food producers and processors, national food control agencies and the international food trade. This code has had an enormous impact on the thinking of food producers and processors, and has enhanced awareness among end users – the consumers. Its influence extends to every continent, and its contribution to the protection of public health and fair practices in the food trade is immeasurable.

The responsibility for developing the standards that are adopted into the Codex Alimentarius rests with the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies. These standards are science-based and are elaborated taking into consideration the expert advice provided by joint expert committees established by FAO and WHO, such as the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA), the Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) and the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA), or by ad hoc expert consultations such as the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Evaluation of Allergenicity of Genetically Modified Foods (2001).

FAO and WHO also complement the Commission’s activities through their capacity-building programmes. In order to be in a position to enact Codex standards, countries need adequate food legislation, as well as a technical and administrative infrastructure with the capacity to implement it and ensure compliance. For many years, FAO and WHO have been providing assistance to developing countries to enable them to take full advantage of the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

In order to participate fully, and take advantage of such participation, countries that are Members of the Commission should have solid knowledge of how it is organized and functions and, further, should understand the support provided to it by FAO and WHO through the provision of scientific advice and capacity-building projects and activities. It is also recognized that a strong national Codex framework facilitates not only the national Codex process, but also contributes to a strengthening of national food safety control systems. In this context, FAO and WHO have developed this training package.

The reference material drawn on to prepare this training package was available at the time of publication. As the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies meet regularly, more up-to-date material may become available before the training package can be updated. Such information may be found on the Codex Web site: www.codexalimentarius.net.

Structure of the training package

This package serves two purposes. First, it provides a step-by-step guide for use by countries that are becoming involved in Codex work and are developing a national framework to support this involvement. Second, it provides information that can be used by countries to develop training programmes to suit their specific needs and thus enhance their capability to participate in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The package identifies and provides information in the form of modules with relevant visual aids, grouped around distinct themes. This structure provides the flexibility to develop a training programme to meet the needs of a specific country, by allowing the organizer of the training to select those modules that contribute to the achievement of the training objective.

How to use this package

This package is intended primarily for use by individuals who need to provide information, in a condensed form, to limited audiences composed of ministers and/or senior government officials, and for those who provide training on Codex and the international food standard-setting process. This includes, but is not limited to, consultants, national Codex Contact Points and individuals in observer organizations, including those representing food industry and consumer groups, who have responsibility for coordinating input into Codex work. The material in this package will also be of use to others such as policy-makers and academia involved in developing or strengthening national food safety systems based on Codex standards.

The package is composed of four sections, each section having a common theme and containing a number of modules related to that theme. Each module generally consists of: printed material on the subject of the module, including sample documents or case studies; a list of reference material; practical exercises; and suggested text for visual aids. The package includes a CD-ROM containing the visual aids and other relevant reference materials.

The package has been designed to permit flexibility in customizing a training programme to meet the needs of a specific country. In developing a customized training programme, trainers should have a clear idea of the desired outcomes. This will enable them to identify which sections and/or modules provide the material relevant to the achievement of the training objective. For example, a Codex Contact Point in a country may need to develop a brief presentation for the purpose of increasing Codex awareness among senior officials or ministers. By selecting information from the appropriate modules, the Codex Contact Point can prepare a presentation outlining the general nature of the Codex Alimentarius, how the country's Codex process functions, and linkages with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to help highlight the importance of participation in Codex.

The package has been compiled as a training tool that can be adapted for use in field training. Each module has been developed so that any or all parts of the module can be reproduced (e.g. photocopied) by the trainer to provide handouts to participants. Furthermore, each module contains proposed text for visual aids that can be used as they are or can be modified by the trainer to suit a specific situation. The related practical exercises may be used to reinforce the training objective.

Getting started

The introductory first section, *Establishing and maintaining national Codex activities*, is designed to outline the initial steps to be taken to establish a national framework in order to participate in Codex. It outlines the considerations that should be taken into account in establishing a programme, including the importance of identifying which government ministries have a constitutional role in food safety, and how these ministries will communicate. This component of the package is designed primarily for working directly with the national Codex Contact Point and support staff to facilitate the setting up and functionality of the country's Codex involvement. While the focus is on the initial setting up of the Codex programme, this section also contains general advocacy information that is useful to ensure continued government support, seek additional resources, etc.

The remaining sections are intended for the conduct of training in those countries that have identified a Codex Contact Point and wish to enhance the functioning of the Codex Contact Point and national Codex framework.

Sections 2 and 3, although designed for a broad audience, should be studied by those involved in the management of the country's Codex programme, including the Codex Contact Point and any support staff.

Section 2 (*Understanding the organization of Codex*) provides general background information on the Codex Alimentarius and how the Codex Alimentarius Commission is organized to undertake its standard-setting work. The section covers the structure of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies, terms of reference of the subsidiary bodies, the process of standards elaboration, and an outline of procedures at sessions of the subsidiary bodies.

Section 3 (*Basics of national Codex activities*) provides information relating to Codex activities at the national level. It covers the need for the government ministries, departments or agencies with a constitutional mandate to be involved in the national Codex programme. The functions of Codex Contact Points and national Codex structures are elaborated, criteria for building national delegations are suggested, and the responsibilities of delegations are identified. Guidance on developing a national consultative process is also provided, as is guidance on developing national positions. This section emphasizes that participation in Codex is not attendance at a meeting, but involves a number of activities prior to leaving for a meeting such as the review of working documents, appropriate consultation and the preparation of written comments.

Section 4 (*Scientific basis for Codex work*) provides information on the use of scientific and other expert advice in the elaboration of Codex standards. It covers the purpose and functions of the permanent expert bodies (e.g. JECFA and JMPR), the role and functions of JEMRA and ad hoc expert consultations, and the availability of different types of expert advice. The focus of this section is to provide information on the risk analysis terminology used in Codex, and on how the various scientific advisory functions work, but it is not intended to provide guidance on how to conduct a risk analysis. Guidance for member countries on the conduct of a risk analysis at the national level is provided in the FAO/WHO *Food safety risk analysis – An overview and framework manual*.¹

¹ Joint FAO/WHO publication, provisional edition. 2005.

{ Summary

Section 1: Establishing and maintaining national Codex activities

Module 1.1 / Why should my country become involved in Codex?

Outlines the importance for countries of becoming involved in Codex, and the significant role of the FAO/WHO coordinating committees.

Module 1.2 / My country wants to be involved in Codex, what should be done?

Outlines the steps to be taken when deciding whether a country should become involved in Codex, suggests who should be involved in the decision-making process, and provides guidance on how a country becomes a Member.

Module 1.3 / What resources do we need?

Helps countries to determine their minimum resource requirements.

Module 1.4 / What are the first steps my country should take to participate in Codex work?

Designed to help countries identify which ministries should be involved in the implementation of a national Codex programme, addressing issues related to national Codex committees/structures, coordination and networking with other Codex Contact Points, particularly other Codex Contact Points in the same region.

Section 2: Understanding the organization of Codex

Module 2.1 / Codex: a historical perspective

Provides a brief history of food standard setting and of the establishment of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Module 2.2 / What is Codex?

Reviews the mandate of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and examines key statutes, particularly those related to membership and Rules of Procedure.

Module 2.3 / How is Codex organized?

Looks at the organizational structure of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the Executive Committee, the role of the Secretariat and the different types of committees within the structure.

Module 2.4 / Which committees should my country be involved in?

Reviews the terms of reference of the various subsidiary bodies, with a practical exercise designed to facilitate the identification and prioritization of those Codex committees/task forces of most significance to the country in which the training is being conducted.

Module 2.5 / How do Codex committees function?

Outlines the Rules of Procedure, clarifies the responsibilities of host countries regarding the organization of sessions of subsidiary bodies of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and provides information on the conduct of meetings including how countries should participate in debates.

Module 2.6 / How does Codex elaborate standards?

Outlines the five- and eight-step elaboration process.

Module 2.7 / Understanding Codex documentation

The purpose is to demystify Codex documentation. ALINORMS, circular letters and the numbering system of Codex documents are explained.

Module 2.8 / Is there a format for Codex standards?

Outlines the format used for Codex standards and the advantages of using this standard format, with a practical exercise for participants to draft a commodity standard for a product relevant to their economy.

Module 2.9 / What is the difference between the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Codex Alimentarius?

Outlines the scope and nature of the Codex Alimentarius.

Module 2.10 / What is the relationship between Codex standards and WTO?

Outlines the linkages between Codex and the Agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) of the World Trade Organization.

Section 3: Basics of national Codex activities

Module 3.1 / Functions of a national Codex Contact Point

Outlines the core functions of a national Codex Contact Point.

Module 3.2 / How to develop national positions on Codex issues

Provides guidance on developing national positions on Codex issues, with emphasis on preparation and submission of written comments, also covering issues related to national Codex coordinating structures (e.g. National Codex Committee) and the need for effective consultation. A practical exercise on developing a national position is included.

Module 3.3 / Considerations for selecting national delegations

Provides guidance and criteria to assist in selecting an individual to head a delegation and, if appropriate, and subject to available resources, any other person whose role would be to advise the head of the delegation.

Module 3.4 / Organizing Codex documentation

Addresses the receipt and storage of Codex documents, also demonstrating the link between Codex standards and the development of national legislation.

Module 3.5 / What do FAO and/or WHO offer to help implement or make use of Codex standards?

Examines the use of Codex standards as the basis for national food safety legislation or for establishing national food control systems. Appropriate capacity-building activities are identified.

Section 4: Scientific basis for Codex work

Module 4.1 / Risk analysis in the framework of Codex

Outlines the scientific principles adopted by the Commission that underpin its science-based standard-setting process, and provides the key risk analysis terms found in Codex documents.

Module 4.2 / Requesting, accessing and contributing to expert scientific advice

Provides information on how countries can access the results of risk assessments, and/or how countries can provide input into risk assessments. In addition, guidance will be offered on how countries can request risk assessments on issues relevant to them.

Module 4.3 / Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)

Outlines the role and functions of JECFA.

Module 4.4 / Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues (JMPR)

Outlines the role and functions of JMPR.

Module 4.5 / Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA)

Outlines the role and functions of JEMRA.

Note:

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, through its various subsidiary bodies, elaborates standards, recommended codes of practice and guidelines. Unless stated otherwise, in this training package the term “standards” is used in its generic sense to include all the types of texts developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

{ Abbreviations

ADI	Acceptable daily intake
CAC	Codex Alimentarius Commission
CCEXEC	Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission
CCAFRICA	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Africa
CCASIA	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia
CCCPC	Codex Committee on Cocoa Products and Chocolate
CCCPL	Codex Committee on Cereals, Pulses and Legumes
CCEURO	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Europe
CCFAC	Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants
CCFFP	Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products
CCFFV	Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
CCFH	Codex Committee on Food Hygiene
CCFICS	Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems
CCFL	Codex Committee on Food Labelling
CCFO	Codex Committee on Fats and Oils
CCGP	Codex Committee on General Principles
CCLAC	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean
CCMAS	Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling
CCMH	Codex Committee on Meat Hygiene
CCMMP	Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products
CCNASWP	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for North America and the Southwest Pacific
CCNEA	FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East
CCNFSDU	Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses
CCNMW	Codex Committee on Natural Mineral Waters
CCPFV	Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables
CCPR	Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues
CCRVDF	Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods
CCS	Codex Committee on Sugars
CCVP	Codex Committee on Vegetable Proteins
CL	Circular letter
CRD	Conference room document
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe (of the United Nations)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IPCS	International Programme on Chemical Safety

IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
JECFA	Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives
JEMRA	Joint FAO/WHO Expert Meetings on Microbiological Risk Assessment
JMPR	Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues
MRL	maximum residue limit
NCC	National Codex Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health
SPS Agreement	Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
TBT Agreement	Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization



Section 1

Establishing and maintaining national Codex activities

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{ Introduction

This section is designed to provide guidance to countries that are contemplating or are in the initial processes of becoming involved in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and addresses the establishment of a Codex Contact Point. It can, however, also be used by countries already involved in Codex as guidance on continuing advocacy for Codex activities in their country. Therefore, general advocacy material is included which may be used from time to time by those responsible for ensuring ongoing support to, and identification of, resources for national Codex activities.

Issues that should be taken into account when becoming involved in Codex work are reviewed, including the importance of identifying which government ministries have a constitutional role in food safety and food standard setting, and how these ministries should collaborate to facilitate a country's effective participation in Codex activities. The need to identify and include all stakeholders in the process is also stressed.

This component of the package is designed to assist a country in the process of establishing domestic Codex activities, and to help identify the level of commitment appropriate for its circumstances.



Module 1.1

Why should my country become involved in Codex?

Often, the first step in obtaining political or senior management support for involvement in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is providing an answer to the basic question “Why become involved?” In any country, whether it is a developing country, a country with a small economy or a developed country, senior decision-makers will need to be convinced of the benefits that will accrue as a result of utilizing resources, which are often limited, to become involved in the activities of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Why should countries become involved in Codex?

It is important for countries to become involved in the Codex process for the following reasons:

1. Growth in world food trade has created potential opportunities for consumers to have greater access to a wider variety of foods. This has subsequently created potential opportunities for countries to expand their economic productivity. The increase in food trade has heightened the need for international food standards to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in the food trade.
2. As a result of the increase in food trade among nations, there is a greater probability of diseases indigenous in one country to be transmitted to another country in which such diseases had not previously been prevalent. In addition, with the international movement of food products that may carry risks to human health, it is important to develop appropriate standards to protect the health of the consumer. Codex provides a ready-to-use compendium of such standards that can be readily adapted, where appropriate, to the country situation.
3. Codex is an international risk management body and, by using Codex standards and related texts, countries can make substantial savings in time and money incurred in risk assessment and risk management processes. Participation in Codex and use of Codex standards assists policy-makers in building a sound national food control system to provide food of adequate quality and safety, and to protect the consumer.
4. It should be noted that Codex is not just a forum for developing standards, but that the elaboration process also provides opportunities to exchange information and share views on food safety and quality issues. Therefore, member countries can be kept apprised of international developments in food safety and quality including new or pending technological developments, new products entering the marketplace and up-to-date measures in the management of food safety and quality issues.
5. The status of Codex standards under World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements has increased the significance of Codex standards. Codex standards are explicitly referenced in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary

Measures (SPS Agreement) as the international benchmark for food safety. According to this agreement, Members shall ensure that any sanitary or phytosanitary measure is applied only to the extent necessary to protect human, animal or plant life or health, and shall not be applied in a manner that would constitute a disguised restriction on international trade. The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) makes reference to international standard-setting bodies. Codex has been designated as the main player in the area of food. In a broad sense, the TBT Agreement establishes that Members shall ensure that technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures are not prepared with a view to, or with the effect of, creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade.

6. These WTO agreements provide member countries that adopt Codex standards as their national standards with a defence in situations where they are challenged by trading partners. National measures based on Codex standards are deemed necessary and thus in compliance with the SPS Agreement.
7. Countries that are Members of WTO and therefore are signatories to the SPS and TBT Agreements are also expected to participate to the extent possible in the standard-setting work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

What level of commitment should a country give to Codex?

Consideration should be given at an early stage in the decision-making process to ascertaining the level of commitment to Codex that would provide the greatest benefits for a country. A good starting point in preparing advice for senior decision-makers is to assess the commitment level of other countries within the region and the type of Codex activities they have instigated. As countries in a region often share common problems and have common goals in terms of achieving safe food of adequate quality, countries may find that the work of an FAO/WHO coordinating committee is a good starting point from which to build a long-term Codex programme.

Furthermore, the scope of activities addressed by FAO/WHO coordinating committees is much broader than that of other Codex committees. The other committees are primarily standard setters – producers of standards, guidelines, codes of practice and other recommendations. However, FAO/WHO coordinating committees are mandated to identify the needs and problems of the region concerning food standards, to define the needs of the region concerning food control and to stimulate the strengthening of food control infrastructures. Hence, many of the outcomes of these committees fall into the realm of technical assistance, which is provided by the parent bodies of Codex (FAO and WHO). The Commission itself is not mandated to provide such assistance. However, through the committees, technical needs can be identified and recommendations brought to the attention of the parent bodies.

There are other benefits that may accrue as a result of active participation in FAO/WHO committees. In addition to being able to influence strategic priorities, the committee affords the opportunity to network and develop working relationships with other professionals in the member countries of the region. This facilitates the exchange of information and the promotion of a country's position on key issues. It opens the door to technical expertise that can be tapped to help develop national food control systems. Furthermore, it is often more realistic with respect to cost to participate in an FAO/WHO committee meeting than a session of the Commission.

Most countries have limited budgets for attendance at international Codex meetings, and therefore prioritization and strategic planning are required to ensure a country's

representation at those committee meetings of most relevance. As stated above, there is strong justification to attend the FAO/WHO coordinating committee, especially when a country has only recently become involved in Codex.

Briefing the decision-makers

In establishing a case to become a Codex member country, or initiating a domestic Codex programme that will require policy commitment and resources, it may be appropriate to present a formal briefing to senior decision-makers.

The accompanying set of visual aids is a suggested approach to a briefing session for this purpose. The briefing covers the topics listed below, but can be enhanced or expanded depending on the particular situation and/or needs of the country. For example, it could contain data on national food-borne incidence or internationally available data on food import rejections, analysis of imported/exported food products and projected economic benefits.

- What is Codex?
- Why a country should be involved in Codex
- Value of the FAO/WHO coordinating committees
- Resources required

The accompanying briefing should take no more than 10–15 minutes. If possible, several ministers/senior officials should be briefed simultaneously, although this is not a necessity. The remaining modules in this section provide information that will assist in preparing this briefing.

In particular, it will assist countries in determining their level of involvement in the Codex process, the resources required to maintain this commitment, and initial steps to be undertaken in establishing the national programme.

Module 1.2

My country wants to be involved in Codex, what should be done?

The decision to establish a national Codex programme should not be made in isolation by a single individual or government ministry. All the work of Codex is based on the premise of transparency and communication. Accordingly, such a decision should be taken collectively, with the consent of all stakeholders who will be involved in the implementation of the programme. All ministries that have a constitutional responsibility for food safety or food standards should be involved in the decision-making process as each ministry will, at some stage, have a core interest in the issues coming before Codex.

Step 1 – Determine if it is appropriate

It is necessary to determine if it is appropriate for a country to become involved in the work of Codex. In this respect, several considerations should be taken into account:

- a) Is the country a Member of FAO and/or WHO?
- b) Would the adoption or use of Codex standards in national legislation facilitate protection of the country's consumers?
- c) Is it important for the country to introduce a national food control system, improve the existing system, or improve its national capacity to deal with food safety incidence?
- d) Does the country export agricultural crops, animal products or species of fish in their raw or processed state, and do any of these commodities and products contribute significantly to the country's economy?
- e) Are there specific food imports upon which the country relies to ensure an adequate and nutritious food supply?
- f) Is the country a Member of WTO?

If any of these questions can be answered in the affirmative, then it would be appropriate for the country to become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Step 2 – Advocacy

Once it has been determined that membership in the Codex Alimentarius Commission is appropriate, the next step is to identify which government departments/ministries have a legislated responsibility for food standards, and to engage them in the preliminary decision-making process and any briefing sessions. This entails an examination of existing food legislation applicable anywhere along the food chain, from farm to consumer, taking care to identify any government departments/ministries with responsibility for administering and/or enforcing legislation pertaining to food quality and safety.

This may entail more than mere identification. It may be necessary to liaise with the various ministries in order to explain what Codex is about, and why it is important for

the country to become involved. In this regard, the briefing material provided in Section 1 may be of some value in familiarizing the appropriate senior officials with Codex. Regardless, the need for communication among the relevant government departments/ministries cannot be overemphasized. Transparent decision-making processes and good communication at this early stage will avoid many misunderstandings and duplication of activities in the future.

Even at these early stages of Codex involvement, it is important to include or to involve other stakeholders – industry, academia and consumer groups. Although they may not be involved in the ultimate decision, they do have an important role to play.

Step 3 – Identify the Codex Contact Point

Once there is agreement that the country should become involved in Codex activities, the next step is to identify a Codex Contact Point and the department/ministry that will have responsibility for coordination of the programme. Section 3 provides greater detail regarding the functions of a Codex Contact Point, but it is important to understand that a country's participation in Codex is a collaborative effort. In order for such participation to be effective, there must be open and constant communication among not only the government ministries, but also industry and consumer groups.

It is important to understand that there is a clear difference between the function of a Codex Contact Point and that of the individuals who have the primary responsibility for preparing national positions on issues under consideration by the various Codex committees. Section 3 outlines in greater detail the process for developing national positions and the relationship between the Codex Contact Point and the individuals who are actually developing positions.

At this point, it is important to understand that the Codex Contact Point is primarily a coordinator and focal point for Codex activities within the country, and is the link between the country and the Codex Alimentarius Commission (and its Secretariat).

The individual identified as the Codex Contact Point must be given the responsibility and authority to coordinate national Codex activities. It is critical that the designated individual has sufficient time and resources (human and financial) to devote to this function. In some countries, a senior official is the designated Codex Contact Point, but the actual coordination and related work is carried out by a professional officer. This is acceptable provided the necessary resources (including time) are devoted to the country's Codex activities to achieve the desired results.

A common question is “Where should the Codex Contact Point be?” As the Codex Alimentarius Commission is an intergovernmental programme, the designated Codex Contact Point should be a government official. It is important that the individual designated as the Codex Contact Point communicates with all interested stakeholders and has sufficient support and resources to do the work. A key role will be to interact with entities in relevant ministries such as health, agriculture, fisheries and trade.

Upon understanding the role and functions of the Codex Contact Point, the decision on where best to locate the Codex Contact Point rests with the respective member country. It is, however, common practice that the government takes up the responsibility to be the Codex Contact Point because:

- Codex is an intergovernmental body and it is the Member Governments that take decisions at the Codex Alimentarius Commission, with the expectation that they should interpret and implement them accordingly at the national level. Hence, it is more appropriate that the government should coordinate Codex activities.

Box 1.2.1 | Notification of membership form

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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CX 2/4-MF-2005

JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME NOTIFICATION OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

The Government of _____ has the honour to inform the Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Director-General of the World Health Organization that, in accordance with Article 2 of the Statutes of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, it wishes to be considered as a Member.

1. A list of the subsidiary bodies of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is given overleaf. All invitations to sessions of these subsidiary bodies are sent to Member Governments of FAO and WHO. Documentation relating to these sessions is sent to all designated Codex Contact Points.

2. Please advise if a National Codex Committee has/has not been established and give the address:

3. Please give the name, address, telephone and fax numbers as well as the E-mail address (the use of an institutional rather than personal account is encouraged) of the Contact Point in your country for Codex Alimentarius matters to whom all technical documentation and correspondence should be sent:

4. Please advise how many copies and in which language Codex documents should be sent to the Contact Point for Codex Alimentarius matters (maximum: a total of five copies).

_____ English _____ French _____ Spanish

Notification of membership made by:

Name: _____

Official title: _____

Address: _____

Box 1.2.1 (cont.) | Notification of membership form

SUBSIDIARY BODIES OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION¹

Codex General Subject Committees:

Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants
Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems
Codex Committee on Food Hygiene
Codex Committee on Food Labelling
Codex Committee on General Principles
Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling
Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues
Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food
Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses

Codex Commodity Committees:

Codex Committee on Cocoa Products and Chocolate *
Codex Committee on Fats and Oils
Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products
Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
Codex Committee on Milk and Milk Products
Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables
Codex Committee on Natural Mineral Waters *
Codex Committee on Meat Hygiene *
Codex Committee on Cereals, Pulses and Legumes *
Codex Committee on Sugars *
Codex Committee on Vegetable Proteins *

Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Task Forces:

Fruit and Vegetable Juices
Foods Derived from Biotechnology

Codex FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees:

Coordinating Committee for Africa
Coordinating Committee for Asia
Coordinating Committee for Europe
Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean
Coordinating Committee for North America and the South-West Pacific
Coordinating Committee for the Near East

* Adjourned *sine die*

¹ All references in this manual to Codex subsidiary bodies are based on the status as of March 2005. The Codex Web site should be consulted for more up-to-date information.

- Looking at the functions and requirements, in most cases it is the government that is better placed to be effective as the Codex Contact Point.
- There is a need for perceived neutrality in terms of meeting the basic Codex objectives of protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade, and the government is generally considered to be in a position to provide this.

Irrespective of the location of the Codex Contact Point, it is desirable that the following criteria are met:

- neutrality as far as possible with regard to all stakeholders involved in Codex work;
- capability to perform the functions of the Codex Contact Point;
- accessibility to all parties interested and/or those involved in the activities of Codex.

In general, the Codex Contact Point is located in a ministry. There is no right or wrong location, it is a matter of national choice. The important thing is to have a transparent decision-making process.

Step 4 – Request membership

The Codex Alimentarius Commission maintains an open invitation to become a Member by virtue of Article 2 of its Statutes that states:

Membership of the Commission is open to all Member Nations and Associate Members of FAO and WHO which are interested in international food standards. Membership shall comprise such of these nations as have notified the Director-General of FAO or of WHO of their desire to be considered as Members.

Therefore, once a decision has been taken by a country that it wishes to become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, it should communicate this desire by means of a letter addressed to the Director-General of either FAO or WHO. The letter should be signed by a suitably senior official, e.g. a minister or head of agency, and include the name and contact information of the designated Codex Contact Point (including an e-mail address and national Codex Web site where applicable). Any e-mail address for a Codex Contact Point should be generic if at all possible. A copy of the letter should also be referred to the Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Box 1.2.1 provides a sample of the form that should be completed and appended to the official letter of request for membership.

Module 1.3

What resources do we need?

The resources a country needs to expend on its Codex activities will depend on the extent to which it is involved. When a country takes a decision to become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and become involved in its work, it is not necessary for the country to be involved in all of the Commission's subsidiary bodies. Most developing countries, or countries with small economies, tend to focus on the FAO/WHO coordinating committee for their region and one or two other committees/task forces that are developing standards for products of significance to them.

The Codex Contact Point

As indicated in Module 1.2, the Codex Contact Point is designated when a country makes known its desire to become a Member of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

In some countries, the designated Codex Contact Point is a senior official who may have little hands-on dealings with day-to-day Codex activities. This is acceptable provided there is a professional officer with the authority and time to carry out the coordination work and report regularly to the Codex Contact Point.

The official responsible for the daily management and coordination of the Codex programme should be a professional officer, preferably with a background in food safety/food standard setting. The individual must be given sufficient authority to coordinate the programme and have sufficient time to devote to it. Ideally, the individual should have no other duties, but this is not always realistic. Regardless, the individual must be able to devote an identified portion of time to dealing with Codex issues. The amount of time will vary, depending on the number of committees a country is involved in, the level of training of the professional officer, etc. It is up to the individual country to determine its needs, but a recommended minimum allocation would be up to approximately 25 percent of the person's time (i.e. the equivalent of approximately 1¹/₄ days per week) to Codex activities, based on minimal Codex activities (e.g. involvement limited to the FAO/WHO coordinating committee).

It is important that sufficient administrative and logistical support be available to the Codex Contact Point, e.g. adequate office space, telephone, computer, e-mail, etc. Section 3 provides details on the functions and activities of the Codex Contact Point.

Administrative support for the Codex Contact Point

The level of support needed by the Codex Contact Point will depend on the location of the official. The collocation of the official Codex Contact Point and the Codex office (i.e. the officer and support staff who coordinate the daily work) has benefits in terms of efficiency and leads to greater effectiveness of allocated resources.

In terms of resource allocation, there should be an administrative officer/personal assistant or clerk assigned to assist the official responsible for the Codex Contact Point, who should be able to devote at least 25 percent of his/her time in support of the programme. The allocation of other human resources to the Codex programme will be contingent on the level of involvement and coordination required. This issue is addressed more fully in Section 3. However, in determining ongoing commitment as a Codex member country, a preliminary assessment of the projected level of involvement and associated budgetary implications should be made at this stage in the decision-making process.

Infrastructure

In becoming a Codex member country, a nation takes on responsibility for establishing an interface between the Codex Contact Point and the Rome-based Secretariat, and between the Codex Contact Point and the national stakeholders, as well as linkages with other Codex member countries within the region. Certain infrastructure issues will need to be addressed.

Computer facilities

The primary method of contact between the Codex Secretariat in Rome and the Codex Contact Points is via electronic mail. In addition, all the standards, guidelines and recommendations adopted by the Codex Alimentarius are posted on the Codex Web site. Therefore, it is essential that the Codex Contact Point and officers involved in the management of the Codex programme are equipped with a computer capable of accessing e-mail and the Internet, and with up-to-date software capabilities.

From a practical viewpoint, it may be desirable to establish a distinct e-mail address for the Codex programme so that communications regarding the programme do not get lost in the general e-mail account of the Codex Contact Point or agency. Many countries have established an e-mail address with a high degree of success along the following lines: (codex.countryname@...). This is also useful to ensure that there is no interruption in the flow of information should there be a change in the individual designated as being responsible for the Codex Contact Point.

Office

The Codex office may be located in an existing office, or provided with a separate facility. Whatever arrangement is implemented, it is important that the Codex programme has a designated area/facility from which the work is conducted.

Essential equipment

Telephone and facsimile access for the Codex office are essential to the overall efficiency of the programme. A photocopy machine and filing cabinet will facilitate the handling and organization of Codex documentation and related correspondence.

Library/reading facility

While most Codex documentation is available electronically, not all interested stakeholders will have access to computers. Therefore, there is still a need to have the capacity to manage printed copies of some Codex documents. The need to ensure transparency and communication of Codex work has led in some countries to the establishment of a reading facility. This ensures ready access for interested parties (industry, consumers) to Codex texts. Another country has set up a specific computer for use by interested parties to access Codex material electronically.

Module 1.4

What are the first steps my country should take to participate in Codex work?

Up to this point, the country has made a decision to become involved in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, a decision that was agreed to by all the relevant ministries. A Codex Contact Point has been identified and resources made available in order for the Codex Contact Point to function effectively.

Now comes the difficult part – making participation in Codex a reality. Taking into consideration the fact that each country's legal structure and administrative framework are different, the modalities of undertaking national Codex activities, including international linkages, will vary from country to country. Within that context, the following considerations are offered as suggested steps that can be taken to commence actual participation in Codex.

Establish contacts with other government ministries

As explained in the preceding modules, the decision to become involved in the food standard-setting work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission should not be made in isolation. Other relevant ministries need to be consulted and involved in the decision-making process. Similarly, in the undertaking of involvement in Codex activities, these other ministries need to remain involved.

A good first step would be to identify contacts (i.e. name, position, contact particulars, etc.) in the relevant ministries. This should include a name, telephone number and e-mail address if one exists. The next step is to contact that person, arrange a brief face-to-face meeting to outline what Codex is, and explain the nature of the country's involvement and the role the contact is expected to fulfil. One important aspect that should be conveyed to such contacts is that they will be the focal point in that ministry to whom the Codex Contact Point can go to obtain input on Codex issues. For example, if a standard on fish is being discussed in Codex, then the Codex Contact Point should ensure that the ministry with responsibility for fisheries is engaged in the process, and takes the lead in developing the national position. The consultative process will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3.

The number of contacts in each ministry will vary depending on the organizational structure and the mandate of the ministry concerned. For example, in some cases, it would be desirable to have two contacts, one being a technical expert, the other a policy-maker.

Establish contacts with industry

A key stakeholder in the establishment of food standards is the food industry. Therefore, it is recommended that as early in the process as possible, the Codex Contact Point should make contact with national food industry associations where they exist, or

commercial establishments involved in the production, processing, exporting or importing of food products.

Again, it is important that the Codex Contact Point not only identify the industries – the identification should include a name, telephone number and, if possible, an e-mail address. As in the case of the government contacts, a brief face-to-face meeting with the various industry representatives should also be held to familiarize them with the country's Codex involvement.

This contact should facilitate solicitation of input from industry on Codex issues relevant to them. It should be remembered, however, that the final decision as to the content of a national position rests with the government, and it is up to the government to determine to what extent it will incorporate input from industry into the national position.

Establish contacts with consumers

Consumers play an important role in Codex and have a responsibility with respect to food safety. In order to ensure that there is a balance in the expression of opinions on Codex issues, consumers also need to be involved in the process. Therefore, the Codex Contact Point should establish contacts with national consumer organizations in order to facilitate communication on issues relevant to consumers. Again, as in the case of industry, the final decision as to the content of a national position rests with the government, and it is up to the government to determine to what extent it will incorporate input from consumers into the national position.

Establish a mechanism to enhance national collaboration

National Codex activities will not be effective if communication among all interested stakeholders is inadequate.¹ A means to achieve this communication should be planned and coordinated by the Codex Contact Point. One mechanism employed in many countries to ensure that this communication occurs is to establish a National Codex Committee (NCC). Should a country wish to establish such a committee, suggested functions and possible membership are discussed in Section 3.

As NCCs tend to reflect national requirements, their composition and organization will vary. However, NCCs can provide a forum for discussions and for the formulation of the national position(s) and responses to Codex proposals or policy.

Often the Codex Contact Point serves as the secretariat to the NCC although, again, it is up to the country to determine the organizational structure best suited to its needs. Further information on country experiences is included in Module 3.2.

Conduct Codex workshops

Once the Codex Contact Point has met with representatives of the various interested stakeholder groups, it is suggested that Codex workshops be conducted to facilitate the understanding of Codex as an international food standard-setting organization, and of how the national Codex programme interacts with international standard-setting activities.

¹ For the purposes of this package, the term "interested stakeholders" means government officials, consumers, industry, academia and health professionals with an interest in food safety and standard setting related to food.

Sections 2 and 3 of this package, including their accompanying visual aids, provide the framework for the conduct of such workshops.

Circulate reports

A first step in engaging stakeholders and making them aware of the issues discussed at Codex meetings is to circulate the latest versions of the reports of the Codex committees relevant to the country. It would be helpful to draw their attention to specific paragraphs in the report that address agenda items of particular interest to the stakeholders.

In addition, circulation of reports not only serves to familiarize recipients with the relevant issues, but also to sensitize them to the format and language of Codex documents.

Start submitting written comments

It must be understood that the submission of written comments is the first, and often the most crucial, step in the implementation of a national Codex programme. Written comments are normally submitted prior to a meeting when requested by the Codex Secretariat. These comments are translated into other languages and shared with other countries. However, when countries do not meet the deadline, they may provide written comments on a working document and request them to be circulated at the Codex meeting as a conference room document (CRD) (but only in the original language). Overuse of CRDs should be discouraged as they are not circulated in advance of the meeting and they may overstretch an already full meeting agenda. Where countries have difficulty in attending Codex meetings owing to financial constraints, the submission of written comments is important. Participation in the work of Codex starts with the submission of written comments and, regardless of a country's ability to travel, it can still make its views known by these submissions. Of course, attending Codex meetings provides the opportunity to draw the attention of the committee to the country's position through verbal interventions made by the member country, and provides additional opportunities to promote the country's position.

The various circular letters (CLs) and working papers associated with the Codex agenda often request countries to submit comments, and also include a deadline for the submission of those comments. The Codex Contact Point should ensure that the country does submit comments, and does so on time. Section 3 outlines more specific information on the modalities of developing and submitting national positions.

Comments can be submitted on a range of issues, including specific standards under preparation and working papers prepared on a given topic, and issues related to Codex procedures.

Regional liaison/networking

The concerns and issues of significance in one country may also be shared by other countries in the region. Therefore, it is recommended that the Codex Contact Point establish contacts with the other Codex Contact Points in other countries in the region. Collaboration among the member countries in a region can enhance the effectiveness of the comments being submitted, i.e. three countries reflecting the same position in their written comments are more effective than one country. Furthermore, since resources are usually limited, it may be more feasible for countries to combine resources to fund one

country's attendance at a Codex meeting where it can express the views of the region, rather than several countries trying to obtain funding for individual attendance. Another practical option is to request another country with the same position to raise the concern on behalf of one or more countries, in the event that all the countries concerned cannot attend the meeting.

An important venue for regional liaison is the FAO/WHO coordinating committee. For this reason, attendance at sessions of the FAO/WHO coordinating committee could be considered a priority, as it provides an opportunity for the coordination of positions within the region. An important role of a regional coordinator, through the Executive Committee, is to promote issues of relevance to the region, for example drawing the attention of the Commission to aspects of the Commission's work of particular relevance to the region. This enhances opportunities for countries in the region to network with other countries outside their region. More information is provided in Module 2.3.


Prepare regular briefings for senior officials

In order to ensure that politicians and senior-level officials are fully informed of Codex issues of relevance to the country, the Codex Contact Point should prepare regular briefings. These briefings should bring to their attention the status of Codex standards that are of particular interest to the country, or inform them of any policy decisions taken at the international level that may have an impact on the country.




Visual aids

Modules 1.1–1.4



FAO/WHO CODEX TRAINING PACKAGE
Enhancing participation in Codex activities

Developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO)




FAO/WHO CODEX TRAINING PACKAGE

SECTION ONE
ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING NATIONAL CODEX ACTIVITIES

Modules 1.1–1.4

2




What is Codex?

- Codex is the common name for the Codex Alimentarius Commission
- Codex is mandated to develop international food standards:
 - to protect the health of consumers
 - to facilitate fair practices in the food trade
- As of March 2005, Codex consists of 171 member countries and 1 member organization

3

FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4




Why is Codex important?

- Growth in world food trade
- Increase in food trade among nations
- Important to develop appropriate standards to protect the health of the consumer

4

FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4




Why is Codex important? (cont.)

- Codex provides a forum for exchange of information
- Status of Codex standards under WTO Agreements
- Obligation of WTO member countries to participate as fully as possible, within the limits of their resources, in the standard setting work of Codex

5

FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4




National Codex Contact Point

- Coordinator and focal point for Codex activities
- Link with the Codex Secretariat
- Facilitates communication among relevant government ministries, industry and consumer groups
- Usually located in a government department or ministry

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FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4


Modules 1.1–1.4 (cont.)



7 Why are FAO/WHO coordinating committees important?

- To define the needs of the region concerning food control and to stimulate the strengthening of food control infrastructures
- Technical needs can be identified and recommendations brought to the attention of the parent bodies
- Opportunity to develop working relationships with other professionals in the member countries of the region


FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4



8 Resources required

- One professional officer with food science/food safety experience and/or training who can devote at least 25% of his/her time to Codex issues
- One clerical support person who can devote 25–30% of his/her time to administrative issues related to the Codex programme
- This allocation of time is based on a minimum involvement by a country in Codex (i.e. the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee)


FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4



9 Infrastructure resources required

- The professional officer must have a computer capable of accessing the Internet, receiving e-mail and contemporary software capabilities
- Office space including photocopying capacity, filing cabinet, telephone, fax, etc.

FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4



10 Initial activities

- Establish contacts with other relevant government ministries
- Establish contacts with industry
- Establish contacts with consumers
- Mechanism for national collaboration
- Conduct Codex workshops
- Circulate reports
- Start submitting written comments
- Regional liaison/networking
- Briefings for senior officials

FAO/WHO Codex training package
Modules 1.1–1.4