



**JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME
FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEE FOR ASIA
Twentieth Session**

New Delhi, India 26 - 30 September 2016

**MATTERS ARISING FROM THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AND OTHER CODEX
COMMITTEES**

Discussion and conclusion related to the revitalisation of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees

Matter for information

1. This document presents a brief summary of the discussion and conclusion of CCEXEC70 and CAC38 regarding revitalisation of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs), following the sessions of the six RCCs held from September 2014 to June 2015.
2. Excerpts of the entire discussion and conclusion of CCEXEC70 and CAC38 can be found in the Appendix of this document.

70th Session of the Executive Committee (CCEXEC70)

3. CCEXEC70 was informed of the discussions that took place at the six RCCs meetings held between September 2014 and May 2015, and in particular that all RCCs generally supported the revitalization process to make RCCs more strategic forward thinking on food safety and quality issues related to the region. CCEXEC70 considered the recommendations in [CX/CAC 15/38/10](#) and had come to the following conclusions.
4. The Executive Committee:
 - Supported the initiative of the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO to revitalize the coordinating committees.
 - Supported the alignment of the agenda of the RCCs, noting that there should be some flexibility to allow inclusion of specific items to respond to the needs of the region.
 - Endorsed the revised generic agenda (Appendix II of [REP15/EXEC](#)), which will be used as a basis for the agendas on the next round (2016-2017) of RCCs sessions.
 - Requested Regional Coordinators to make recommendations on topics for the keynote address on regional issues of priority.
 - Requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, to:
 - prepare a prototype of the platform for information sharing, taking into account the availability of existing information;
 - develop a set of questions on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety for testing at the next round (2016-2017) of the coordinating committee sessions;
 - prepare an analysis of the information collected for presentation at the next round of the coordinating committee sessions.
 - Requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Coordinators, to:
 - develop a set of questions on needs and priorities in the regions;
 - prepare an analysis of the information collected for presentation at the next round of the RCCs sessions.
 - Requested coordinating committees to provide initial inputs for the next Codex strategic planning exercise.

38th Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC38)

5. CAC38 was informed of the conclusions of CCEXEC, and came to the following conclusions.
6. The Commission:
 - a) Welcomed the revitalization of RCCs as a useful process and endorsed the recommendations of the CCEXEC70 and the work developed by the Secretariat FAO/WHO in this regard;
 - b) Recognized the importance of the platform for information sharing on food control;
 - c) Noted the importance of interregional cooperation as an opportunity to exchange experience;
 - d) Recognized that regional strategic plans should be aligned with the global strategic plan but acknowledged the need to include specific regional issues and regional strategic plans that could usefully complement the global plan;
 - e) Noted that capacity building activities for Regional Coordinators were useful in preparing them for their role.

EXCERPTS OF THE DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION OF CCEXEC70 AND CAC38**70th Session of the Executive Committee (CCEXEC70)****REVITALISATION OF FAO/WHO COORDINATING COMMITTEES (Agenda Item 4)¹**

56. The Codex Secretariat introduced the document, jointly prepared with FAO and WHO, and recalled that the six FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (RCCs), which had met between September 2014 and May 2015, had generally supported the revitalization process to make RCCs more strategic forward thinking fora on food safety and quality issues related to the region. The Secretariat explained that the document contained an analysis of the discussion of the RCCs on the four proposals, namely (i) RCCs as improved food safety and quality fora: aligning the agendas of RCCs; (ii) Platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety; (iii) Identification of needs and priorities in regions (persistent and emerging food safety/quality issues); and (iv) Regional Strategic planning and specific recommendations on these proposals on the next step for the RCCs revitalization. It was also noted that it was timely to agree on the next steps so that these decisions would be taken into account in the preparation of the next round of RCCs (2016-2017), starting in September 2016.
57. The Representative of FAO sought to explain the envisaged role of the RCCs in the identification and analysis of emerging food safety issues given the importance placed on this matter during the discussions on Agenda Item 3. She noted that FAO and WHO had been responding to demands from several sub-regions for training and capacity development in food safety early warning and foresight. These activities embraced the One Health Approach and emphasised the importance of integrated surveillance. She added that the strengthened capacities of increasing numbers of countries creates an invaluable opportunity to use the RCCs to share intelligence and to identify emerging food safety issues thus enhancing the ability of Codex to proactively deal with these. This would of course be an evolving function of the RCC.
58. The Representative of WHO underlined the more strategic role that RCCs could play in discussing food safety issues in the region, by filling the gaps left by the discontinuation of the global and regional food safety regulators' fora organized in the 1990s.

General discussion

59. The Executive Committee considered the recommendations in para. 22 of the document and made the following comments and decisions.
60. Members welcomed the proposals of revitalisation, noting that it had been well received and supported by the coordinating committees.
61. With regard to the proposal on collection of information, it was noted that coordinators had difficulties in obtaining information because countries did not understand the benefit of providing and sharing such information; a platform could facilitate the provision and sharing of information in a structured and systematic way; it was important not to increase the burden for countries to provide information especially since they are required to provide information for other purposes outside of Codex; generic information on national food control systems was available on the websites of many countries; countries might be more interested in providing and getting information on how they were approaching a particular subject, e.g. surveillance.
62. Members supported the generic agenda, which would contribute in making the work of coordinating committees more homogeneous. They noted that the agenda needed to have a certain flexibility to allow the inclusion of specific items to respond to the needs of the region.
63. The Codex Secretariat clarified that:
- Item 4 "Food safety and quality situation in the countries of the region" was an analysis, to be prepared by FAO and WHO, of the information submitted by countries through the platform.
 - Item 6, whose title was amended to read "Use of Codex standards in the region" was an analysis, prepared by the Codex Secretariat, of the information submitted by countries through the platform.
 - A new item "Codex work relevant to the region" to be prepared by the Regional Coordinators needed to be added to the generic agenda.

¹ [CX/CAC 15/38/10](#); [CX/CAC 15/38/10 Add.1](#)

64. The Representative of FAO explained that management of Item 4 in the generic agenda of the RCCs would most likely evolve as the relevant foresight techniques to support identification of medium to long term emerging issues developed. For the upcoming round of RCCs FAO and WHO would rely on more ad hoc ways of collecting and analysing information on the food safety situation.
65. The Representative of WHO clarified that the idea of developing a database to collect information was to replace the current system of circular letters, and in developing elements for such a database it was important to build on existing information and avoid duplication as well as avoiding placing an additional burden on countries to respond to additional questionnaires. She also noted that information exchange and sharing of best practices could be facilitated through the INFOSAN platform, which was providing such features also at regional level.
66. The Representative of FAO stated that FAO and WHO shared the frustration of Members about the futile collection of information. She underlined that what was proposed is a rethinking about what information would be of interest to Codex Members and to the parent organizations and also consideration of how information input could be facilitated.

Conclusion

67. The Executive Committee:
- Supported the initiative of the Codex Secretariat, FAO and WHO to revitalize the coordinating committees.
 - Supported the alignment of the agenda of the RCCs, noting that there should be some flexibility to allow inclusion of specific items to respond to the needs of the region.
 - Endorsed the revised generic agenda (Appendix II), which will be used as a basis for the agendas on the next round (2016-2017) of RCCs sessions.
 - Requested Regional Coordinators to make recommendations on topics for the keynote address on regional issues of priority.
 - Requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat, to:
 - prepare a prototype of the platform for information sharing, taking into account the availability of existing information;
 - develop a set of questions on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety for testing at the next round (2016-2017) of the coordinating committee sessions;
 - prepare an analysis of the information collected for presentation at the next round of the coordinating committee sessions.
 - Requested FAO and WHO, in collaboration with the Codex Secretariat and the Regional Coordinators, to:
 - develop a set of questions on needs and priorities in the regions;
 - prepare an analysis of the information collected for presentation at the next round of the RCCs sessions.
 - Requested coordinating committees to provide initial inputs for the next Codex strategic planning exercise.

38th Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC38)

Revitalisation of FAO/WHO Coordinating Committees (Agenda Item 6(b))¹

107. The Secretariat explained that the proposals had been developed by the Codex Secretariat with FAO and WHO with the intention to recognise the importance of RCCs as regional fora for food safety and quality. The proposals had been discussed and welcomed by all RCCs. He introduced the four main proposals, namely (i) RCCs as improved food safety and quality fora: aligning the agendas of RCCs; (ii) Platform for information sharing on food control systems and roles and responsibilities in food safety; (iii) Identification of needs and priorities in regions; and (iv) Regional Strategic planning and specific recommendations on these proposals on the next step for the RCC revitalization. It was also noted that it was timely to agree on the next steps so that these recommendations could be implemented in the next round of RCCs (2016-2017), starting in September 2016.
108. The Chairperson recalled the conclusions of the CCEXEC7049.
109. Delegations expressed unanimous support for the overall revitalisation process.

110. In addition Delegations expressed support for a generic yet flexible agenda; for the inclusion of a keynote address (which was welcomed as a reactivation of the Food Safety Regulators Fora of the 1990s); and for the online platform for information sharing - hoping that it would become a useful database for relevant national food safety information.
111. The importance of maintaining the possibility to develop, present and adopt regional positions was stressed.
112. Some Delegations questioned the usefulness of regional strategic plans while others saw them as necessary tools for addressing regional priorities and for supporting the global strategic plan. The need for regional plans to be coherent with the global one was broadly appreciated. Some delegations were of the view that regional plans enabled the practical implementation of the wider global plan.
113. The need was stressed to prepare Regional Coordinators for their tasks in order for them to be effective. The Secretariat said that several activities for assisting the new Coordinators were already envisaged also in cooperation with the initiative of the Chairperson to hold meetings with the Coordinators.
114. The Representative of FAO explained that the purpose of the keynote address, as an item of the agenda of the RCCs, should be seen in the context of the collective vision of the RCCs. They should be seen as the premium food safety/quality events in the region and a forum for dynamic discussion on the issues of greatest concern to the region. FAO, WHO and the Secretariat would engage closely with each of the Regional Coordinators to identify priority issues of interest to the region in order to prepare for a keynote address or for a round-table with authoritative speakers. She considered that this would constitute a useful enhancement of the RCCs, which could contribute: to building high-level political awareness of Codex; to driving involvement of key members of the "food safety" community; and to improving the ability of the Codex system to pick up on emerging food safety and quality issues. It would also support prioritisation of capacity building needs; commitment to improved food safety management; and more effective engagement of countries in the work of Codex.
115. The Representative of WHO emphasized that the purpose of a keynote address or round-table discussion was two-fold: to raise awareness on the importance of Codex and to discuss a topic of importance of the region, thereby also going beyond standard setting work. The RCCs would become more forward-looking in the identification of issues relevant to the region and also use this opportunity to tackle overarching issues.
116. The Representative further noted that it was important to monitor the strategic planning and therefore it would be important not to have too many parallel efforts reducing the amount of resources needed for this. In the context of the discussion on an electronic platform to replace circular letters, she emphasized that it was important that the initiative was not duplicating existing efforts and built on the identified information needs of countries. It was also important to assure that relevant information was actually provided, and this that could then be analysed and used in the work of the Regional Committees.
117. Some delegations indicated the importance of the input and support from the regional offices of FAO and WHO for the reactivation of the RCCs so that the work of RCCs could be conducted in a wider perspective (regarding food safety and trade in the regions) than in the current practices.

Conclusion

118. The Commission:
 - f) Welcomed the revitalization of RCCs as a useful process and endorsed the recommendations of the CCEXEC70 and the work developed by the Secretariat FAO/WHO in this regard;
 - g) Recognized the importance of the platform for information sharing on food control;
 - h) Noted the importance of interregional cooperation as an opportunity to exchange experience;
 - i) Recognized that regional strategic plans should be aligned with the global strategic plan but acknowledged the need to include specific regional issues and regional strategic plans that could usefully complement the global plan;
 - j) Noted that capacity building activities for Regional Coordinators were useful in preparing them for their role.