

Codex Alimentarius

Food safety


Terms
Foodborne illness
HACCP
Critical control point
Critical factors
FAT TOM
pH
Water activity (W_a)
Pathogens
Clostridium botulinum
E. coli
Hepatitis A
Norovirus
Parasitic infections
Blastocystis
Cryptosporidiosis
Trichinosis

The **Codex Alimentarius** (Latin for "food book") is a collection of internationally recognized standards, codes of practice, guidelines and other recommendations relating to foods, food production and food safety. Its name derives from the Codex Alimentarius Austriacus.^[1] Its texts are developed and maintained by the **Codex Alimentarius Commission**, a body that was established in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). The Commission's main aims are stated as being to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the international food trade. The Codex Alimentarius is recognized by the World Trade Organization as an international reference point for the resolution of disputes concerning food safety and consumer protection.^{[2] [3]}

Scope

The Codex Alimentarius officially covers all foods, whether processed, semi-processed or raw, but far more attention has been given to foods that are marketed directly to consumers. In addition to standards for specific foods, the Codex Alimentarius contains general standards covering matters such as food labeling, food hygiene, food additives and pesticide residues, and procedures for assessing the safety of foods derived from modern biotechnology. It also contains guidelines for the management of official (i.e., governmental) import and export inspection and certification systems for foods.

The Codex Alimentarius is published in Arabic, Chinese, English, French and Spanish. Not all texts are available in all languages.

General texts

- Food labelling (general standard, guidelines on nutrition labelling, guidelines on labelling claims)
- Food additives (general standard including authorized uses, specifications for food grade chemicals)
- Contaminants in foods (general standard, tolerances for specific contaminants including radionuclides, aflatoxins and other mycotoxins)
- Pesticide and veterinary chemical residues in foods (maximum residue limits)
- Risk assessment procedures for determining the safety of foods derived from biotechnology (DNA-modified plants, DNA-modified micro-organisms, allergens)
- Food hygiene (general principles, codes of hygienic practice in specific industries or food handling establishments, guidelines for the use of the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point or “HACCP” system)
- Methods of analysis and sampling

Specific standards

- Meat products (fresh, frozen, processed meats and poultry)
- Fish and fishery products (marine, fresh water and aquaculture)
- Milk and milk products
- Foods for special dietary uses (including infant formula and baby foods)
- Fresh and processed vegetables, fruits, and fruit juices
- Cereals and derived products, dried legumes
- Fats, oils and derived products such as margarine
- Miscellaneous food products (chocolate, sugar, honey, mineral water)

Controversy

The controversy over the Codex Alimentarius relates to a perception that it is a mandatory standard for food—including vitamin and mineral supplement—safety. Supporters of the Codex Alimentarius say that it is a voluntary reference standard for food and that there is no obligation on countries to adopt Codex standards as a member of either Codex or any other international trade organization. From the point of view of its opponents, however, one of the main causes of concern is that the Codex Alimentarius is recognized by the World Trade Organization as an international reference standard for the resolution of disputes concerning food safety and consumer protection.^{[2] [3]} Proponents argue that the use of Codex Alimentarius during international disputes does not exclude the use of other references or scientific studies as evidence of food safety and consumer protection.

It is reported that in 1996 the German delegation put forward a proposal that no herb, vitamin or mineral should be sold for preventive or therapeutic reasons, and that supplements should be reclassified as drugs.^[4] The proposal was agreed, but protests halted its implementation.^[4] The 28th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was subsequently held July 4 – July 9, 2005.^[5] Among the many issues discussed were the "Guidelines for Vitamin and

Mineral Food Supplements"^[6], which were adopted during the meeting as new global safety guidelines.^[7] This text has been the subject of considerable controversy, in part because many member countries may choose to regulate dietary supplements as therapeutic goods or pharmaceuticals or by some other category. The text does not seek to ban supplements, but subjects them to labeling and packaging requirements, sets criteria for the setting of maximum and minimum dosage levels, and requires that safety and efficacy are considered when determining ingredient sources. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) have stated that the guidelines are "to stop consumers overdosing on vitamin and mineral food supplements." The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has said that the guidelines call "for labelling that contains information on maximum consumption levels of vitamin and mineral food supplements." The WHO has also said that the Guidelines "ensure that consumers receive beneficial health effects from vitamins and minerals."^[8]

Similarities have been noted between the EU's Food Supplements Directive and the Codex Alimentarius Guidelines for Vitamin and Mineral Supplements.^[9]

Texas Republican Rep. Ron Paul has said that the Central American Free Trade Agreement "increases the possibility that Codex regulations will be imposed on the American public."^[10]

Additional controversy has been expressed by proponents of ecologically and socially sustainable agriculture and food systems, such as the Slow Food movement^[11], who view the Codex Alimentarius as antithetical to this goal. According to the Manifesto on the Future of Food, the Codex Alimentarius has "codified policies designed to serve the interest of global agribusiness above all others, while actively undermining the rights of farmers and consumers".^[12]

References

- [1] Codex Alimentarius: how it all began (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/v7700t/v7700t09.htm>) Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations website. Accessed 1 January 2009.
- [2] Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/15sps_01_e.htm) World Trade Organization. Accessed 3 September 2008.
- [3] Understanding the Codex Alimentarius (ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/Publications/understanding/Understanding_EN.pdf) Preface. Third Edition. Published in 2006 by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Accessed 3 September 2008.
- [4] 'Health supplements: R.I.P.'. The Guardian newspaper, UK. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2002/sep/14/medicineandhealth.lifeandhealth>) Published 14 September 2002. Accessed 2 August 2008
- [5] Codex Alimentarius Commission 28th Session, FAO Headquarters, Rome, Italy, 4-9 July, 2005. Official report. (ftp://ftp.fao.org/codex/alinorm05/al28_41e.pdf)
- [6] Codex Guidelines for Vitamin and Mineral Food Supplements (http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/standards/10206/cxg_055e.pdf)
- [7] UN commission adopts safety guidelines for vitamin and food supplements (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=14974&Cr=codex&Cr1>) United Nations News Centre. Published 11 July 2005. Accessed 1 January 2009
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- [11] http://www.slowfood.com/about_us/eng/campaigns.lasso
- [12] The International Commission on the Future of Food and Agriculture (July 15, 2003). "Manifesto on the Future of Food" (<http://www.farmingsolutions.org/pdfdb/manifestoinglese.pdf>). .

External links

- Codex Alimentarius Commission - official website (http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/index_en.jsp)
 - 'Understanding the Codex Alimentarius' (<http://www.fao.org/docrep/w9114e/w9114e00.HTM>) Published in 2005 by the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Accessed 4 May 2007.
 - "Authority and Legitimacy in Global Governance: Deliberation, Institutional Differentiation, and the Codex Alimentarius" (<http://ssrn.com/abstract=903408>) Michael Livermore, 81 NYU Law Review 766 (2006)
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