



MIDDLE EAST NORTH AFRICA –
MENA – CODEX INITIATIVE

2021

CODEX COLLOQUIUM FOR THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION



UNIVERSITÉ
LAVAL

Faculty of Agriculture
and Food Sciences



Food Risk Analysis and Regulatory
Excellence Platform



GLOBAL FOOD REGULATORY
SCIENCE SOCIETY



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Introduction

A 3-day Codex Colloquium for the Middle East and North Africa Region was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates from 12-14 September 2021. The Colloquium was organized by:

The [Global Food Regulatory Science Society](#) (GForSS) in collaboration with the [Food Risk Analysis and Regulatory Excellence Platform \(PARERA\)](#) at Université Laval, Quebec, Canada, with the Partnership of:

- ♣ The Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technologies of the United Arab Emirates;
- ♣ The National Codex Committee for the United Arab Emirates (NCC);
- ♣ Abu-Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA); and
- ♣ The Dubai Municipality

This Colloquium was held as part of the [MENA CODEX initiative](#) sponsored by the US Codex Office and implemented jointly by PARERA and GForSS with the aim to enhance Codex capacity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) through:

- the development of communities of practice in targeted countries to facilitate effective preparation and contribution in Codex Technical Committees, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), and the Executive Committee, where relevant.
- the enhancement of national Codex capacities in countries of the MENA region, and
- the development of enablers to Codex work, such as availability of data information sharing and coordination tools.

Up to **67** participants from **12 countries of the MENA** region were present physically at the event and over 120 participants attended the event virtually, via the Zoom Platform, adding **3** countries being represented from the region.

The objectives of the Colloquium were to:

- 1) further develop the Codex communities of practice that were initiated in the region,
- 2) Support the review of conclusions of major Codex Past Technical Committees namely: CCGP, CCCF, CCFICS, and CCRVDF, in preparation for participation at the next meetings and the Codex Alimentarius Commission Discussion
- 3) Prepare for upcoming Codex Technical Committee meetings: Codex Committee on Food Labelling CCFL, September 27-October 1 2021;
- 4) Prepare for the 44th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC44), to be held November 8-13, 2021

The meeting was officially opened by Her Excellency Dr. Mouza Suhail Al Muhairi, Executive Director, Executive Director Policy & Regulation Sector, Strategy and Performance Sector of the Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety

Authority (ADAFSA) and Chair of the National *Codex Committee of the United Arab Emirates (UAE)*. In her opening remarks, Her Excellency reiterated the importance given by the Government of the UAE to the development of food safety and quality standards that further enhance consumer protection and confidence in the food supply globally. She reviewed the recent achievements accomplished in Abu-Dhabi and in the UAE in enhancing the country's food control system and confirmed the country's support to the development and implementation of international food standards as an instrument that levels the playing field of food safety requirements around the world and promotes food security.

Opening remarks were also made by Mr. Khaled Al Zahrani, from the Saudi Food and Drug Authority, and Chair of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (Coordinator for the Near East Region), by Eng. Mariam Eid, Vice Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Head of the Department of Agro-Industries, Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon, by Dr. Oday Hatim Abu Alhamad, Director Standards and Metrology Directorate, Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO), by Dr. Basem Hamad Al Tarawneh, Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technologies, United Arab Emirates and by Ms. Juhaina Al Ali, Director Permits Division, Dubai Municipality, UAE. All speakers emphasized the importance of strengthening Codex capacities in the region and supported enhanced communication and collaboration between Codex delegates from the region and committed to working together towards a stronger representation of the MENA region in the development of international food standards.

The Colloquium Program, the agenda of which is appended to this report, alternated introductory presentations, review of outputs of recent codex committees, and facilitated discussions amongst participants on priorities of investment in Codex capacities in the MENA region at the national and regional level.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The main conclusions of the Colloquium, recommendations and future directions are summarized below:

- ♣ All participants supported the direction expressed by the Coordinator for the Near East, the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, towards continued investment in efforts of coordination of Codex positions in the region and the development of food standards that serve the interest of consumers and the food production sector in the region. The MENA Codex initiative will devote the needed resources to enable the realization of the Vision of the CCNEA Coordinator.
- ♣ Participants approved of continued investment in the guidance provided through the [MENA Codex initiative](#) with the development of analysis of agenda items, prior to each Codex Committee considered as a priority by the region. The analysis documents will serve Codex delegations from the region to have additional insights on the agenda items of key codex committees and to help prepare their national positions. These analysis documents can be found through the Arabcodex.com / arabcodex.org webpages, hosted by GFORSS.

- ♣ Participants recommended the development and reliance on Information and Communication Tools (ICT) to support the seamless communication and information exchange amongst Codex delegations and teams in the region. The representative of the UAE referred to the ICT used by the Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO) for collaborative work on standards development. Future discussions with the GSO will take place to seek a demonstration of the tool and a possible collaboration for its utilization for the purpose of supporting Codex communities of Practice in the region.
- ♣ Participants discussed the prioritization of action and importance of various Codex Committees for the region and emphasized the need to not only have a focus on horizontal Codex committees with a priority given to: CCFA, CCPR, CCRVDF, CCCF and CCFICS, but also on Commodity committees CCFO, CCFFP and CCSCH.
 - A specific request was made from delegates of Morocco and Syria to develop a coordination of positions on certain items of the CCFO27 agenda, in particular the standard for olive oil and olive-pomace oil.
 - Another request was made in relation with coordination of positions in preparation of positions for the upcoming CCFL.
- ♣ Participants discussed some priority areas of investment to support Codex capacities in the region at the national and regional level:
 - Participants acknowledged that some Codex contact points in the region are in need for added support and welcomed the opportunity for [MENA Codex](#) to enhance such capacity, as part of leveling the playing field between Codex contact points in the region and towards added collaboration amongst them;
 - Participants confirmed that the region / competent authorities of the region needed to invest in foundational areas that support Codex work and contribution to the international food standard setting process, as well as maximizing the impact of Codex standards on the food regulatory requirements adopted in the region. Areas of focus were identified as the need to:
 - ensure availability of data from the region and their timely submission to Codex.
 - support capacity in risk assessment and risk analysis in the region as a foundational area to a better understanding of the impacts of Codex standards and their translation and use in domestic food regulatory provisions.
- ♣ Participants discussed opportunities of coordination between Codex delegations in the region and reiterated the importance to offer the support to the Coordinator for the Near East region. Participants also discussed coordination efforts that transcend the current membership in the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East and to support an inclusive coordination that encompasses various Arab countries, some of which are not members of the CCNEA but members of CCAFRICA e.g. Mauritania, Morocco, Djibouti etc...A Brainstorming sessions to discuss additional opportunities for enhanced coordination in the region resulted in the identification of two possible additional vehicles of collaboration and coordination through the leadership of the Gulf Standardization Organization – GSO- (for countries members of the Gulf Cooperation Council) and through the Centre for Standardization of the Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization (AIDSMO). Initial contacts with these organizations will be undertaken by the MENA Codex initiative to explore such opportunities of collaboration and coordination, which should bolster the overall effort of CCNEA coordination and contribute to its added effectiveness.

- ♣ Participants agreed to maintain the momentum created by the organization of this Colloquium and to ensure that virtual meetings are planned on a regular basis to help prepare for key Codex Committees as well as to discuss further progress in the development of the building blocks for enhanced collaboration between Codex delegations of the region. A first meeting would be held on Thursday September 23rd, 2021 as part of preparation to the 46th session of the CCFL.

CONCLUSION

The Codex Colloquium for the MENA region organized in Dubai, UAE offered an opportunity to bring together Codex delegations from over 13 countries of the region and re-created a momentum of collaboration with the identification of key priorities for intervention at the national and regional level.

The [MENA Codex](#) initiative will pursue the direction charted by the recommendations stemming from the Colloquium and will work with the CCNEA coordinator and other parties from the region to support the enhancement of Codex Capacities nationally and regionally.

Colloquium Agenda

12 SEPTEMBER 2021

Session 1: Priorities of the MENA Region (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

9:00 – 9:05 Workshop Introduction and Context

Prof. Samuel Godefroy

9:05 – 9:20 Official Opening by Her Excellency Mouza Suhail Al Muhairi, Executive Director Policy & Regulation Sector, Strategy and Performance Sector, Abu Dhabi Agriculture and Food Safety Authority (ADAFSA), Chair of the National Codex Committee of the United Arab Emirates

9:20-9:45 Introductory Remarks of Partner Organizations

- *Opening Remarks by the Representative of the Dubai Municipality*
- *Opening Remarks by Ms. Mariam Eid, CAC Vice Chair and Lead of the Arab Codex Initiative*
- *Opening Remarks by the Coordinator for the Near East Region, FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East*
- *Opening Remarks by the Representative of the Gulf Standardization Organization (GSO)*

Session 2: Setting the Stage – Workshop Expectations, Current Status of Codex Participation from the Region (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

9:45 – 10:15 Introduction of Participants

Each participant introduces themselves and reviews their expectations from the workshop

10:15 – 10:45 Presentation: Analysis of Past Participation in Codex Proceedings: Codex Technical Committees and the Commission

Prof. Samuel Godefroy, ULaval / PARERA

10:45 – 11:15

Health Break

11:15 – 12:30 Facilitated Discussion: How Can We Bolster Participation in Codex Proceedings from the Region

Reviewing previously identified priorities through previous discussions of CCNEA, as well as through the Arab Food Safety Initiative

12:30 – 13:30

Lunch and Prayer Break

Session 3: Reviewing Recent Developments Achieved by Codex Technical Committees and Impacts on Food Regulatory Initiatives in the MENA Region
(Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

13:30 – 14:00 Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food (CCCF) – Review of Outputs

Member of the GFORSS EWG, GFORSS / PARERA

14:00 – 15:00 Facilitated Discussion: Impacts of CCCF Outputs and Future Agenda Items – Small Group Discussion

15:00 – 15:30

Health Break

15:30 – 16:00 Reports from Small Groups

16:00 – 16:30 Wrap-Up Session – Conclusions of the Day and Next Steps / Agenda Items (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

Session 4: Evening Session - Engagement with Food Industry Sector of the Region - Networking Session

Session for participants physically present only

(Illy Lounge)

- 16:30 – 18:30**
- *Introduction of Leaders of the MENA region's Food Industry Groups*
 - *Value of harmonization of Food Regulatory measures*
 - *Importance of structured preparation to Codex proceedings by delegates from the region*
 - *Networking Session*

13 SEPTEMBER 2021**Session 1: Preparation for Upcoming Codex Committee – CCFL (Local: Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)**

9:00 – 9:45 Introduction to Upcoming CCFL Agenda – Key Areas of Interest; Discussion of Positions of Countries from the Region

Each country delegation would offer their input on the key areas of concern for CCFL

9:45 – 10:30 Discussion Session:
Input from Industry Participants on Challenges Related to Differences in Food Labelling Requirements in the MENA Region and Opportunities of Coordination and Convergence using Codex Guidance

10:30 – 11:00 Health Break

Session 2: Outputs of CCGP, CCFICS and Impacts (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

11:00 – 11:30 Introductory Presentation on Outputs of CCFICS and Future Directions

11:30 – 12:30 Comments from a MENA Participating Delegation on Future CCGP, CCFICS Agenda Items of Interest

12:30 – 13:30 Lunch and Prayer Break

Session 3: Outputs of CCRVDF and Enhanced Impact on Management of Residues in the MENA Region (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

13:30 – 14:00 Outputs of Recent CCRVDF
Expert Working Group – GForSS / PARERA

- 14:00 – 14:30**
- *Challenges Faced by CCRVDF in Advancing its Agenda*
 - *Relevance of CCRVDF Standards to the Region*

14:30 – 15:00 Health Break

15:00 – 15:30 Introduction of a New Initiative – Exploring Methodology Development for MRL Extrapolation to Camelids and Camel Tissues of Relevance to the Region

Session 4: Best practices in Preparing for Codex Meetings – Review of Processes and Resources Available (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

15:30-16:00 Special Presentation from the Food Safety Team – Dubai Municipality – Digital Journey of Food Safety in Dubai
Ms. Juhaina Hassan Al Ali, Dubai Municipality

16:00 – 16:30 Reviewing a Country Experience Related to the Preparation for Effective Participation to Codex Committees – Country Input: Morocco

16:30 – 17:00 Reviewing Current resources, best practices from participating countries and opportunities for change

17:00 – 18:00 **Health Break**

Session 5: Towards the Development of Sub Regional Networks - Collective Dinner (Local: Emirates Ballroom)
Session dedicated to Regulators / Competent Authorities

18:00 – 19:30 Meetings aiming to create Sub Regional Networks – Working Dinner

- Arab North Africa
- Gulf Countries and the Near East

14 SEPTEMBER 2021

Session 1: Charting a Path Forward for Enhanced Participation in Codex Proceedings by MENA Delegations (Emirates Ballroom 5 & 6)

9:00 – 9:30 **Country Inputs: Areas of Focus for Upcoming Codex Meetings and the CAC**
Each country comes

9:30 – 10:00 **Small Group Discussions: Enhancing Regional Resources for Consistent Preparation for and Participation in Codex Meetings**

10:00 – 10:30 **Sharing of Recommendations by Small Groups**

10:30 – 11:00 **Health Break**

11:00 – 12:00 **Prioritizing Interventions by MENA Codex to Enhance Codex Participation and Relevance from MENA Delegations**
Collective facilitated discussion and recommendations

12:00 – 12:30 **Evaluation and Closing Remarks**