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ANALYSIS OF AGENDA ITEMS IN PREPARATION FOR THE 6TH SESSION OF THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON SPICES AND CULINARY HERBS

26th – 30th SEPTEMBER and 3rd OCTOBER 2022 - Virtual Meeting

AGENDA ITEM 4

DRAFT STANDARDS FOR DRIED SEEDS – NUTMEG (Step 6)

Objectives

This document offers a review and analysis of the agenda items planned for discussion at the 6th session of the **Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH)**, scheduled to take place virtually September 26th – 30th and October 3rd, 2022. This document is intended for possible use by the Codex communities of practice, promoted by [GForSS](#) and [PARERA](#), as part of their contribution to enhancing awareness and supporting effective participation in international food standard setting meetings (Codex meetings) by representatives from members and observers.

The analysis provided in this document offers a factual review of agenda items, their background and a discussion of some considerations. This analysis is indicative in nature and does not represent an official position of the organizations mentioned above ([PARERA](#) and [GForSS](#)), their membership or their management. It provides a synthesis and analysis of the work currently under discussion by the CCSCH, which may be useful for delegations from Arab countries to prepare their positions taking into account the needs and specificity of the region and the potential impact of the proposed food standards.

This analysis is prepared as part of the **Codex Initiative for the Arab Region: Arab Codex Initiative**, implemented by [PARERA](#) and [GForSS](#), hosted and coordinated by the [Arab Industrial Development, Standardization and Mining Organization \(AIDSMO\)](#) and funded by the US Codex Office, US Department of Agriculture.

The focus of the analysis of agenda item 4 of CCSCH6, **relates to the Draft Standard for dried seeds - nutmeg.**

**It is important to note that experts – members of the Arab Expert Working Group – do not represent the organizations and / or jurisdictions to which they are affiliated. The selection and participation in the Arab Expert Working Group proceedings is based on each expert's own credentials and experience, which should not be misconstrued as the country's / delegation's / organization's position to which they belong.*

Agenda Item 4.1: Draft Standard for Dried Seeds - Nutmeg

Documents

CX/SCH 22/6/4

CX/SCH 22/6/4 Add.1

Recommendations formulated by the EWG chaired by Indonesia and India

In its 6th session, CCSCH is invited to:

Consider the draft standard as presented in Appendix I of working document CX/SCH 22/6/4, with the intent to progress it to **Step 8 for final adoption** by CAC45.

Background

- The new work on establishment of standard for nutmeg was proposed during the 2nd session of CCSCH2 in September 2015 and it was considered and provided with conditional approval (in order of priority) due to minimal changes to be made.
- In 2017, at the 3rd session CCSCH, the proposal recommended for approval as new work on nutmeg and was further **categorized** under “**dried Seeds**”. The CAC40 approved the project document for new work as proposed by CCSCH.
- CCSCH4 (2019) agreed to return the proposed draft standard to step 2 for redrafting taking into account the comments made at or submitted to the CCSCH4, then circulate the proposed draft for comments at Step 3. The Committee also agreed to re-establish an EWG, chaired by Indonesia and working in English only, to proceed with the task of redrafting proposed draft standard for nutmeg.
- The CCSCH5 (2021), held virtually, agreed to:
 - i. Forward the proposed draft Standard for dried seeds - nutmeg to CAC44 for adoption at Step 5 and extension of the timeline for completion until CCSCH6;
 - ii. Forward the provisions on food additives, labelling and methods of analysis and sampling to the appropriate committees for endorsement; and
 - iii. Re-establish an EWG, chaired by Indonesia and co-chaired by India, working in English, to consider those parameters or values in square brackets, taking into account the comments submitted at Step 6 as well as discussions at the current session.
- **CAC44 (2021) adopted the draft standard** for dried seeds - Nutmeg at Step 5 and extended the timeline for completion of work to CCSCH6. CAC44 also noted that **the draft standard would be circulated for comments at step 6** and the interested parties were encouraged to resubmit technical comments and join the ongoing EWG co-chaired by Indonesia and India.

EWG participation and methodology:

- Following the decision of the CCSCH5, the kick-off message was issued in July 2021, to which eleven (11) Codex members and one organization expressed interest to participate in the EWG i.e. Chile, Ecuador, France, Grenada, India, Jamaica, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, USA, and American Spice Trade Association (ASTA).
- The EWG also agreed to undertake its work through the Codex EWG platform.



- The first draft was circulated on 6 October 2021 and the EWG received comments from five EWG members i.e. Grenada, USA, Japan, India and Mexico.
- The second draft was circulated on 26 February 2022; and comments were received from USA, India, Grenada, and Japan and from non-registered EWG members (Costa Rica and IOSTA).

Analysis

Considering the suggestions and proposals from the EWG members, the following will summarize the main points discussed and agreed on to each clause in the draft standard:

- In general, the EWG has been re-established to discuss the parameters and or values in square brackets, where no consensus was reached during CCSCH5. However, some comments were related to wider aspects of the draft standard. The chair and co-chair recommended that the discussion would not be re-opened regarding the parameters previously agreed on during CCSCH5.

1. Scope

- One member of EWG suggested the removal or providing the definition for the text **“industrial processing”**. The EWG agreed to **keep that phrase** in the draft standard.

2.1 Product Definitions

- A proposed redefine the definition as stated in 2.1.1 to “Dried nutmeg is the seed of the *Myristica fragrans* of the Myristicaceae family having reached a moisture content of no more than 10% based on ISO 939 method”. The **EWG considered the proposal** and noted that the **product definition should not include quality criteria and testing methods**.
- After taking the comments and proposed definitions from members **The EWG proposed to change the text in 2.1.2 to be read as:** *“2.1.2 Nutmeg has variety of shapes from ovoid to broadly ovoid, with variety of sizes which averages between 2 – 3 cm long and 1.5 – 2.5 cm wide. Nutmeg kernels have a slightly wrinkled like surface. Inshell nutmeg seeds may rattle due to the seed’s shrinkage within the shell in the drying process.”*

2.2. Styles

- The EWG agreed to **keep the term “styles”** instead of “classification” to keep the standard consistent with the templates of SCH standards.
- A proposal to replace the wording **“seed”** by “kernel” was not considered since the current wordings had already been agreed during the CCSCH5.

2.3. Sizing (optional)

- The EWG noted that clause 2.3 is made **“optional”** according to the current global trade practices. Therefore, **the draft text will be kept as it is**.

4. Food Additives

- There was a suggestion to **remove the text in clause 4 Food Additives in dried nutmeg**. The EWG considered that use of food additives (anticaking agent) in this standard is intended for only ground/powder product, and not for nutmeg seed and it is acceptable according to the General Standard of Food Additives. Therefore, **the EWG agreed to keep the text**.



8. Labelling

8.5. Labelling of non-retail containers

- Labelling of non-retail containers kept in the draft since it is a template used also in other standards developed by CCSCCH.

9. Methods of Analysis and Sampling

9.2. Sampling Plan

- The EWG noted that the section of sampling plan in all CCSCCH standards was made **“to be developed”**. The separate Codex standard for sampling plan will be established for CCSCCH commodities.

Annex I. Chemical Characteristics for Whole, Broken and Ground/Powdered Nutmeg

Volatile Oils Content

- The EWG agreed to adopt the following proposals for the volatile oils content that are set based on the current trade practices data:

Description	Specification		
	Whole	Broken	Ground/ Powdered
Volatile Oils content, (mL/100g), (min)	6.5	6.0	5.0

Calcium as CaO in ground/powdered style

- The EWG agreed to remove the square bracket and delete the N/A in ground/powdered, the value of 0.35 % for Calcium Oxide (expressed as CaO) was adopted in ground/powdered styles.

Annex II. Physical Characteristics for Nutmeg:

Combined Tolerances for Mould Visible and Insect Defiled/infested.

- The EWG considers to remove the square brackets with the value as follows:

Parameters	INSHELL (With shell)	SHELLED SEED (Without shell)		
	Whole	Whole	Broken	Ground/ Powdered
Mould visible ³ , insect defiled/infested % w/w (max)	10	10	N/A	N/A

- These values were considered based on the reason that zero value or less than 10% in whole nutmeg is practically impossible to be achieved in tropical producing countries

Tolerances for Insect Fragments:

- There was a proposal regarding the tolerances of insect fragment to be set at 100 units/10g for broken shelled seed. The EWG noted that the value reflects trading in terms of method tallied and tolerances allowed, so the value was modified to be as follow:

Parameters	INSHELL (With shell)	SHELLED SEED (Without shell)		
	Whole	Whole	Broken	Ground/ Powdered
Insect fragments, count/10g (max)	N/A	N/A	100	N/A

- The EWG considered to revise the value of 0.1% for adhering mace only on inshell nutmegs as recommended by a member to read as follow:

Parameters	INSHELL (With shell)	SHELLED SEED (Without shell)		
	Whole	Whole	Broken	Ground/ Powdered
Piece of mace, % w/w (max)	0.1	N/A	N/A	N/A

The latest comments from members and observers through the OCS in reply to CL 2022/26-SCH published on the 24th of Aug,2022 are summarized as below:

- Cuba, India, Kenya, Philippines, Syrian Arab Republic, USA were in general support to the draft standard of nutmeg.
- Egypt, Uganda, India and USA commented on the description and product definition and suggestions were provided to ensure the inclusion clarity of definition and description along with formatting suggestions.
- Uganda suggested minor formatting changes in Clause 5. Contaminants and, 6. Hygiene
- Comments from Canada, India, Uganda and the USA were presented to enhance clause 8. Labeling: including (8.2.2, 8.4.1, and 8.5), the comments were suggesting that text should align with the text in other draft spice standards and in accordance with CXS 346-2021, beside minor suggestion to text
- Recommendations and suggestions on Tables 2, 3, and 4 were presented from members and observers on text and values with references and related rationale

All points above will be reviewed by the EWG and the final draft will be considered for discussion during CCCHS6.

Comments and Considerations

- Sufficient justification was presented on the parameters and values discussed by the members of the EWG resulting common agreement on the standard draft.
- Most of the discussions and recommendations from the EWG members on the text and terminology were referred to the CCSCH template standard, for example, “styles” instead of “classification”.
- It is important to note that a separate Codex standard for sampling plan will be established for CCSCH commodities. Therefore, clause 9.2. The sampling plan can be accepted as “to be developed” in this version of the standard and can still be presented with the intent to progress it to Step 8 for final adoption by CAC45.

Considerations for the Arab Region

The nutmeg, as a spice, was originally used in the East Indies islands specifically in Indonesia and it is considered the largest producer of nutmeg currently alongside with Granada, India, Guatemala and Vietnam.



However, the nutmeg is wildly used in the Arab region as a culinary spice; it is commonly used in milk-based sauces, and in some areas it is used in hot beverages like tea and coffee.

Although No Arab country was actively participating in the EWG for the standard, some Arab countries commented through the OCS in response to CL 2022/26/OCS-SCH issued in June 2022

In response, Saudi Arabia expressed its concern regarding the safety of nutmeg and mace since this product contains “myristicin and methoxysafrole” which may have detrimental effect on health. Saudi Arabia also suggested forwarding the mentioned components of nutmeg as well as nutmeg in whole to be evaluated for its safety as a flavor agent and / or to set maximum levels for its use through JECFA. However, it is important to mention that the medicinal effect of nutmeg derivatives is well known but the dietary exposure due to its use as a culinary spice is low.

Syrian Arab republic accepted the proposal in general and Egypt commented on Table 1 and suggested to delete table 1 because it is already mentioned in the definition clause 2.1.1.

The review of the comment proposed by Saudi Arabia by the Arab EWG suggests that the concerns expressed are beyond the scope of use of nutmeg in the context of “spices and culinary herbs” i.e., the scope of the Committee’s work.

Although it is accurate that active substances contained in nutmeg, such as the ones referred to in the comments from Saudi Arabia e.g., myristicin would exhibit their potential toxic properties such as narcotic properties or other psychotropic effects, when administered in a different manner (e.g., Two tablespoons of ground nutmeg, one to three whole nutmegs, or 5 g of powdered nutmeg may cause clinical signs of hallucinations, nausea, and severe emesis), these effects are not documented to occur in conjunction with the consumption of Nutmeg, Dried Seeds as spices. Moreover, Myristicin has also been identified in other foods such black pepper, parsley, celery, dill, and members of the carrot family, without requiring any particular attention for its toxic properties. Also, Nutmeg’s use for culinary purposes has been documented for use in Asia and other parts of the world for over 3,500 years in various Asian cuisines.

Conclusion

Considering the level of progress of the standard developed by the CCSC and under the leadership of the EWG chaired by Indonesia and India, and the fact that most issues under discussions were resolved, it is suggested that Arab delegations support the standard to be advanced to step 8 for final adoption in CAC45. Keeping in mind that national standards can be developed based on a country’s specific needs, the act of endorsing this standard reflects the support of international food trade practices, especially when thorough and sufficient information is covered in the Draft Standard for dried seeds – nutmeg.