



Summary of Side Event Discussions

Codex @ 60 – Towards Enhanced Food Control Systems in the South-West Pacific Region

Background

CCNASWP and its members used the opportunity of the organization of CCNASWP16 to hold a side event, aiming to highlight the accomplishments of Codex during its past 6 decades and its possible future contributions to enhancing food control systems in the region.

This event gathered all codex delegates of the CCNASWP and benefited from the participation of representatives of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Codex Secretariat. The workshop also featured the participation of the Chairperson of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), Dr. Steve Wearne, as well as Vice Chairperson Raj Rajesakar .

This event was supported by the Southwest Pacific Codex Initiative, a capacity building program implemented by the Global Food Regulatory Science Society (GForSS), in collaboration with Landolakes Venture 37, and in partnership with the Codex Programs of Australia and New-Zealand and funding provided by the United States Codex Office.

Discussions at the workshop reviewed some of the previous findings of the Codex capacity assessment in the region, with emphasis on some of the challenges faced by the Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

The outputs of a SWOT analysis carried out at a recent Codex outreach program held in Auckland New-Zealand, from 7-9 November 2022 were reviewed. This analysis identified the following challenges:

- Codex contact points in the region (particularly in PICs) are generally under capacitated, with requirements of operations that go beyond Codex work, and which may lack the level of support needed to be involved in Codex work of relevance to their countries and the region,
- Various needs of capacity building were identified and include the need to enhance the level of knowledge related to the structure, operations of Codex as well as how codex standards would be applied to support the development of food control systems in the region,
- The scientific capacity in the region is limited and would benefit from the creation of a pool of resources, mainly expertise that could be useful and accessible to various food control organizations and in particular Codex contact points in the region,
- Access to data is also limited to support scientific assessments and to address the relevance of proposed standards for the region and its countries.

Various opportunities were also identified:

- There has been significant development in the level of participation from the region, facilitated by opportunities of virtual Codex meetings/sessions, although the internet infrastructure may have been inconsistent and may have hampered effective and consistent engagement for delegations from the region,
- There are opportunities to rely upon Codex guidance as a source for standards and guidance to develop consistent food regulatory decisions in the region and to strengthen food control systems in PICs. This is particularly important for countries that include reference to Codex standards in their legislation and regulations.

Group discussions were organized and focused on the theme: **Maximizing the impact of Codex standards on food control systems of the region.**

Participants were asked to identify and prioritize enablers that would:

- 1) Support improved contribution of delegations from the region in the proceedings of international food standard setting
- 2) Support the ability of food competent authorities to use Codex standards and adapt them or adopt them, after ascertaining their suitability for countries of the region.

Delegates further elaborated on the challenges faced by countries and codex contact points of the region and discussed the following points:

- There is a need for enhancing the understanding of codex delegates and codex contact points of the region, of codex procedures and frameworks and topics,

- There is a need to enhance the awareness and the abilities of regulators to develop food risk management frameworks, with access to experts in various areas such as legal experts, or enforcement officers,
- There is a need to strengthen access to data that support food decision-making, including access to experts that are able to plan and analyze such data as part of assessments or formulation of food decisions,
- The region suffers from limited access to food laboratory infrastructure with sustainable funding, and lacks local and regional networks of expertise in this area,
- The region lacks access to a sustainable and accessible capacity in food risk analysis, including expertise in food risk assessment.

Overall, participants highlighted needs in:

- Expertise / competencies supporting both their capacity to contribute effectively to the development of international food standards, but also to enable the analysis of codex standards and consider their adaptation or adoption in the form of national food regulatory decisions,
- Data: with a scattered and limited capacity to collect important data needed in food standard setting, including occurrence data and food consumption information,
- Infrastructure and tools, including Information and Communication Tools (ICTs) supporting food decision-making processes, and handling of the data useful in food risk analysis / risk assessment.

Subsequent discussions focused on possible immediate mitigation measures that may help address some of these challenges.

Participants highlighted the possibility to build on the newly created informal collaborative mechanism amongst codex contact points and programs of countries of the region – **the Codex Roundtable for the SWP**. The Roundtable would offer the opportunity to structure resource-sharing and work-sharing initiatives for the benefit of the region. It would bring together a broad network of regulatory, research and capacity-building interests to create synergies in capacity building initiatives targeting the enhancement of codex capacities in the region.

Some of the immediate interventions discussed, and to be explored further, include:

- Structuring participation in Codex committees between countries of the region, such that the charge to contribute to a given priority committee would be covered by one or two countries on behalf of all others, while ensuring sufficient coordination and information exchange. This would enable input on relevant agenda items that is reflective of the region's needs, environment and specificities.
- The creation of pools of experts in various areas of food risk analysis, which could be called upon to support competent authorities in the region to prepare for Codex technical discussions and/or to adapt codex standards in support for national / regional food regulatory decisions.
- The creation of a network of food laboratories in the region, to stimulate experience-sharing and collaborative efforts of data generation. This network could be connected to the AOAC INTERNATIONAL, the reference organization in food analytical standardization.
- Adopting alternative approaches for data collection, including data mining of published information in the peer reviewed scientific literature.
- Development of a sustainable repository for data which could be in the form of individual / shared databases where such data would be stored and analyzed / used.
- Developing a collaborative initiative amongst the food analytical and the risk assessment community in the region to support the generation of data pertaining to the determination of Scopolotin in Noni juice, hence supporting availability of data in the GEMS/Food database and to JECFA for its possible consideration.
- Collaborative efforts in the prioritization of traditional / indigenous foods that can be candidates for the development of regional standards, with the identification of a pipeline for such products, with the relevant supportive research / data. The development of Codex regional standards for such products would help promote their marketability and availability in foreign markets.
- Developing synergies with capacity building programs funded through other initiatives, including by the FAO and WHO, and in particular the Codex Trust Fund dedicated to countries of the region to maximize the impacts of the planned investments for the entire region.

Participants concluded the workshop by reiterating their appreciation to the Chair of CCNASWP16 for the excellent management of the agenda of the meeting and to the competent authorities of Fiji for the great hospitality and the exemplary organization of the meeting. All participants were appreciative of the opportunity provided by the CCNASWP16 to hold these discussions and to contribute through such an event to charting a path forward towards enhancing Codex capacities and food control systems in the region.