

Report of the coordination meeting with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Electronic

Working Group of Fresh Dates draft standard

Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV)

Virtually • Monday February 10, 2025

In preparation for the 23rd meeting of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV23), a virtual coordination meeting was held on Monday, 10 February 2025, at the invitation of the Regional Coordinator for the Near East Region, bringing together the Codex Contact Points for the Near East Region, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Working Group on the CCFFV Fresh Dates Standard, and with presence of one of the Vice-Chairs of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The main objective of this meeting was to discuss the minimum moisture content for fresh dates and to seek consensus among the participants.

The countries participating in the meeting are as follows:

1. Jordan
2. Bahrain
3. Tunisia
4. Algeria
5. Saudi Arabia
6. Oman
7. Palestine
8. Qatar
9. Kuwait
10. Morocco
11. Yemen

In addition to :

- Chair (India) and Vice Chair (Saudi Arabia) of the Working Group on Fresh Dates Standard.
- Representatives of the Expert Team of the Arab Codex Initiative - GFoRSS

The Regional Coordinator for the Near East opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and thanking them for accepting the invitation. The Chair of the Working Group on Fresh Dates (India), his Vice-Chair (Saudi Arabia), and the Vice-Chair of the Codex Alimentarius Commission conveyed their best wishes for the successful achievement of the meeting's objective.

Background of discussion

CCFFV22 (2022) agreed to refer the proposed draft standard to CAC45 for adoption at Step 5/8, while retaining the moisture content ranges between 30-85%, noting the reservations expressed by Algeria and Morocco regarding this decision. However, during the 45th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC45), most delegations from Arab dates-producing countries requested that the standard be fast-tracked at Step 5/8 due to their objection to the minimum moisture limit of 30%, and proposed that the standard only be adopted as a draft at Step 5. CCFFV Committee was asked to hold further technical discussions on the appropriate moisture limits to be included in the standard, with a focus on defining the proposed minimum moisture content.

The standard will be discussed at Step 7 during the CCFFV23 meeting, which is considered a final opportunity to amend the text, ensuring it reflects both scientific evidence and trade realities, while covering the full range of fresh date varieties.

Contribution of Arab countries

An electronic working group was established within the Arab Codex Initiative to collect and analyze data on the moisture content of fresh dates produced in the Arab region. The group was chaired by Morocco. The group was able to collect data developed and published by several laboratories and research centers in dates-producing countries, such as Egypt, Algeria, UAE and Tunisia. This data reflected those fresh dates (i.e. those that have not been processed after collected) in these countries often contain lower moisture content than 30%. Moisture levels range from 12% to more than 80% depending on the type and maturity period of dates, which reinforces the idea of canceling the minimum moisture limit. The working group also pointed out that imposing the previously proposed minimum of 30% may exclude a large percentage of Arab dates “traded in the global market” that cannot be called “fresh.”

Recommendations and suggestions

The Chair of the Electronic Working Group (EWG) on Fresh Dates (India) and the Vice-Chair (Saudi Arabia) recommended the remove the minimum moisture content and focus on setting the maximum (85%), with an explanatory note added to the standard stating that moisture content is not a criteria for determining whether dates are fresh or not.

It was also agreed that there should be no conflict between other international standards related to dates, and some suggested that additional opinions be sought to ensure consistency between the different standards.

Meeting summary

At the end of the meeting, the importance of continuing to study this issue was highlighted, along with the need to provide member states with the opportunity to review the proposals and recommendations before making a final decision. It was emphasized that more scientific and commercial input is essential to ensure the development of a balanced standard that satisfies all stakeholders while preserving the competitive position of fresh dates in the global market.

