

**MULTILATERAL TRADE
NEGOTIATIONS
THE URUGUAY ROUND**

RESTRICTED

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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION AT THE SECOND
MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP (3 NOVEMBER 1988)

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) was established in 1962 to implement the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, the purpose of which is to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in food trade; to promote co-ordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations; to determine priorities and initiate and guide the preparation of draft standards through and with the aid of appropriate organizations; to finalize standards and, after acceptance by governments, publish them in a Codex Alimentarius. The first session of the CAC was held in Rome in June 1963, as was the most recent session (seventeenth) in July 1987.

Membership of the CAC is currently 135 countries, and each country has designated a Codex Contact Point so that all actions of the Commission, all working papers, reports, etc., are routinely sent to each member country and to a wide range of United Nations and non-governmental organizations to assure the widest possible participation and greatest possible transparency in all Codex activities. This combined system of Codex Contact Points, transparency in operations, thorough discussion of draft standards in Codex Committees and the step procedure for elaborating Codex decisions has been quite effective and all Codex standards, codes and pesticide residue limits have been adopted by the Commission by consensus.

The Codex Alimentarius is a collection of internationally adopted food standards presented in a uniform manner. During twenty-five years of existence, the CAC has elaborated over 200 individual commodity standards and almost 2,000 maximum residue limits for pesticides. The Codex Alimentarius also includes provisions of an advisory nature in the form of forty codes of practice, numerous guidelines and other recommended measures to promote production and marketing of foods of acceptable levels of quality and safety. The publications of the Codex Alimentarius are intended to guide and promote the elaboration and establishment of definitions and requirements for foods to assist in their harmonization and, in doing so, to facilitate international trade. Copies of an information booklet entitled "Introducing Codex Alimentarius" have been provided to the GATT secretariat for additional information to a number of GATT Working Group delegations.

The Commission has an Executive Committee and twenty-five subsidiary committees. The Codex Committees can be divided into three broad groups, namely (a) those dealing with food commodities, (b) those dealing with general subject matters, and (c) those dealing with regional matters.

The programme of work of the Commission depends on expert scientific and technical advice provided by FAO/WHO Expert Committees and by technical and scientific advisors in national delegations to Codex Committees. Essential technical information is also provided by international non-governmental organizations specialized in various fields. In the areas of food additives, contaminants and pesticide and veterinary drug residues, the preparation of toxicological evaluations of, and specifications for these chemical compounds is a very specialized field and the Commission relies on the recommendations of Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committees (e.g. Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives, Joint FAO/WHO Meeting on Pesticide Residues). These FAO/WHO Expert Committees are internationally recognized for their contribution of independent, sound and practical advice based on thorough scientific and toxicological principles.

The Commission has embarked from its inception to secure international agreement on the substance of food standards and then to invite governments to accept them in various specified ways for implementation in national legislation. A complete working procedure has been designed to ensure that governments have the opportunity to comment and accept standards, codes of hygienic/technological practice and maximum limits for pesticide residues, veterinary drug residues, and specifications of identity and purity for food additives. Acceptance by governments of commodity standards, general standards and maximum residue limits can be divided into general categories of (a) full acceptance; (b) acceptance with specified deviations; (c) limited acceptance (i.e. non-hindrance of importation of foodstuffs complying with Codex standards or limits) and (d) no action.

Codex commodity standards and maximum residue levels have been accepted by many Codex member countries. In addition, the existence of the various standards, codes of practice and residue levels are invaluable in many different ways to member governments and food producers, processors and marketers. For instance, since they are soundly based on the best available scientific information on food quality and safety and have been thoroughly discussed in Codex Committees and in the Commission, they are used in the establishment of contracts between buyers and sellers, and are often utilized by governments when establishing national food legislation. As part of its future plan, the CAC will decrease its emphasis on the standardization of specific food commodities (i.e. vertical committees) and increase emphasis on the work of general subject committees (i.e. horizontal committees) in areas common to all foods such as labelling, food additives, pesticide and veterinary residues, food hygiene, contaminants (chemical and micro-biological), the harmonization and co-ordination of regional activities, and technological assistance to developing countries.

In addition, the CAC will focus its deliberations on minimizing technical barriers to food trade and avoidance of duplication of effort between parties in such areas as pesticide and veterinary drug residues, food additives and radioactive contamination. These efforts will emphasize co-ordination with the GATT Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, where procedures currently exist to avoid duplication of effort between parties through the use of mutual notification procedures and the participation of observers at each other's meetings. These efforts will increase the transparency of national regulatory procedures, harmonize testing and inspection procedures, acceptance of test data, and rules concerning product processing. The inclusion of CAC standards and codes of practice in GATT agreements would also be of great assistance in promoting international trade of foods and minimize current problems of different national regulations which may cause technical barriers to food trade. It also provides an excellent opportunity for promoting more rapid and uniform acceptance of Codex work through national Codex Contact Points.