

**21st FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Asian region (CCASIA) Held at Goa, India (23-27 September, 2019)**



The 21st session of the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA21) was held in Goa, India, from 23 to 27 September 2019. Mr Sunil Bakshi, Head (Codex and Regulations), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), chaired the session, which was attended by 15 Member Countries, 3 Member Countries and one Member Organisation from outside the Region, and 4 Observer organizations.

The Committee had 15 agenda items for discussion. The agenda for the meeting is available at:- <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/committees/codex-regions/ccasia/meetings/it/>

The brief of the outcome of the main agenda items are as follows:

**1. Keynote address: Food Safety at Primary Production- Issues and best practices for an evolving region –**

The Keynote address by Prof. S Ayyappan was very well appreciated and led to an extensive discussion on the subject with countries sharing their experiences and FAO/WHO providing further inputs on ways to address the related challenges. Based on discussions, the Committee highlighted the following as possible approaches:

- (i) importance of a whole food chain approach in delivering safe food in the region;
- (ii) small farmers are the backbone of food production in the region and that there is a critical need for Member Countries to invest in this group in terms of training, education and improving accessibility and applicability to food safety standards and good practices;

- (iii) need for member countries to apply an all of government approach involving the multiple agencies and ministries (e.g. agriculture, health, land, water, trade, economy, etc.) to facilitate a One Health approach in order to ensure food safety at primary production and across the food chain;
- (iv) critical role of data in identification, assessment and management of hazards, and the need to invest in data collation (from government, research, private sectors) and its analysis and use for prioritization and management of food safety risks, to increase awareness of food safety among high-level policy makers in order to secure political support and investment;
- (v) Member Countries, FAO and WHO need to invest in the use of existing Codex standards and in adapting them to local contexts as applicable, and that CCASIA and national Codex Committees in the region should work to make these standards accessible to, and promote their use by, small farmers;
- (vi) developing innovative approaches to training and dissemination of information to millions of farmers across the region;
- (vii) need to make consumers aware of the importance of food safety at primary production and the efforts being made to improve food safety so that they can make informed choices about the food they consume.

## **2. Emerging issues in food safety and quality in countries in the region:**

The Committee took note of several critical and emerging issues identified by various countries of the region in response to the survey which included i) areas in which Codex standards already existed (Pesticide residues, veterinary drug residues and AMR), ii) capacity and regulatory issues (National food safety and regulatory authorities, food standards bodies), and iii) issues resulting from changing contexts and environments (Climate change, food fraud and authenticity, food safety reporting in media, online sale of food, novel foods).

The Committee acknowledged the need to prioritize the issues and that identification of actions to be taken to address these issues becomes critical e.g. sharing of information on best practices; FAO/WHO offices at the country level providing technical assistance; addressing of complex issues such as Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) through coordinated efforts of countries, WHO and FAO; establishing a global system to avoid misuse/abuse of antimicrobials; identifying foods vulnerable to food fraud and having an action plan to manage the risk of fraud; access to key information about foods sold over internet specifically in the context of increasing international online food sales etc.

The Committee also highlighted the importance of maintaining open communication channels to share information on emerging issues among Members, FAO and WHO and proposed that innovative tools and approaches be considered to facilitate communication and information sharing on emerging issues.

### **3. The Future of Food Safety: Outcome of the First FAO/WHO/AU International Food Safety Conference and the International Forum on Food Safety and Trade – What's Next:**

The Committee appreciated the efforts of FAO, WHO and WTO in organizing these events and noted their outcomes. It further:

- (i) reaffirmed the need to raise awareness on food safety in order to gain high-level political support and investment in food safety and supported the ongoing efforts of FAO and WHO to maintain the high profile of food safety in the coming months; and
- (ii) welcomed the efforts being made to include food safety on the agenda of the upcoming WHO Executive Board and World Health Assembly and encouraged Members to build awareness in their ministries of health and representations in Geneva to WHO on the importance of supporting such efforts.

### **4. Use of Codex Standards in the Region:**

The Committee noted the outcome of the survey which had focussed on the Codex standards on MRLs for veterinary drugs in foods; Codex texts pertaining to AMR; and Code of Hygienic Practice for Street Vended Foods in Asia. The aim of the survey was to provide a better understanding of the extent of use and relevance of Codex Standards, an insight into the difficulties related to the use of Codex Standards etc.

Recognizing the usefulness of such surveys and suggestions by some member countries on the areas that could be covered in future surveys, the Committee agreed to keep both incorporation of Codex standards in national legislation as well as direct use of standards by stakeholders without their incorporation in the national legislation under the scope of future surveys. The Committee also highlighted the need for harmonization with Codex standards to improve national food control systems.

### **5. Codex work relevant to the region:**

This document was prepared and introduced by India as the Regional Coordinator and included a draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for use internal use by CCASIA to strengthen regional coordination. The SOP was supported by several countries. The Representatives of FAO and WHO specifically welcomed the useful proposals in the draft SOP, highlighted the potential value of more discussions and stronger working relations between the Coordinator and FAO and WHO between sessions based on the elements of the SOP. Taking note of the strong support for further development of the SOP, the Committee agreed to establish an EWG chaired by India to work on this text further based on the comments received and experiences gained during implementation of the SOP. The Committee also confirmed that the areas of Codex work identified by countries and presented in the agenda document were the key priority areas for the region.

## **6. Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 – Roadmap to Implementation:**

The Committee identified Goal 1 (Address current, emerging and critical issues in a timely manner), Goal 2 (Develop standards based on science and Codex risk analysis principles), and Goal 3 (Increased impact through the recognition and use of Codex standards) and their related objectives under the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025 as the priority goals for the region. It accordingly identified various activities that need to be implemented for a period of 2 years to achieve the objectives of these 3 goals which will further facilitate enhancement of food safety in the region.

## **7. Codex Communication Workplan:**

Codex Secretariat while introducing the document and the proposed communication workplan acknowledged the good work by India in communicating success stories of Codex work in the country. The Committee expressed that such collaboration could be established between the Secretariat and all countries in the region either directly or through the Coordinator for a successful implementation of the agreed communication workplan. It was also noted that the intent behind such communications is raising awareness of Codex issues at the highest political level or when reporting, for example, on technical and capacity building issues.

## **8. New work:**

The Committee agreed to recommend 3 new work proposals for development of regional standards for some food products (Soybean products fermented with bacterium *Bacillus subtilis*; Quick frozen dumplings; and Cooked rice wrapped in plant leaves) of importance to the region and finalized their project documents for consideration and approval by the CAC43 (July 2020). It may be noted that some of these products are also prepared in some parts of India.

The Committee also noted the proposal from India for development of a regional standard for traditional milk based sweets, and agreed that India could present a revised discussion paper in the next session of the Committee taking note of the comments provided by member countries and the need to include products of similar nature prepared in different countries of the region.

The Committee also noted the support for initiating work by Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV) on Cashew Kernels and India's interest in leading this work through a Working Group. India's earlier proposal for initiating this new work is already approved by the Commission but is currently put on a low priority by the CCPFV.

## **9. Nomination of the Coordinator:**

CCASIA21 unanimously agreed to recommend to Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC43) that China be appointed as the next Coordinator for Asia.

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