

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS: Main Outcome of the 23rd Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV23)

Article By:

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End February, the Codex Alimentarius Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) concluded its work on two new Codex Alimentarius Standards on Fresh Dates and on Fresh Curry Leaves, at its 23rd session. CCFFV23 also advanced the alignment of two existing Codex standards on avocado and on asparagus with the proposed layout for all standards falling under its purview covering fresh fruits and vegetables (FFV), subject to a future inter-sessional work. CCFFV23 finally agreed to start a new work on a new standard on fresh turmeric under Fiji's lead and also, in principle, on fresh broccoli under the lead of Mexico.

CCFFV23 was held in person in Mexico City (Mexico) from Tuesday February 25th to Saturday March 1st, 2025, by about 130 delegates from twenty-eight (28) countries, one (1) member organisation (representing 5 of its 27 member states), and only two (2) observer organisations, including a representative of the OECD. More information about CCFFV23 supporting documents remain available [ii] and the official proceedings are to become soon available [iii].

NEW CODEX STANDARDS FINALIZED ON FRESH DATES AND FRESH CURRY LEAVES

Main Outcome

CCFFV23 agreed to forward to CAC48 for final adoption two new international Codex standards on fresh dates and on fresh curry leaves, as included in Appendix II and in Appendix III of the CCFFV23 report, noting that the provisions on food additives and food labelling were already endorsed for fresh dates by CCFA and CCFL respectively, whereas they would still need to be endorsed for fresh curry leaves. CCFFV23 discussed an EU proposal on consequential amendments to the existing *Codex Standard on Dried Fruits* (CXS 360, 2020 version), but the Committee could not find a consensus on that proposal.

Fresh Dates

India, as Chair of the electronic working group (EWG) and of the in-session working group (IWG) and speaking on behalf of the Co-Chair Saudi Arabia, introduced the IWG report included in CRD 02 and summarized the key conclusions. The IWG agreed to delete the values for the minimum moisture content and set maximum value to 85% and clarified that the term “fresh” did not depend on the

water content. Regarding the provisions on sizing, the IWG decided to delete the Tables 1 and 2 under Section 4, recognizing that these requirements were optional and that they were adaptable to trade practices, and depending on varietal differences, there was separate sizing for the *Tamar* stage, which was not covered under the draft standard. Furthermore, some standards developed by CCFFV did not have the specific tables under Section 4 on Provisions concerning sizing. Additionally, the IWG made editorial revisions, including updating references to footnote, and alignment of the draft standard to the *proposed layout for standards for fresh fruits and vegetables (the 'FFV layout')*. It was noted that the provisions on food labelling and food additives had already been endorsed (by CCFL and CCFA respectively). The Committee agreed to include a 1% tolerance for decay in “Extra” Class, on which the EU and EUMS present in the room at the time of the meeting put their reservation [iv].

Fresh Curry Leaves

India, as Chair of the EWG and the IWG, and speaking on behalf of the IWG Co-Chair Saudi Arabia, noted that the IWG had reviewed the proposed draft standard section by section as presented in CRD10 and made further revisions. CCFFV23 agreed to consider the report of the IWG as presented in CRD 03 based on which CCFFV23 reviewed the standard recommendation by recommendation. CCFFV23 agreed to move the bullet points regarding the tolerance under the Section 5.1.1 “Extra” Class to Section 5.1.2 “Class I”, as these requirements were best suited under this other class, in line with the proposals of the IWG. The Codex Secretariat clarified that all food additive provisions in any commodity standard must be referred to CCFA for final endorsement, in accordance with the Codex Alimentarius Commission’s *Procedural Manual*. The Codex Secretariat further clarified that if the use of food additives was not permitted in a given commodity, Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) would consider the food additive provisions as being for information only. During the CCFFV23 session but on another item, the Codex Secretariat also recalled that the Codex Commodity Committees were responsible for determining the technological needs of a given food additive and for developing the food additive provisions for specific commodities subject to a vertical standard, and that the CCFA role was limited to assessing the safety of proposed additives.

EU proposal reflecting on the work on fresh dates to revise sections 1 and 4 of the ANNEX B of the *Codex General Standard for Dried Fruits* (CXS 360, 2020 Version)

The EU emphasized the importance of providing consumers with clear and accurate information on the nature of dates, given the existing Standard for dates in Annex B of the *General Standard for Dried Fruits* (CXS 360, 2020 version) and the proposed adoption of the new standard for fresh dates. To clarify the distinction between “fresh dates” and “dates,” the EUMS recommended revising the Section 1 of that Annex B on Description and the Section 4 on Labelling, as outlined in their CRD 27. It was underscored that the product name should be specified as “*dried dates*” or “*re-hydrated dates*” and, where applicable, supplemented with the phrase “*dates coated with glucose syrup*”. These revisions would ensure that consumers receive reliable and transparent information about the products available on the market. The *Codex Secretariat* clarified that given that the CCFFV was adjourned *sine die* and the expertise CCFFV acquired on dates and on the levels of moisture content in this commodity, CCFFV could make recommendations to the CAC for its consideration. This would help facilitate the smooth adoption of any proposed revisions. CCFFV23 simply took note of the proposal in CRD27 submitted by the EU. Other members comments can be found in endnote [v].

FORMAT ALIGNMENT OF ALL FFV EXISTING STANDARDS WITH THE ‘FFV LAYOUT’

Main Outcome

CCFFV23 agreed to re-establish an EWG chaired by Germany to continue with the alignment of existing FFV standards with the FFV layout, focusing on the editorial issues, including the standards for Avocado and for Asparagus as edited during the session and as included in Appendix IV and Appendix V of the CCFFV23 report.

General Discussion

Germany, as Chair of the EWG, introduced the item by indicating that the purpose of that work was to align existing FFV standards with the *FFV layout*, and possibly through that process, consider some necessary updates, and eventually identify further needs to revise such standards. Germany explained the process and methodology, including the selection of two existing FFV standards as a pilot for this initial work (*i.e.*, *Codex standards on Avocado* (CXS 197, 2013 version) and *Asparagus* (CXS 225, 2005 version)). Both editorial and substantive proposed changes were highlighted in the EWG report included in the working document for the CCFFV23 consideration. CCFFV23 agreed that the methodology for the current review of FFV standards needed to focus on alignment with the FFV layout only, and that substantial/technical changes would need to be addressed separately and as deemed necessary, following the established Codex procedures [vi].

Specific Discussions

- **Avocado**

CCFFV23 based its discussion on the revised document prepared by Germany as presented in CRD 28, to limit the changes resulting from the proposed alignment to editorial elements only, although a discussion started again on a more flexible approach than just allowing only editorial changes based on the views that the alignment with the FFV layout inherently led to selection of appropriate characteristics and such process needed to be undertaken comprehensively. Others were of the view that should more comprehensive proposed amendments to be considered, they would prefer to revert back to the original of the latest version of the standard (from 2013). As a result, CCFFV23 agreed to stick to the wording from the 2013 version of the standard and only consider editorial changes. Detailed discussions occurred on the provisions for the definition of the produce (section 2), the quality minimum requirements (section 3.1), the tolerances (Section 5), the marking and labelling (Section 7) on non-retail containers (Section 7.2) and on Commercial Specifications (Section 7.2.2) and on Food Additives (proposed new Section 8, finally deleted) are reported in *endnote* [vii]. The basis for the future EWG work is included in Appendix IV of the report of the CCFFV23.

- **Asparagus**

Unlike for Avocado, CCFFV23 agreed to use the revised text presented by Germany in CRD28 as the basis for the discussion. Detailed discussions occurred on the provisions for the definition of the produce (section 2), the quality minimum requirements (section 3.1), the tolerances (Section 5), packaging (section 6.2, especially 6.2.2 on presentation) the marking and labelling (Section 7) on name of the produce (7.1.1) and non-retail containers (7.2) and the nature of the produces (7.2.1) and on Food Additives (proposed new Section 8, finally deleted) are reported in *endnote* [viii]. Upon a request for clarification on the use of terminology “*shall be*” versus “*must be*” in the standard, Germany as chair of the EWG noted that “*must use*” was in line with the FFV layout as well as existing FFV standards, and hence would be kept, as necessary.

NEW WORK PROPOSALS – Two new work proposals were discussed under AOB, as no response was received to the formal circular letter (CL 2024/75-FFV), by its deadline.

Fresh Turmeric (Fiji proposal)

CCFFV23 agreed to forward the proposal for new work on fresh turmeric to CAC48 for approval as new work as presented in the Appendix VI of the meeting report. The Committee also agreed to establish a new EWG, chaired by Fiji and co-chaired by China, India, and Kenya, to prepare a proposed draft standard for fresh turmeric for circulation for comments and consideration at CCFFV24, subject to approval by CAC48 as new work.

Fiji introduced its discussion paper on the development of a standard for fresh turmeric as included in CRD 06 while highlighting the importance of the agriculture sector for food security and economic livelihood. According to Fiji, the development of an international Codex standard for fresh turmeric would enhance exports, safeguard consumer health, and promote fair practices in trade of this commodity. The Committee reviewed the project document section by section and made several editorial corrections (e.g., changing “aromatic” to “culinary,” removing “developing countries,” and eliminating “life-giving properties”). The Committee also agreed to keep ‘fresh’ in the proposed title, as this would make a clear distinction between the proposed new standard and the existing *Codex Standard for dried or dehydrated roots, rhizomes, and bulbs – Turmeric* (CXS 359, 2024 version) developed by the Committee on Spices and Culinary herbs (CCSCH). On the main aspects to be covered, CCFFV23 agreed to include a general reference to the *General Standard for Food Additives* (CXS 192 – 2024 version). On the proposed timeline for completion of that new work, CCFFV23 replaced the timeline table with the sentence “*It is expected that the development of this standard be conducted in three CCFFV meetings or less, depending on the agreement reached by CCFFV*” to offer a better flexibility than fixed deadlines.

Fresh Broccoli (Mexico proposal)

CCFFV23 agreed to request Mexico, with support from other interested Members, to revise the Project Document to ensure full compliance with the Codex Procedural Manual. The revised Project Document would then be submitted to CCEXEC through the Codex Secretariat for critical review and possible forwarding to CAC48 for approval. CCFFV23 agreed to establish a new EWG chaired by Mexico and co-chaired by China and India, to prepare the proposed draft standard for fresh broccoli for circulation for comments and consideration at CCFFV24, subject to approval by CAC48 as new work.

Mexico introduced the discussion paper on the development of a standard for fresh broccoli as included in its CRD 29. Mexico emphasized an increased production volume and broccoli’s popularity and that the proposed standard would address trade barriers, harmonize regulations, and benefit producers by promoting fair practices in international trade of fresh Broccoli, and it would offer a support to local productions compared to the existing Codex standard for Quick Frozen Vegetables and its annex on Frozen Broccoli (CXS 320, 2022 version). CCFFV23 noted the broad support for the proposal but observed that the Project Document did not adhere to the format required by the Codex Procedural Manual and lacked key content, including the section on “*Relevance to the Codex Strategic Objectives*”. Consequently, the document was not ready for immediate review by the Committee.

NEXT SESSION

CCFFV23 was informed that the exact time and venue of CCFFV24 would be determined by the Host Government (i.e., Mexico), in consultation with the Codex Secretariat.

Endnotes

[i] Food Production Systems Engineer; Food Standards, Safety and Regulatory Specialist; Counsellor at Keller and Heckman LLP Brussels office

[ii] See CCFFV23 webpage: <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/detail/en/?meeting=CCFFV&session=23>

[iii] See CCFFV23 report at: <https://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings/en/>

[iv] CCFFV23 agreed to retain the 1% tolerance for decay in “Extra” Class, noting the reservation of EUMS which explained that it couldn’t not support the 1% tolerance for decay in “Extra” Class, stressing that it should be set at 0% in line with “Extra” Class requirements. The EUMS recalled that CAC41 had confirmed that the provision for decay in “Extra” Class was optional; and depending on the nature of the produce, the tolerance might not be applicable or necessary. The EUMS maintained their view that a tolerance for decay in “Extra” Class was not in conformance with the requirements for “Extra” Class, which was a special status granted to a produce of exceptionally high quality, and it required more careful production. Other Members expressed the views that (a) the 1% tolerance for decay in “Extra” Class was necessary, given that the perishable nature of fresh fruits and vegetables, a perfect condition on arrival is not expected by any producer, packer, or shipper and defining fractional percentages was impractical also for sampling; (b) the 1% tolerance did not permit the sale of decayed produce or compromise consumer safety; it was strictly a quality inspection measure, and any decayed produce is expected to be removed before the lot is offered for sale, (c) without this tolerance, a single decayed FFV in a shipment of any size could result in the downgrading of an entire lot, negatively impacting trade and producer income; (d) many private trading agreements included similar tolerances, and their absence in quality standards often led to conflicts and unnecessary rejections; (e) such 1% tolerance was not considered practical, as fractional percentages were not always feasible, and a decayed fruit was counted as a whole unit; (f) the draft standard was at its pre-final step of discussion, and the provision for decay in “Extra” Class had been duly considered by CCFFV based on consensus and as it was deemed consistent with the established framework for “Extra” Class, it should be retained.

[v] The proposal to revise Annex B of the standard on dried fruits (CXS 360, 2020 version) was premature and could impact national standards and trade practices. Such a revision may be considered by CCFFV or CAC, given that CCFFV was adjourned sine die, not abolished. The Annex B of that standard already allowed dates to be dried, washed, preserved, or processed by drying, and that “fresh dates” had a limited shelf-life unless treated by freezing. The Annex B should be revised to clarify that processed dates with a water content exceeding 20% could not be classified as dried fruit, as they required a cold chain to maintain quality until reaching the final consumer. As a dried date was scientifically and technically defined as having a water content of less than 20%, a proposal was made to add a footnote to Annex B stating: “Treated dates with a water content higher than 20% require a cold chain until the final consumer”. The Chairperson suggested to the Committee it could sent the issue to CCEXEC and CAC with a request for further clarification on the distinction between the standards for “fresh dates” and “dates”, and she encouraged Codex Members to submit new work proposals for a possible revision of Annex B of the Standard on Dried Fruits (CXS 360, 2020 version). However, there was no consensus on this proposal.

[vi] The Codex Secretariat noted that this alignment with the FFV layout would comprise more changes than editorial ones only. It recommended to CCFFV to adopt a more structured approach and establish a priority list of standards for consideration and subsequently develop a single project document incorporating all these standards requiring revision. This approach would facilitate their comprehensive revision at the next stage. While the report of the EWG was containing some proposed criteria for creating such a priority list, the Codex Secretariat pointed out that the CAC Procedural Manual also provided mechanisms to review existing standards and that the CCFFV could define its preferred approach. In other terms, The Codex Secretariat was of the view that CCFFV would need to decide whether to continue with the alignment exercise, by limiting changes to the existing standards to editorial changes only or chose to stick to the formally established Codex procedures, when it comes to suggest more substantive technical revisions of existing FFV standards. CCFFV23 overall agreed with the proposed methodology and existing Codex procedures, and several views expressed the need for such an alignment work to be more inclusive with an active participation from more Codex Members involved, and not be impeded by national interests (e.g., delaying the alignment process by discussing criteria and priority lists).

[vii] A discussion occurred on current footnote 2 of the standard with the reference to “other suitable database” for the names of the produce. Footnote 2 was retained as worded but put in squared brackets to still read “[2 All information on botanical names is taken from the GRIN database (www.ars-grin.gov) or Mansfeld’s World Database of Agricultural and Horticultural Crops (<http://mansfeld.ipk-gatersleben.de/apex/f?p=185:3:0>) or any other suitable database.]”. On the quality parameters, CCFFV23 replaced “intact” by “whole” (first bullet), deleted the bullets referring to “firm” and “fresh in appearance”, edited the other bullet that referred to ‘intact’ to read “having a stalk not more than 10 mm in length which must be cut off cleanly. However, its absence is not considered a defect on condition that the place of the stalk attachment is dry and whole”. On tolerances, the introductory paragraph under 5.1 was moved directly under the title of the Section 5, but

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