

codex alimentarius commission

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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WORLD HEALTH
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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Nineteenth Session

Rome, 1–10 July 1991

REPORT OF THE THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION
OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION
FAO, Rome, 3 – 6 July 1990

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission at its Thirty-seventh Session:

- expressed its appreciation to FAO and WHO for maintaining the level of the Codex budget, and emphasized the need for the Codex programme to continue to be afforded high priority (para 11);
- welcomed the proposals of the FAO Director-General, to provide tangible support to cooperation between Codex, FAO and GATT, by creating a special unit within the Food Quality and Consumer Protection Group to strengthen liaison with GATT, noting that the establishment of such a unit was dependent upon the availability of adequate resources (para 17);
- strongly supported the convening of the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade in March 1991 (para 21);
- strongly supported the current GATT/Codex cooperative efforts in area of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and agreed to the importance of defining future priorities in this field (para 27);
- fully supported the convening of a Joint FAO/WHO Consultation on Assessment of Biotechnology in Food Production and Processing as related to Food Safety (para 35);
- fully supported the procedure proposed by the Codex Secretariat for converting Codex regional standards to worldwide standards (CX/EXEC 90/37/7) recommended that regional Codex standards should be maintained only on the basis of specific justification. (para 38);
- recommended that governments be requested to comment on the status of Codex Guidelines and other texts of an advisory nature, on the basis of a document to be prepared by the Secretariat which would place a strong emphasis on the need for scientific rigour in advisory texts (para 43);
- on street foods, endorsed the opinion of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia that the convening of an additional expert consultation by FAO and WHO should be considered only in the future when sufficient additional information would be available. It also expressed the wish that FAO and WHO continue to provide guidance on core elements for inclusion in the Regional Codes of Practice (para 51);
- fully endorsed the view that where there is a General Code of Hygienic Practice within a subject area, codes on specific subjects should be limited to essential differences to avoid unnecessary repetition (para 55);
- recommended that the establishment of *ad hoc* working groups operating between Committee sessions would be made only when necessary and with specific terms of reference and with the accomplishment of specific tasks with a clearly defined time frame (para 56);
- authorized the further elaboration of proposed draft standards for nopal (prickly pear), carambola and litchi and proposed draft codes of practice for the packaging and transport and control and inspection of tropical fresh fruits and vegetables (para 65);

- agreed on the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of the Code of Ethics in International Trade in Foods by providing assistance to countries in applying provisions of the Code by strengthening their food legislation and control infrastructures and by providing the necessary documentation and instructions (para 69);
- agreed that questions concerning the use of the term "natural" in food labelling should be taken up by the Codex Committee on Food Labelling and endorsed the elaboration of Codex General Guidelines on Nutrition on Health Claims for Labelling through the same Committee, with the understanding that the issue of advertising would be limited to discussions only (paras 72-73);
- strongly endorsed recommendations concerning the promotion of Codex work:
- supported recommendations aimed at expediting the review of so-called GRAS food additives, and means of expediting the expert evaluation of contaminants in appropriate FAO/WHO bodies and agreed to inform the JECFA Secretariat accordingly (paras 77, 79);
- expressed satisfaction with the proposal to hold an expert review of existing Codex Codes on Meat Hygiene in September 1990, to prepare the draft revised codes for further comments by governments and discussion by the 6th Session of the Committee on Meat Hygiene (para 80);
- agreed to refer the Draft Guideline Levels for Methylmercury in Fish to the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants for discussion in the light of government comments obtained at Step 6 on the questions raised by CCFFP (paras 82-84);
- commended the Codex Committee on Fish and Products on its initiative to review its standards to emphasize health and safety matters, decomposition, microbiological contamination, container integrity and economic fraud (paras 85-86);
- endorsed the Draft Provisional Agenda for the 19th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, with amendments (para 90);
- on biologically/organically produced foods, requested the Secretariat to contact the appropriate agricultural production units in FAO informing them of the Commission's interest in production technologies of these foods. It also proposed that an expert FAO consultation could be convened at the earliest opportunity with the cooperation of WHO to examine the regulatory aspects of the production, labelling, certification and control of organic or biologically produced foods. (paras 92-94);
- recommended that the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants should consider extending the Codex Guideline Levels on Radionuclide Contamination of Foods to permanent application in international trade (paras 95-97);
- it requested the Secretariat to circulate discussion paper on Salmonellosis to Codex Member States for comments and the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene to act upon the recommendations contained in the paper in the light of governments' comments (paras 98-100);

- welcomed efforts to ensure that the duration of Codex sessions would not exceed one normal working week (paras 101-102).
- discussed a number of specific matters referred to it by Codex Committees (paras 44-99).

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission held its Thirty-seventh Session at FAO Headquarters, Rome, from 3 to 6 July 1990. The Executive Committee was presided over by the Chairman of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Dr. E.R. Méndez (Mexico) in the presence of its three Vice-Chairmen; Dr. C. Kane (Senegal), Dr. N. Tape (Canada) and Prof. F.G. Winarno (Indonesia). Representatives from the following geographic locations were present; Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and South-West Pacific. The Codex Coordinators for Africa, Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean were also present at the meeting. A complete list of participants is given in Appendix 1.

2. The Session was opened by Mr. A.N. Cortas, Assistant to the Assistant Director-General, Economic and Social Department, FAO, who welcomed the members of the Executive Committee on behalf of the Directors-General of FAO and WHO. Mr. Cortas drew attention to the new spirit of worldwide political cooperation which has opened the way for the resolution of long-standing world problems. He noted that the area of international trade, especially in agricultural products, was most likely to benefit from these historical changes. The Multilateral Trade Negotiations within GATT were progressing and in the area of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Barriers, and there seemed to be a willingness to establish greater discipline against the use of such measures and regulations as barriers to trade. Mr. Cortas stated that the results of the GATT discussions in this area will have considerable repercussions for the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, as the trend of the GATT discussions was to place reliance on Codex standards as a basis for the long-term programme of harmonization of national regulations and to refer to Codex Standards, among other sources, when resolving disputes, either in early informal reconciliation procedures or through more formal dispute settlement arrangements.

3. Mr. Cortas also stressed that the impact of the Commission's work on the quality and safety of foods has helped to upgrade food manufacturing and processing standards all over the world. It has improved prospects for the facilitation of trade and encouraged industries and governments to take cognizance of consumers' expectations. In this regard, the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission was consistent with the 1985 UN General Assembly resolution on consumer protection. Moreover, Mr. Cortas noted that the objectives of food safety, improved quality, and reduced non-tariff barriers to trade should appeal to the general public as well as to specialized groups, and that work in the area of food quality and standards achieved a congruence of public and commercial interests.

4. The Chairman thanked Dr. Cortas for his words of welcome and encouragement, noting that this Session of the Executive Committee came at a time when the importance of multilateral cooperation in trade matters was very much under the spotlight. He stated that the long-term programme of harmonization of national standards proposed by the GATT Uruguay Round, would open the way to the meaningful acceptance of Codex standards by major trading nations. In this process, the Chairman suggested that it may be necessary to re-visit some of Codex standards and also perhaps, to revise Codex procedures to make them more flexible, more responsive to the needs of countries, and less time-consuming. In this sense, the Chairman noted the importance of the Joint Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade organized for March 1991. The Chairman expressed his appreciation to the Directors-General of FAO and WHO for their continued positive support of the work of the Codex Alimentarius.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Item 1)

5. The Executive Committee adopted the Provisional Agenda as proposed in documents CX/EXEC 90/37/1 and 90/37/1 - Addendum 1 as the agenda for its session. In addition, it agreed to discuss, under Item 12 "Other Business" the matter of the "Duration of Codex Sessions" as proposed by its Chairman.

REPORT ON THE ACCOUNTS OF THE JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME FOR 1988/89 AND THE APPROVED BUDGET 1990/1991 (Item 2)

6. The Executive Committee had before it document CX/EXEC 90/37/2, which was introduced by the Chief of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, Mr. J.R. Lupien. Mr. Lupien referred to the two elements of the budget, namely the cost-sharing arrangements to which FAO contributed 75% and WHO 25%, and the supplementary contribution by FAO as the administering agency which brought its overall support to approximately 83% of the total budget. He noted that the operations of the Programme for 1988/89 were carried out within the approved budget, and that in fact a slight surplus was carried forward into 1990/91. In particular, publication costs were brought under tighter control and meeting costs were reduced by limiting the duration of major meetings (Commission, Executive Committee) were funded directly from the budget.

7. He also noted that the approved budget for 1990/91 provided some additional funds for computer services, but otherwise the zero-growth budget, in operation since 1974, remained the same. FAO had also assumed greater responsibility for documentation costs. Meetings costs were slightly increased to cover the costs of additional meetings funded from the budget (Milk Committee, Fruit Juices Committee). Mr. Lupien reported that it was expected that the budget would be sufficient to meet the requirements of the Programme for the biennium, including the publication of the first volumes of the Revised Codex Alimentarius, but warned that continuing financial problems due to the lateness of contributions to FAO in particular, could mean that some meetings and publications may have to be postponed.

8. The Representative of the Region of Europe questioned the financial arrangements supporting the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) and stressed the need to ensure that a sufficient number of meetings of the Committee were held in the area of food additives. The Executive Committee was informed that neither JECFA, nor the Joint FAO/WHO Meetings on Pesticide Residues (JMPR) formed part of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme or were funded by it. In fact meetings of JECFA were funded directly from the Regular Programmes of FAO and WHO. Although only two meetings of JECFA had been budgeted in the current biennium by FAO, extrabudgetary support from the Government of the Federal Republic

of Germany would ensure the holding of a third meeting. However, only one of the three sessions would be devoted to food additives per se, the other two sessions being devoted to the evaluation of residues of veterinary drugs. It was noted that the holding of a fourth session in the biennium, although technically feasible, would not be possible due to the limited funding, including that provided through the WHO/UNEP/ILO International Programme on Chemical Safety (IPCS).

9. The Representative of the Region of Europe expressed regret that JECFA support to the evaluation of food additives would not be increased and suggested that any savings in the Codex budget might be used to ensure support to JECFA. It was noted that the Coordinating Committee for North America and the South-West Pacific had expressed the need for increased work in the evaluation of food additives.

10. In response to questions from Professor F.G. Winarno (Vice Chairman) and the Representative of the Region of Latin America and the Caribbean, the Executive Committee was assured that cost reductions under documentation were being achieved by increased efficiencies in document preparation and by restricting the length of working papers and reports. Distribution of Codex documentation was not affected.

11. The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to FAO and WHO for maintaining the level of the Codex budget and to the Secretariat for the effective utilization of the resources available. Noting that the budget was the minimum necessary to ensure the effective operation of the programme, it emphasized the need for the Codex Programme to continue to be afforded high priority to ensure that its work programme was not jeopardized by potential financial problems facing the parent organizations. It also noted with appreciation the support available through Regular Programme and Extrabudgetary sources for training courses and seminars held in association with Regional Coordinating Committee sessions held in developing countries which strengthened participation and interest in the work of Codex.

REPORT ON THE TWENTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE FAO CONFERENCE AND OTHER MATTERS ARISING FROM FAO AND WHO RELATED TO THE WORK OF THE COMMISSION (Item 3)

12. The Committee heard oral reports from the Chief, FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme on matters arising from the 25th Session of the FAO Conference, and from the WHO Joint Secretary on matters arising from recent meetings of the World Health Assembly and Executive Board, related to the work of the Commission.

13. The Committee noted that the FAO Conference had emphasized the important pivotal role of FAO in the harmonization of national regulations on sanitary and phytosanitary measures based on the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and expressed its appreciation for the long established and valuable work of the CAC in harmonizing food standards and related rules for international food trade. The Conference also fully endorsed the support provided by FAO to the Uruguay Round Negotiations, including support to the GATT Secretariat, and recommended that such support should continue and, where appropriate, be intensified. The Conference also stressed the need for providing technical assistance to developing countries in these areas. The Conference recommended the immediate implementation of the plans of the FAO Director-General to strengthen activities regarding Codex, whereby a special unit within the Food Quality and Consumer Protection Group would be created to expedite Codex/GATT cooperation in such areas as food standards, food additives, veterinary drug and pesticide residues in foods and other areas which could constitute sanitary barriers to trade.

14. The Executive Committee was informed that FAO Conference had supported strongly proposals made by the Director-General in response to recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Nutrition of the UN Administrative Committee on Coordination, to convene a Joint FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition. The WHO Executive Board had also endorsed the WHO Director-General's proposal that such a Conference should be convened jointly by FAO and WHO in close collaboration with other agencies and with concerned multilateral and bilateral organizations. The Joint FAO/WHO International Conference on Nutrition will be held in Rome in December 1992.

15. The WHO Joint Secretary also informed the Committee that the WHO Director-General had established a Commission on Health and Environment which would prepare the WHO input in the UN Conference on Environment and Development, scheduled for 1992. This Commission was chaired by Mrs. Simone Veil, former French Minister of Health and former President of the European Parliament. Its work would be supported by four technical committees related to energy, industry, urbanization and food and agriculture. The first sessions of the Commission and its four panels had taken place in the second half of June 1990 in Geneva. Its work is expected to terminate in mid 1991. The Executive Committee also welcomed the convening of a Conference on Agriculture and the Environment sponsored jointly by FAO and the Government of the Netherlands to be held in 1990, as part of FAO's input to the UN Conference on Environment and Development.

16. The WHO Joint Secretary also informed the Executive Committee that the World Health Assembly had decided by a Resolution (43.2) that iodine deficiency disorders in humans should be eliminated by the Year 2000 and had asked JECFA to verify the effectiveness and safety of potassium iodide and potassium iodate to fortify salt.

17. The Executive Committee noted the work approved by FAO Conference and the World Health Assembly and Executive Board in areas which supported directly and indirectly the work of the Commission. It also welcomed the proposals of the FAO Director-General, supported by Conference, to provide tangible support to this work by creating a special unit within the Food Quality and Consumer Protection Group to strengthen liaison with GATT, noting that the establishment of such a unit was dependent upon the availability of adequate resources.

PROGRESS REPORT ON THE PROPOSED FAO/WHO INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FOOD STANDARDS, CHEMICALS IN FOOD AND FOOD TRADE (Item 4)

18. The Executive Committee had before it document CX/EXEC 90/37/3 which provided a progress report concerning the Joint FAO/WHO Conference to be held in Rome from 18-27 March 1991. It was recalled that the Conference had been initiated on the request of the 18th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (paras 316 and 532, ALINORM 89/40) in order to provide a forum for discussions concerning, among other issues, food additives, contaminants, import/export control programmes, GATT/Codex procedures in relation to non-tariff barriers to trade, deliberations of JECFA/JMPR and assistance and training to governments. The document summarized the expected outputs of the Conference and included a draft provisional agenda.

19. In response to concerns regarding the timing and distribution of invitations and working papers for the Conference, the Secretariat assured the Executive Committee that invitations would be distributed by October 1990 at the latest, while working papers would be distributed before the end of the year. The Executive Committee noted that the timely distribution of documents was necessary in order to promote meaningful

discussions and to stimulate the participation of member governments at the meeting. In this regard, the Committee recommended that all working papers should be distributed to Codex Contact Points for action in order to improve the coordination and participation by knowledgeable and upper level government representatives. The Executive Committee also requested that a pre-notification circular letter would be distributed to Codex Contact Points prior to the invitations which would describe the organization and expected output of the Conference, and would solicit information and inputs from governments concerning issues of importance to national authorities.

20. The Secretariat emphasized that invitations would be distributed to FAO/WHO member governments and recognized international organizations in accordance with FAO/WHO Rules of Procedures with copies to Codex Contact Points. In this respect the Committee noted that the Conference was to be intergovernmental in nature and that the composition of Conference delegations was the decision of national governments. The Conference would be held in Plenary Session in its entirety, with the creation of ad hoc working groups only if necessary on the basis of Conference progress.

21. The Executive Committee strongly supported the convening of the Conference, and looked forward to discussions of the Conference recommendations at the 19th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1991. It noted the importance of including in the Conference, discussions on radionuclides, irradiation, the relationship between Codex/GATT, JECFA, and the development of training programmes and information exchange for developing countries.

REPORT ON THE STATUS OF THE GATT URUGUAY ROUND OF TRADE NEGOTIATIONS ON AGRICULTURE WORKING GROUP ON SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY REGULATIONS AND BARRIERS (Item 5)

22. The Committee had before it document CX/EXEC 90/37/4 which provided the background and current status of the negotiations within the Uruguay Round.

23. The representative of the South-West Pacific highlighted the most recent deliberations of the 9th Session of the Working Group on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Regulations and Barriers (WGSP) which had been held concurrently with the present session of the Executive Committee. The active participation of Codex representatives at all of the working group sessions was noted as well as support for the negotiations at the Twenty-Fifth Session of the FAO Conference.

24. The Representative of the South-West Pacific noted that the current meeting of the WGSP had focused its deliberations on a "Draft Text for the Framework of an Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures" and that negotiations continued in several major areas. The Representative was pleased to note, however, that the draft text was received in a positive manner despite its being subject to future review. In view of the preliminary nature of the proposed text, the Committee agreed to focus its discussions on general principles regarding the Codex/GATT relationship.

25. Specifically, the draft agreement recommended that GATT contracting parties should play a full part in the relevant international organizations to which they belong, to encourage these organizations to, among other things, (a) recommend standards and guidelines with respect to all aspects of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, to (b) develop and publish methodologies and criteria for risk assessment, for the establishment and recognition of pest or disease-free areas, and guidelines for the determination of equivalency and (c) to identify, when requested, competent independent experts who might be able to advise and assist parties on sanitary and

phytosanitary matters of concern. The Committee noted the major implications for Codex and FAO and WHO in developing these recommendations for GATT and looked forward to its deliberations in these areas.

26. The Secretariat and Representative of FAO Legal Counsel noted the preliminary nature of the document, and agreed that many of its aspects needed further elaboration, which in part, would be accomplished through specific dispute settlement cases in the future. The representative of the South-West Pacific region also emphasized that GATT was very supportive of Codex as the primary international scientifically based standards setting body which would be relied upon for its expertise while recognizing the importance of its total independence. The Executive Committee stressed that Codex standards and codes of practice should always reflect current scientific knowledge. It noted that the majority of Codex/GATT collaboration would take place in the areas of general (i.e. horizontal) subjects as opposed to specific (i.e. vertical) areas, as was the trend in current international commerce.

27. The Executive Committee agreed that the Commission and the Joint FAO/WHO Conference should examine areas of emphasis and means of support for the GATT agreement, including providing past history, recommending experts, defining and prioritizing future work, and identifying potential areas of dispute. It strongly supported the current GATT/Codex cooperative efforts in the area of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and agreed to the importance of defining future priorities in this field.

REPORT ON THE PUBLICATION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS; DISTRIBUTION OF CODEX DOCUMENTATION AND COMPUTERIZATION OF THE PROGRAMME
(Item 6)

28. The FAO Joint Secretary introduced document CX/EXEC 90/37/5 and 90/37/5Add 1. The Executive Committee recalled that the Commission at its 18th Session had endorsed proposals for the publication of a revised Codex Alimentarius together with an abridged version for distribution through the worldwide sales offices of FAO and WHO. Advance copies of the Abridged Codex Alimentarius prepared by Mr. B.L. Smith (Canada) were made available to members of the Executive Committee. It was noted that the volume would become generally available in September 1990.²⁹ The FAO Joint Secretary reported that the first volume of the Revised Codex Alimentarius has been sent to FAO Publications Division for printing and distribution and that three further volumes were expected to be submitted in the course of the year.

30. In cooperation with the Publications Division of FAO the possibility of distributing the revised Codex Alimentarius on CD-ROM or making it available as an on-line data base for computer users was being evaluated (see para. 33 below). The presentation of the Codex Alimentarius in a non-printed form could enable reducing the number of printed copies that would be needed in the future. However a sufficient number of printed copies would continue to be available for distribution free of charge to Codex Contact Points and to persons and organizations on the FAO and WHO official distribution lists.

31. The Secretariat also informed the Executive Committee of proposals to establish standing orders for Codex documentation (reports, working papers etc.) through FAO and WHO sales outlets. The standing orders would be available for industry associations and other organizations or individuals to purchase as required. The regular distribution of documentation to Codex Contact Points and Codex delegations would not be affected.

32. The Executive Committee congratulated the Secretariat on the presentation of the Abridged Codex Alimentarius and noted especially the work of Mr. Smith. Concern was expressed at the lateness of documentation, especially for the present Session and the Executive Committee was assured that efforts were being made to resolve this problem. In reply to a question concerning the availability of the audio-visual cassette describing the work of the Codex Alimentarius, the Chief of the Programme noted that the First Session of the Coordinating Committee for North America and the South-West Pacific had proposals on the use of additional and specific audio-visual presentations to highlight the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission which would assist in the publicity for the revised and abridged versions of the Codex Alimentarius.

33. The FAO Joint Secretary reported to the Executive Committee the outcome of the work of a small Expert Group, convened at the request of the 35th Session of the Committee, to review the data handling requirements of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (CX/EXEC 90/37/5 Add. 1). It was noted that since the meeting of the Expert Group FAO had established general rules for the release of copyrighted FAO material in the form of data bases whether on diskette, CD-ROM or other media. On this basis the Secretariat had taken initial steps together with the Publications Division of FAO to explore ways in which the contents of the Codex Alimentarius could be transferred to electronic media for storage and publication.

IMPACT OF BIOTECHNOLOGY ON FOOD STANDARDIZATION ACTIVITIES OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION - PROGRESS REPORT (Item 7)

34. The Secretariat introduced the working paper for this agenda item CX/EXEC90/37/6 and informed the Committee that a Joint FAO/WHO Consultation on Assessment of Biotechnology in Food Production and Processing as Related to Food Safety had been scheduled for November 1990. A provisional agenda had been established as in Annex I of the working paper. The Committee was informed that the Consultation will examine the impact of the biotechnologies on food production, processing and distribution: analyze the implications of the use of biotechnologies for food safety and identify real or potential safety concerns and issues specific to the application of the biotechnologies and recommend appropriate safety assessment strategies and procedures. The Committee was also informed that not only individual experts and scientists had been invited but also selected nongovernmental organizations concerned with the use and assessment of biotechnology in food.

35. The Committee fully supported the Joint Consultation and expressed the view that the Report of the Consultation should be made available to the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade and that the topic should remain on the agenda of the Commission, the Executive Committee and relevant Codex General Subject Committees for the time being.

CONVERTING CODEX REGIONAL STANDARDS TO WORLDWIDE STANDARDS (Item 8)

36. The Secretariat introduced the working paper CX/EXEC 90/37/7 concerning the proposal of converting Codex Regional Standards to Worldwide Standards, based on the wishes expressed at the 18th Session of the Commission. The Procedure specifies that it is open to the Commission to consider at any time the possible extension of the territorial application of a Codex Regional Standard in the light of all acceptances received. The working paper includes a list of Codex Regional Standards and the status of acceptances which points out for several regional standards a larger acceptance by

countries outside the Region and states that regional standards may be potential non-tariff barriers in international trade.

37. The Secretariat proposed that member governments should be asked by means of a Circular Letter whether or not individual regional standards should be converted to worldwide standards, either with or without amendments. Where there appears to be a consensus that a Regional Standard could be converted to a Worldwide standard without amendment the Commission would be invited to take this action immediately in conformity with its mandate. Where it appears that such consensus would not be obtained, the Commission should be invited to send the standard(s) to governments for technical comments as Proposed Draft Worldwide Standard(s) at Step 3, and to decide which body among its subsidiary bodies should be entrusted with a further development of the standard(s).

38. The Committee fully supported the procedure proposed by the Codex Secretariat for converting Codex regional standards to worldwide standards, recommended that regional Codex standards should be maintained only on the basis of specific justification and confirmed that the existing regional Codex standards remain in force until the proposed worldwide standards could be adopted by the Commission.

STATUS OF CODEX GUIDELINES AND OTHER TEXTS OF AN ADVISORY NATURE (Item 9)

39. The Secretariat introduced the document CX/EXEC/90/8 and traced the development and the types of Codex advisory texts and the need for clarifying their status, in view of the increasing role of Codex texts in international trade particularly in the agreement on sanitary and phytosanitary measures of the present multilateral trade negotiations in GATT.

40. The Representative of the FAO Legal Counsel, Mr. R. Stein, noted two broad types of guidelines - texts which were complementary or explanatory to Codex standards or Codes and independent self-standing texts such as Guideline Levels for Contaminants. It was noted that, although not binding legally, these texts had value in themselves when they form part of an agreement between contracting parties or were incorporated into regulation by governments. Possible direction outlined by the Counsel might be to develop an acceptance procedure for these texts but the legal consequences of such a move should be carefully weighed.

41. The Executive Committee noted that guidelines, codes of practice and other advisory texts were taken very seriously by the Codex committees which apply the same elaboration procedure, effort and expertise as those required for the elaboration of standards. Although less binding than standards these texts did have meaning and use in international trade and in some cases had been used as reference texts containing the best available international evidence. There was a strong emphasis on the application of most up-to date and rigorous scientific criteria in the elaboration of the texts.

42. Several members of the Committee suggested that in clarifying uncertainties concerning advisory texts it would be important to obtain the feedback from member countries on the practical application of the texts, and to have a further review of the issue within Codex at the earliest possibility. It was also suggested to have the guidelines and codes of practice discussed at the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade in March 1991.

43. The Committee recommended that the Secretariat revise the text, incorporating the suggestions made by the Executive Committee and placing a strong emphasis on the scientific rigour in advisory texts. The revised document should then be circulated to governments and interested organizations for comments and feedback on terminology, uses and applicability of the guidelines, codes of practice and other advisory texts. The opinion of the Codex Committee on General Principles would be sought by correspondence, and the issue would be discussed at the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade in March 1991. It was agreed that the matter should be specifically discussed by the Commission at its 19th Session in July 1991.

MATTERS ARISING FROM CODEX COMMITTEES (Item 10)

44. The Executive Committee had before it documents CX/EXEC 90/37/9 and 90/37/9Add 1 containing matters specifically brought to the attention of the Executive Committee for its advice or opinion on other matters requiring the attention of the Executive Committee acting on behalf of the Commission.

(a) Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) (ALINORM 91/13)

(i) Microbiological criteria for foods to be further processed, including by irradiation

45. The Executive Committee was informed that an Expert Consultation organized by the International Consultative Group on Food Irradiation had recommended that microbiological specifications should be established for a number of raw food materials subject to further processing such as heat treatment, freezing or irradiation. The report of this Expert Consultation had been brought to the attention of the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene which had been invited to consider the specific recommendations. The CCFH in turn had requested the advice of the Executive Committee on how to proceed with the recommendations.

46. The Executive Committee noted that the proposals for microbiological criteria for foods to be further processed implied that amendments to current Codes of Hygienic Practice would be needed. It also noted that the microbiological criteria were not intended for regulatory purposes but as indicators that Good Manufacturing Practices had been followed. They could not however be used as a substitute for Good Manufacturing Practices which covered areas in addition to microbiology. The Executive Committee agreed that a Circular Letter should be sent requesting governments to comment on whether or not existing codes should be amended as proposed by the Consultation. Comments would be made available to the next session of CCFH and on the basis of these comments CCFH would have the opportunity to propose to the Commission whether or not to proceed with the amendments.

(ii) Routine medical examination for food handling personnel

47. A WHO Expert Consultation on Health Surveillance and Management Procedures for Food Handling Personnel had recommended that pre-employment or routine medical and laboratory examinations of food handling personnel should be discontinued as they were of no value in preventing food-borne disease. Such examinations are required by law in some countries. The Codex Codes of Hygienic Practice suggest that such examinations may be considered in cases where they are medically, clinically or epidemiologically indicated. The CCFH had requested the advice of the Executive Committee on how to proceed in this case.

48. The Executive Committee agreed that government comments should be requested by means of a Circular Letter and that the matter should be discussed at the next session of CCFH.

(iii) **Street Foods**

49. On the recommendation of the 36th Session of the Executive Committee the CCFH examined proposals for a number of core elements to serve as guidance to the Regional Coordinating Committees in the elaboration of Codes of Hygienic Practice for Street Vended Foods (see ALINORM 89/4, para. 33). Following the comments of several delegations, including those which stressed the need for a code of hygienic practice bearing the approval of FAO and WHO, the CCFH agreed to recommend to the Executive Committee to request FAO and WHO to consider holding an expert consultation on street food hygienic practices in order to produce a more detailed document for consideration by the CCFH and the Regional Coordinating Committees.

50. Dr. Tape (Vice-Chairman) drew attention to the usefulness of such documents in the protection of human health which was one of the objectives of the Codex Programme as well as their information and educational components. He recommended work in this area should be enhanced and that a basic document should be prepared to help the regional coordinating committees to proceed with their work. Professor Winarno (Vice-Chairman) supported the proposal of CCFH for a future FAO/WHO expert consultation but stressed that new work was under way especially in the evaluation of interventions to improve the quality of the street foods which would not yield data before the end of 1990/91. It was noted that the Seventh Session of the Coordinating Committee for Asia had been informed of the opinion of CCFH but had noted the need to improve the street food situation.

51. The Executive Committee noting the comments of its members and additional information provided by Mr. Dawson, FAO and the WHO Joint Secretary, endorsed the opinion of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia that the convening of an additional expert consultation by FAO and WHO should be considered only in the future when sufficient additional information would be available. It also supported the continuation of FAO work in this area and expressed the wish that FAO and WHO continue to provide guidance on core elements for inclusion in the Regional Codes of Practice.

(iv) **Organization of work**

52. The CCFH had asked the advice of the Executive Committee in a number of matters in the organization of its programme of work.

– Terms of Reference:

53. The CCFH had asked for advice on its terms of reference and its future coordinating role in view of the importance of general subject committees in the Codex system. The Executive Committee noted that the CCFH terms of reference gave it wide authority to draft provisions on food hygiene but noted that for foods for which a Codex commodity committee had been established initial responsibility in this matter lay with the commodity committee concerned. It recommended that the matter be taken up by the March 1991 Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade and subsequently by the Commission.

– Review of timing of Commission Sessions and Preparation of Documents:

54. The Executive Committee noted that procedures existed for distributing documents for comments in advance of the Committee session including requests for comments in anticipation of Commission decisions advancing standards or codes to Step 6. The Executive Committee noted that to a considerable degree the matter was the responsibility of the host government and Codex secretariats and also noted that the question of Codex structures and procedures was on the Agenda of the International Conference.

- Avoidance of unnecessary repetition in Codex Codes of Practice

55. The Executive Committee fully endorsed the view that where there is a Code of General Principles within a subject area, codes on specific subjects should be limited to essential differences to avoid unnecessary repetition.

- Justification and guidelines for establishment of ad hoc working groups operating between sessions of the Committee:

56. The Commission at its 16th Session had recommended that care should be taken in the establishment of working groups especially those operating outside formal Committee sessions. The Executive Committee noted that there was some benefit to be able to delegate work to small groups of countries to accelerate progress as provided for in the Procedural Manual. However, it recommended that the establishment of such working groups would be made only when necessary and with specific terms of reference and with the accomplishment of specific tasks within a clearly defined time frame. It noted that the implementation of such a guideline would have to be left to the discretion of each Committee on a case by case basis but working groups meeting between sessions should be kept to an absolute minimum and sufficient notice of their meetings should be made.

- Pictorial Manual of Visual Can Defects

57. The CCFH had requested the USA and Canadian delegations to prepare a model of a Pictorial Manual of Visual Can Defects which could be used in conjunction with the "Guideline Procedures for the Visual Inspection of Lots of Canned Foods" (see ALINORM 91/13, para. 60). The Representative of the Region of North America and Dr. N. Tape (Vice Chairman) presented model copies of the Manual to the members of the Executive Committee. The Manual had been prepared to enhance the uniform interpretation of terminology and classification of can defects, and was primarily based on pictorial communication. The Executive Committee was informed that both the governments of the USA and Canada had indicated their willingness to contribute to the cost of publication and distribution of the Manual. The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the Governments of the USA and Canada for the useful and practical nature of the Manual and for the generous offers of support. It recommended that the Manual be published in the FAO series of Manuals of Food Quality Control which already provided comprehensive practical advice to food control inspectors and officials in these areas.

(b) **Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia** (CCASIA) (ALINORM 91/15)

58. The Representative of the Region of Asia provided a brief summary of the matters referred to the Executive Committee by the Seventh Session of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA).

59. In relation to the proposal for the elaboration of a Standard for Palm Stearin, the Executive Committee noted that comments received to date in reply to Circular Letter

1990/11-FO had not indicated wide support for the elaboration of such a standard. The Committee proposed that a justification paper showing clearly to what extent Palm Stearin is exported as a food grade product or as a manufacturing product for other purposes be prepared by the Government of Malaysia for discussion at its next (38th) Session. Decision as to the need for elaboration of the Standard for Palm Stearin can be taken by the Commission at its 19th Session. The Coordinator for Africa informed the Executive Committee that Palm Stearin is used in fairly appreciable amounts for food use in Africa.

60. With reference to the proposal of CCASIA that the Commission should not proceed with the elaboration of a Codex Standard for Milled Rice, the Executive Committee noted that the matter had been approached with a considerable degree of caution, and that the views of all Coordinating Committees had been made available to the 18th Session of the Commission when it made the decision to proceed with the elaboration of such a Standard. On the basis of the Commission's decision action was taken to circulate a first draft standard prepared by the USA, France and the Netherlands for comment at Step 3, as is required by the Commission's Procedures. The Step Procedure allows for a second examination of whether or not to proceed with the standard when the Proposed Draft Standard is presented to the Commission at Step 5. The Executive Committee took no action at this time.

61. The Executive Committee noted that the CCASIA had expressed an interest in the elaboration of a Code of Practice for Dried Shark Fins. The Committee was informed that the Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products had extended the Scope of the Proposed Draft Standard on Dried Shark Fins to cover all varieties of shark fit for human consumption and to begin work, together with the Fisheries Industry Division of FAO, on a Code of Practice for the Utilization of Shark which would include elements on Shark Fins as well as muscle and skin. The Executive Committee expressed its approval of the action taken by CCFFP.

62. The Executive Committee noted that the Government of Thailand had undertaken to prepare a Code of Practice for the Use of "Low Energy" or "Reduced Energy" foods for presentation to the next session of CCASIA (ALINORM 91/15, paras. 193-194). The Committee held the view that the undertaking of Thailand as above contained some elements on which action was required if the preparation of such a Code would not exceed the Commission's, and therefore CCASIA's Terms of Reference. Firstly, the question of pricing of food products was outside the terms of reference of the Commission, as was the matter of support to research. Both functions may be carried out by governments, but not by the CAC. Secondly, the development of standards for these products, and for Codes or Guidelines concerning their preparation, was the responsibility of the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU), which took into account the production practices, and potential production practices in all member countries. The Executive Committee noted that the Draft Standard for these products was still under active consideration by CCNFSDU. CCNFSDU also considered the impact of short term and long term consumption of these products, and is formulating recommendations, together with the Codex Committee on Food Labelling on Guidelines for Use and adequate labelling.

63. The Executive Committee recommended that the matter should be brought to the attention of CCNFSDU, which should have the principal responsibility for any future work in this area. It requested CCNFSDU to report to the next session of the Commission on how the questions raised by the Delegation of Thailand at CCASIA can be taken into account within the existing programme of work.

(c) **Codex Committee on Tropical Fresh Fruits and Vegetables** (CCTFFV)
(ALINORM 91/35)

(i) **Elaboration of Proposed Draft Standards and Codes of Practice at Steps 1, 2 and 3 of the Procedure**

64. The Executive Committee noted that it had been requested to authorize the further elaboration of proposed draft standards for nopal (prickly pear), carambola and litchi and proposed draft codes of practice for the packaging and transport and control and inspection of tropical fresh fruits and vegetables, pending confirmation by the 19th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

65. The Committee approved elaboration of these items, and noted its pleasure at the active participation of countries from the regions of Latin America and the Caribbean and Asia in the CCTFFV deliberations.

(d) **Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants** (CCFAC)
(ALINORM 91/12)

(a) **Guideline Levels for Radionuclides in International Trade**

66. See discussion under Agenda Item 12, "Other Business" (paras. 95-97).

(b) **Sampling Plans for Mercury, Cadmium and Lead**

67. The Executive Committee noted that the CCFAC had proposed a simple sampling plan for the regulatory control of contaminants, based on a similar plan adopted by the Commission in relation to pesticides (and endorsed for that purpose by the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (CCMAS) at its 10th Session, 1977. However, CCMAS had not endorsed the plan for contaminants, stating that it would need to know the distribution in foods of the contaminants in question. CCFAC has requested temporary endorsement of the sampling plan, but at the same time is requesting further information from governments on sampling procedures used in individual countries (ALINORM 91/12, para. 25).

68. The Executive Committee endorsed temporarily the simple sampling plan for mercury, cadmium and lead proposed by CCFAC noting that the main obligation of the Committee is to arrive at practical, scientifically based recommendations for use in international trade and not for research or for monitoring purposes. The CCFAC was invited to report on progress made to the next session of the Executive Committee.

(e) **Codex Coordinating Committee for North America and the South-West Pacific** (CCNASWP) (ALINORM 91/32)

(i) **Monitoring the Effectiveness of the Code of Ethics in International Trade in Foods and the Means of its Implementation in the Region**

69. The Executive Committee noted that the CCNASWP had proposed this issue with particular regard to the experience and in the interests of developing countries within the region. The CCNASWP agreed to the importance of providing assistance to countries in applying provisions of the Code by strengthening their food legislation and food control infrastructures and by providing the necessary documentation and instructions. While noting the importance of encouraging Codex member governments to implement the Code, the Executive Committee agreed that this matter should be discussed in other Coordinating Committees based on the working paper prepared for CCNASWP (CX/NASWP 90/8). It also requested that a progress report on specific initiatives envisioned for implementing the Code be presented at its next session.

(i) **Labelling and Other Issues Related to Organically Produced Foods**

70. See discussion under Agenda Item 12 "Other Business" (paras. 92-94)

(ii) **Use of the Term "Natural" in Food Product Labelling**

71. The Executive Committee agreed with the importance of establishing guidelines for use of the term "natural" in food product labelling, and endorsed the CCNASWP proposal to forward this issue to the Codex Committee on Food Labelling for action.

(iv) **Health and Nutrition Claims on Food Labels and in Advertising**

72. The Executive Committee noted discussions of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) concerning this subject in relation to the revised General Guidelines on Claims which addressed the use of misleading health claims. It also noted the discussions held at the 18th Session of the Commission concerning the applicability of the guidelines to advertising (paras. 256-257, ALINORM 89/49), whereby it was agreed that although problems related to advertising could be discussed by the CCFL, there was no need to initiate a code of practice on advertising. Discussions held at the CCFL concerning this subject (paras. 58-69, ALINORM 89/22) , focused on the prevalence of other international agreements which cover advertising, including the U.N. General Assembly Guidelines for Consumer Protection (39/248) and codes of practice promulgated under the International Chamber of Commerce. The Secretariat also noted that advertising did not usually follow products in international trade but was used at the local point of sale. It was also noted that in many countries authority to control advertising did not rest with food authorities.

73. The Executive Committee agreed to endorse the elaboration of Codex General Guidelines on Nutrition and Health Claims for Labelling through the CCFL, with the understanding that the issue of advertising would be limited to discussions only. It was noted that work on EEC Directives in the areas of health and nutrition claims would be reported to CCFL or part of its discussion on this matter.

(v) **Promotion of the Codex Alimentarius**

74. The Executive Committee strongly endorsed the recommendations contained in para. 93 of the report of CCNASWP.

75. The Coordinator of Latin America and the Caribbean suggested convening regional workshops with the participation of officials from Codex Contact Points to reiterate the benefits and structure while promoting Codex in the regions and to assist Codex Contact Points in the organization of national Codex Committees. The Chief of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme supported this proposal. It was also noted that steps were being taken to develop, fund and promote Codex through various means of communication, including audiovisual materials, with the help of extra-budgetary resources.

76. The Executive Committee strongly supported the recommendations of the CCNASWP concerning the promotion of Codex, and looked forward to a progress report at its next meeting.

(vi) **Food Additives and Contaminants**

77. The Executive Committee and the Commission had been invited to consider the possible separation of food additives and contaminants into separate Codex Committees, expediting the review of so-called GRAS food additives, and means of expediting the expert evaluation of contaminants in appropriate FAO/WHO bodies. The

first of these matters had also been discussed by the Codex Coordinating Committee for Europe (CCEURO).

78. In regard to the first of the recommendations, the splitting of Codex consideration of food additives and contaminants, the Executive Committee noted the assurances of the Representative of Europe that adequate attention would be directed to both food additives and contaminants by the CCFAC, and as the evaluation of both items was similar, it would be much more efficient to keep these subjects under one Committee. The Executive Committee agreed that this issue should be forwarded to the next CCFAC for discussion while noting that one of the agenda items for the March 1991 Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade would be a review of the procedures and structure of the CAC. Several of the Regional Representatives gave support to this approach.

79. The Executive Committee supported the second and third of these recommendations, while noting the financial restraints confronting the Organizations. It noted that this matter will also be taken up by the Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade in March 1991. However, the Executive Committee also noted the longstanding opinion of JECFA that a long history of use of substances in food did not necessarily confirm their safety. It also noted the difficulties in obtaining adequate data for the evaluation of such substances. It agreed, however, to inform the JECFA Secretariat of the view of CCNASWP, so that appropriate options may be determined.

(f) **Codex Committee on Meat Hygiene** (CCMH)

80. The Executive Committee was informed about the preparations for the 6th Session of the CCMH to be held in Rome in October 1991, with the objective of revising and updating the four codes of practice elaborated by the Committee. The Executive Committee expressed satisfaction with the developments so far and with the proposal to hold an expert review in September 1990, to prepare the draft revised codes for further comments by governments and discussion by the 6th Session of the Committee.

(g) **Codex Coordinating Committee for Europe** (CCEURO) (ALINORM 91/19)

81. The Executive Committee was informed that the Codex Coordinating Committee for Europe, at its 17th Session discussed the proposal of the Delegation of Hungary concerning the procedure of elaboration of regional Codex standards. The Coordinating Committee expressed the opinion that regional standards might be potential non tariff barriers and that the procedure for the elaboration of Worldwide Codex Standards had proven its usefulness in practice and it should be maintained. The Executive Committee supported the position of the Codex Coordinating Committee for Europe.

(h) **Codex Committee on Fish and Fishery Products** (CCFFP) (ALINORM 91/18)

(i) **Guideline Levels for Methylmercury in Fish**

82. The CCFFP had noted that the Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants had advanced the Draft Guideline Levels for Methylmercury in Fish to Step 8, for adoption by the Commission (ALINORM 91/12, paras. 159-165 and Appendix VIII). It was understood that CCFFP's advice would be sought on the practicability of establishing two guideline levels depending on the type of fish, and the practicability of analyzing for methylmercury as opposed to total mercury.

83. The CCFFP had agreed to inform the Executive Committee that it remained opposed to the guideline levels. The Committee stated that many questions were

unanswered and that more work would need to be done to determine those fish to which the different levels applied. Therefore the Guideline Levels should be returned to Step 6 and comments requested. Several delegations expressed preference to express Guideline Levels as total mercury. The Committee also requested the Executive Committee to determine whether Guideline Levels were in fact implicit standards, even if they were not subject to acceptance.

84. The Executive Committee agreed to refer the matter to the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants for discussion in the light of government comments obtained at Step 6 on the questions raised by CCFFP. It was noted that this procedure would not delay unnecessarily consideration by the Commission at Step 8.

(ii) **Review of Codex Standards for Fish and Fishery Products**

85. The CCFFP had agreed to review its standards to emphasize health and safety matters, decomposition, microbiological contamination, container integrity, and economic fraud. It noted that these aspects were inadequately covered in the Standards whereas areas in which governments took no regulatory action were often presented in considerable detail (defect tables, styles of presentation, etc.). The Executive Committee was informed that a small drafting group would meet in Canada to revise all current standards along these lines.

86. The Executive Committee commended the CCFFP on its initiative, stating that this was in line with earlier recommendations to remove excessive detail from Codex texts. It noted however, that some detail was needed in relation to product identification, and to protect the consumer from economic fraud. The Executive Committee noted that the new approach taken by the CCFFP had implications for other Codex Committees, especially those dealing with processed and quick frozen fruits and vegetables, and proposed that this matter be taken up at the next session of the Commission as a specific topic. It also noted that in cases where the object of having Codex Standards was the commercial quality standardization of produce, as in tropical fresh fruits and vegetables, the new approach taken by CCFFP was not appropriate.

(iii) **Amendments to certain Codes of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products**

87. The Executive Committee noted that the Commission agreed to an automatic amendment of the Fish Codes in relation to the keeping of unused ice on board vessels, if the CCFFP would agree to such a text (ALINORM 89/40, para. 420). A text had been agreed by the Committee (ALINORM 91/18, para. 100) and can be incorporated into all relevant codes immediately. The Executive Committee noted the action taken by CCFFP.

(iv) **Code of Practice for Fish and Fishery Products in Controlled and Modified Atmosphere Packaging**

88. The Executive Committee authorized the immediate development of the Code at Steps 1, 2 and 3 subject to later confirmation by the Commission.

(i) **Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues** (CCPR) (ALINORM 91/24)

89. The Executive Committee noted a recommendation made by the Chairman of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues concerning a number of non-controversial MRLs advanced to Step 5 at the, Committee's 22nd Session, which could probably be adopted by the Commission at its 19th Session if Government comments could be discussed by CCPR at its next session. The Secretariat proposed that the MRLs be

returned to Step 3 for Government comments. Following re-examination by CCPR these MRLs could be then examined by the Commission at Steps 5 and 8, in accordance with established procedures. This would mean that the MRLs concerned could be adopted by the 19th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Executive Committee agreed with the proposal of the Secretariat.

DRAFT PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR THE 19TH SESSION OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION (Item 11)

90. The Executive Committee had for its discussion document CX/EXEC/90/37/10. As a result of discussions at the present session, the Executive Committee recommended inclusion of the following additional agenda items for consideration by the 19th Session of the Commission:

- Review of Codex Standards with regard to format, suitability and possible revision
- Procedures for the elaboration of advisory texts, and their status within the General Principles of the Codex Alimentarius
- Consideration of "Organically/Biologically" produced foods.

91. The Executive Committee endorsed the Draft Provisional Agenda as proposed by the Secretariat, with the changes noted above.

OTHER BUSINESS (Item 12)

Biologically or Organically Produced Foods (Item 12(a))

92. The Executive Committee noted that this matter had been discussed by both the Regional Coordinating Committee for Europe (CCEURO) and the Regional Coordinating Committee for North America and the South-West Pacific (CCNASWP). The two Committees had arrived at similar conclusions in broad terms concerning the need for Codex to provide advice in this area; the CCNASWP had requested the development of Guidelines for Labelling, to be prepared by the Codex Committee on Food Labelling and the CCEURO had prepared six recommendations which could be considered by the Executive Committee.

93. On the basis of these recommendations, the Executive Committee requested the Secretariat to contact the appropriate agricultural production units in FAO informing them of the Commission's interest in production technologies of biologically/organically produced foods. It also proposed that an expert FAO consultation could be convened at the earliest opportunity with the cooperation of WHO to examine the regulatory aspects of the production, labelling, certification and control of organic or biologically produced foods, in the framework of the Commission's overall mandate to facilitate trade and protect the consumer. Noting the financial implications of this proposal it noted that the convening of such a Consultation would most likely be contingent on the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

94. The Executive Committee recommended that such a paper should be made available to the 19th Session of the Commission.

Methods of Control of Radionuclide Contamination of Foods Moving in International Trade (Item 12b)

95. The Executive Committee noted that the subject had been discussed by the 7th Session of the Regional Coordinating Committee for Asia, the 17th Session of the

Coordinating Committee for Europe, and the 22nd Session of the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants. These discussions were outlined in the "Matters of Interest" papers before the Committee (CX/EXEC 90/37/9 and Addendum 1).

96. The Committee noted that the discussions within the CCEURO were based on a comprehensive Conference Room Document, prepared by Norway, giving extensive reasons for establishing levels for radionuclides on a more permanent basis. Opinions within CCEURO were however not unanimous. The CCASIA has criticized the Codex levels for being too high, and has also called for more permanent levels to be established. CCFAC has decided to consider establishing more permanent guidelines and to discuss dilution factors and minor dietary components in relation to contamination with radionuclides at its next session.

97. The Executive Committee expressed the view that it was not in a position to determine whether or not the current Codex Guidelines were too high (or too low) for permanent use in international trade, and recommended that the matter be discussed fully at the next session of CCFAC with a view to making initial proposals to the next session of the CAC.

Prevention and Control of Salmonellosis and similar foodborne diseases (Item 12(c))

98. In introducing document CX/EXEC 90/37/11 the WHO Joint Secretary reminded the Committee (see ALINORM 89/4 paras. 51 and 52) that the World Health Assembly, during its 42nd Session in May 1989, had expressed concern over the marked increase in foodborne infections in many countries, particularly the incidence of human salmonellosis and similar diseases due to the presence of causative agents in livestock and poultry. The World Health Assembly had passed a resolution (WHA 42.40) requesting, *inter alia*, the WHO Director-General to continue to assist Member States, in particular through the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, in the development of optimum microbiological and hygiene standards for products of animal origin.

99. In response to this resolution, the WHO Secretariat had requested selected scientists¹ from the health and agricultural sectors to examine in broad terms the Codex text already adopted or still under preparation which provide guidance to Member States concerning the prevention and control of foodborne diseases. Furthermore, the scientists were requested to propose additional measures in this area in order to make Codex recommendations even more powerful tools in the fight against food contamination and foodborne diseases. The paper proposed, among others:

¹ G.F. Jackson and D.L. Archer - US FDA, and C.F. Langford -Agriculture Canada

- (i) to revise existing codes of practice to place equal emphasis on those stages of food production where contamination may occur;
- (ii) to incorporate the hazard analysis critical control point (HACCP) principle into codes of hygienic practice;
- (iii) to underline in codes of hygienic practice the need for motivation of food handlers to apply properly the principles of hygienic food handling;
- (iv) to develop new codes of hygienic practice, as required by changes in the food industry, in consumer preferences, or in understanding of epidemiology;
- (v) to develop new manuals for inspectors, (similar, and in addition to, RCP 12-1976 and RCP 34-1985).

100. The Committee endorsed, in principle, the recommendations contained in the paper. It expressed the view that Codex recommendations need indeed to be adapted to today's understanding of the epidemiology of foodborne diseases and that, for this reason, codes of hygienic practice should not only concentrate on food processing but address preand post-processing stages of food production, as appropriate. It noted the opinion of the Chief, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, that care should be taken not to exceed the Commission's mandate in this exercise and that the work carried out by other organizations or relevant units in FAO and WHO should not be duplicated. It requested the secretariat to circulate the paper to Codex Member States for comments and the CCFH to act upon the recommendations contained in the paper in the light of governments' comments. The Executive Committee expressed its appreciation to the authors of the paper for their thorough and comprehensive work.

Duration of Codex Sessions (Item 12(d))

101. The Chairman of the Commission drew attention to the practice of some Codex Committees to extend their sessions over a weekend to allow for preparation of the report and its adoption on the following Monday. He noted that this practice added considerably to the costs of governments sending delegations to Committee sessions and may have a counterproductive effect on attendance at sessions, especially by developing countries. Professor Winarno (Vice-Chairman) supported this view and stated that Codex sessions should in general be completed in 4 to 5 days.

102. The Chief of the Joint Food Standards Programme stated that the matter was under serious consideration by the Secretariat and that the trends towards shorter reports, and more effective use of word processing equipment made it possible for all Codex Committee sessions to be completed in a normal working week, including if required, Saturday morning. For those Committees which seemed to have problems in meeting such a timetable, the Secretariat was invited to consult with the Chairman of the relevant Committees to handle the agenda as effectively as possible.

103. The Executive Committee welcomed this approach.

The Use of Arabic Language at Commission Sessions

104. The Coordinator for Africa requested that means should be explored by which the Arabic language would be available to delegations at the next Commission session.

105. The Executive Committee noted the forthcoming retirement of Dr. N. Rao Maturu who had been a member of the Secretariat of over 10 years. Expressing its appreciation for Dr. Rao Maturu's contribution to the work of the Programme, especially in connection with the Codex Coordinating Committee for Asia, the Executive Committee wished him and his wife a long and happy retirement.

**ATTENDANCE AT THE 37TH SESSION
OF THE
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION**

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