

# C O D E X A L I M E N T A R I U S

## Codex timeline from 1945 to the present

**1945** Foundation of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

**1948** Foundation of the World Health Organization (WHO)

**1950** The first session of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition stated:

*"Food regulations in different countries are often conflicting and contradictory. Legislation governing preservation, nomenclature and acceptable food standards often varies widely from country to country. New legislation not based on scientific knowledge is often introduced, and little account may be taken of nutritional principles in formulating regulations"* (FAO/WHO, 1950).

The Committee noted that the conflicting nature of food regulations may be an obstacle to trade and may therefore affect the distribution of nutritionally valuable food and suggested that FAO and WHO study these problems more closely.

**1951** An international convention on the naming and composition requirements of particular varieties of cheese was signed in the Italian city of Stresa.

**1955** The fourth session of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Nutrition (FAO/WHO, 1955) stated that:

*"The increasing, and sometimes insufficiently controlled, use of food additives has become a matter of public and administrative concern".*

It also noted that the means of solving problems involved in the use of food additives may differ from country to country and stated that this fact:

*"must in itself occasion concern, since the existence of widely differing control measures may well form an undesirable deterrent to international trade".*

**1955** First Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Additives. The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) began work. At its first meeting, it articulated the General principles for the use of food additives, a text that still forms the framework for consideration of food additive use.

**1958** - The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) established the Geneva Protocol in which a harmonized layout for food commodity standards was proposed. The relevant working party in UNECE provides quality standards for fresh fruit and vegetables and other food commodities moving in trade in Europe, with the objective of preventing disputes over the handling of these products during transport. The layout still forms the basis of most food commodity standards worldwide including Codex standards. Cooperation between FAO, Codex and UNECE went through different stages (e.g. FAO/UNECE work on fruit juices later Joint Codex/UNECE meetings on fruit juices and quick frozen fruits and vegetables which were later taken over by Codex). Close cooperation between the two bodies continues until today on standards for fresh fruits and vegetables.

- After the International Dairy Federation (IDF) had initially worked on standards and labelling requirements for milk and milk products the work was taken up by the Joint FAO/WHO Committee of Government Experts on the Code of Principles concerning Milk and Milk Products. The committee developed formal procedures for the elaboration of its standards which involved consultation with governments between meetings of the committee itself which are still used today by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

- Regional efforts to harmonize national food standards had begun after the Second World War. In Latin America, Carlos Grau of Argentina was promoting the idea of a Código Latino-Americano de Alimentos.

- The idea of a Europe-wide Codex Alimentarius based on the Codex Alimentarius Austriacus was actively pursued by Hans Frenzel of Austria between 1954 and 1958. Frenzel's work culminated in the creation of the Council of the Codex Alimentarius Europaeus in June 1958 under the joint sponsorship of the International Commission on Agricultural Industries and the International Bureau of Analytical Chemistry. Progress made by the council was not rapid and in August 1960, the council proposed to WHO that it should associate itself with that organization, WHO referred the matter to FAO for discussion of the outlines of how an agreement to take over the work could be reached.

**1960** The First FAO Regional Conference for Europe stated:

*"The desirability of international agreement on minimum food standards and related questions (including labelling requirements, methods of analysis, etc.) was recognized as an important means of protecting the consumer's health, of ensuring quality and of reducing trade barriers, particularly in the rapidly integrating market of Europe."*

The conference also felt that coordination of the growing number of food standards programmes undertaken by many organizations presented a particular problem.

**1961 February** - The Director-General of FAO, B.R. Sen, actively entered into discussions with WHO, ECE, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Council of the Codex Alimentarius

Europaeus with proposals that would lead to the establishment of an international food standards programme.

**June** - The President of the Council of the Codex Alimentarius Europaeus informed the Director-General that the proposed programme had been formally accepted by the council. This was reported to the Council of FAO at its thirty-fifth session in mid-June 1961.

**November** - The eleventh session of the Conference of FAO passed the resolution by which the Codex Alimentarius Commission was established.

**1962** The Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Conference, convened in Geneva and established the framework for cooperation between the two agencies. The Codex Alimentarius Commission was to be the body responsible for implementing the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. All work of FAO/WHO and other regional and international bodies dealing with food standards was gradually to be incorporated into the programme. The conference prepared the commission's first session. [See here for the report.](#)

**1963 May** - The Sixteenth World Health Assembly approved the establishment of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme with the Codex Alimentarius Commission as its principal organ.

**July** - The commission held its first session in Rome in October 1963. Some 120 participants from 30 countries and 16 international organizations attended.

**1991** The FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards, Chemicals in Food and Food Trade recommended: consumer participation in Codex, a horizontal approach for standard setting and that the CAC and the relevant Codex committees responsible for the development of standards, codes of practice or guidelines concerned with the protection of human health should make explicit the methods they have used to assess risk. [See here for the report.](#)

**1995** Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice become a reference for food safety in the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement). The only other organizations mentioned are the World organization for Animal Health (OIE) for animal health issues and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) for plant health.

**2002** In December 2002 FAO and WHO completed an evaluation of the Codex Alimentarius and other FAO and WHO Food Standards work including capacity building and expert scientific advice.

The evaluation found that Codex food standards were given high importance by members and considered a vital component in promoting food control systems designed to protect consumer health, including issues related to international trade and the agreements on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Capacity building activities of FAO, WHO and Codex were found to be continuing to make a substantial contribution internationally and to individual countries both in protecting their own citizens and in benefiting from an increasingly globalized market in food.

In order to maintain the strong support from all Member Nations and stakeholders, the Commission at its 25th (Extraordinary) Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Geneva, 13-15 February 2003) agreed that in their response to the Evaluation, the Commission and its parent Organizations should work towards:

- greater efficiency and effectiveness in the development of Codex standards, whilst maintaining transparency and inclusiveness and procedural consistency in the process of their development;
- increased participation of developing Member Nations and Member Nations in economic transition in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission throughout the standards development process;
- greater usefulness of Codex standards to Member Nations in terms of relevance to their needs and timeliness;
- strengthening of the scientific base for risk analysis, including food safety risk assessment to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in providing expert scientific advice to the Commission and Member Nations and to improve risk communication; and
- more effective capacity building for the development of national food control systems.

**2011** The 34th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission is attended by 625 delegates from 145 Member countries and 1 Member Organization, and 34 international governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Updated on: 05-03-2013