IBFAN Report

Agenda items on Infant and Young Child Nutrition

35th CODEX Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses

Bad Soden am Taunus, Germany

November 4 to 8, 2013
Introduction
The Codex Alimentarius Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses met in Bad Soden, Germany from November 4 to 8, 2013 with a number of agenda items dealing with food products for older infants and young children:

- Processed cereal based foods for underweight infants and young children.
- The review of the standard for follow-up formula,
- Revision of the list of food additives.

The IBFAN Codex Working Group was supported by a team of nutrition and breastfeeding experts:
- IACFO: Patti Rundall
- IBFAN: Elisabeth Sterken and Rufaro Madzima
- ENCA: Helen Crawley
- ILCA: Maryse Arendt

Summary
IBFAN’s aim for Codex participation is to ensure that standards and guidelines set for complementary food products and milks for infants and young children are in compliance with the International Code and WHA resolutions; that compositional criteria meet as best as possible good nutritional and safety standards; that labeling of these products provides full information to use these products safely as possible and that any claims made on labels about these products do not undermine breastfeeding and the use of nutritious family foods for the complementary feeding phase.

Although the meeting is a Member State UN body, Codex is very important to the foods and baby food industries and associations, primarily food products industries and associations (BINGOs) and as independent public interest representatives we experience a strong bias in their associations (BINGOs) and as independent public health workers.

Hence the meeting is heavily attended and in compliance with the International Code and WHA resolutions.

During the opening, the chair stated that it was forbidden to record the procedures because of Germany’s privacy laws. Patti Rundall (IACFO) challenged this saying that the meeting was a UN meeting of enormous importance in terms of trade and public health and that none of the delegates spoke personally. The lack of a proper record proved to be critical in the report writing stage when New Zealand claimed not to recall WHO saying that a standard for Follow-on milks was not necessary.

The 35th CCNFSDU was attended by 264 delegates on national delegations and international NGOs and were from 67 member countries. There were:

- 42 industry representatives on national delegations
- 72 industry representatives as international organizations (BINGOs)
- Approximately 43% of total delegates were from food products industries and associations, primarily the food additives, food fortification and baby food industries.
- 7 delegates represented independent public interest as International NGOs.

The IBFAN Codex Working Group is grateful for the funding provided by NORAD to enable this important work.

IBFAN Briefing and Outcomes
IBFAN held a lunch time briefing session for the delegates in order to highlight nutritional, safety, labeling and marketing requirements to safeguard breastfeeding and family foods for IYC feeding. We produced power point presentations on the 3 agenda items. Our briefing was attended by 28 delegates from UN agencies, FAO, international organizations, Hellen Keller, ESPHGAN paediatricians and government delegations from the US, India, Australia, Brazil, South Africa, Italy, Zimbabwe, Swaziland, China and the African Union (representing 54 African member states) and companies such as Nestle (as ISDI) and Danone.

The briefing once more gave us an opportunity to discuss issues in depth and also to challenge industry regarding their marketing of products and their push for a separate standard for formulas for older babies (so called “Growing Up Milks”) When asked Nestle said they might consider reducing the sugar content in these products if there was a standard for these products.

Is Part B necessary?
IBFAN is concerned about the creation of the Part B and considers it to be unnecessary and risky. The term “underweight” is undefined and as such opens the door for misleading promotion that in this case will target the very poorest. Codex should be working to ensure that ALL complementary foods are as safe as possible and nutritionally adequate and marketed in accordance with the requirements of the International Code and WHA resolutions.

We proposed that the current existing Codex Standard for Processed Cereal-based Foods for IYC is opened to include and harmonize all processed complementary foods for IYC.

1. A part B is not necessary. Creating a separate category for those “at risk of becoming underweight” is not necessary and unclear. Would this cover all normal children – in which case their nutrition is a matter of food access - those clinically undernourished should be under the supervision of health workers.

2. The Standard for Processed Cereal-based Foods for IYC can easily accommodate any modifications that are needed to address the 4 areas of concern – cereal content, energy density and sugar and protein content.

Marketing risks
The labelling and marketing of processed cereal foods is routinely inappropriate and in violation of the recommendations of the World Health Assembly. For example:
Agenda Item 6

Review of the Codex Standard for Follow-Up Formula (CODEX STAN 156-1987)

Is FUF necessary?
1. IBFAN considers follow-up formula to be unnecessary.
2. IBFAN supports the WHO Statement on follow-up formula. Information concerning the use and marketing of follow-up formula “that these products fall under the scope of the International Code” and that the products are superior to local home prepared family foods.

Marketing risks
1. IBFAN notes that the marketing of follow-up formula is misleading, undermines breastfeeding and promotes artificial feeding, putting infant and young child health at risk.
2. These products may be marketed often at a lower cost than routine formulas, they risk being fed at too early an age, compromising exclusive and sustained breastfeeding.
3. If marketed to the age of 36 months, they risk being bottle fed for this duration, seriously damaging oral development and contributing to other negative health impacts.

IBFAN’s Proposed Amendments to the Standard for Infant Formula
1. IBFAN is of the opinion that a separate standard is not necessary. Since fortified milk products are not necessary it is our opinion that the Standard for Infant Formula is sufficient to take care of any artificial-milks that may be required for non-breastfed children from 6-12 months and if products are needed for older children the standard could be renamed as Standard for Formulas for Infants and Young Children.
2. Bringing all such products under one standard would ensure that the safeguards related to marketing and safety are extended to all products and reduces the risk of legitimising unnecessary and possibly harmful products.

Outcomes
WHO objected to proceeding with the standard for under-five children, noting that the term undernutrition is not defined and that the presence of these special products on the market could risk increased overweight and obesity.

The Delegate of India clarified that the standard was intended for healthy children not for ill children (an idea put forward by the baby food industry - ISDF).

Indeed our brief meeting India expressed concern about the way the marketing of processed foods undermined the consumption of family foods. Our team reminded the meeting that the problem arose because India’s call for higher minimum cereal content was not taken up at previous Committee meetings. As we well noted the lack of necessity for these products and that the requirements for increased energy, cereals and decreased sugar content could be addressed in the existing standard. We stressed that labeling and marketing was critically important, especially if terms as “underweight” are used. Such terms could mislead parents, suggesting that the products are superior to local home prepared family foods.

The final Committee decision was to have an e-WG to clarify the scope in line with WHO guidance documents. It was also agreed that if the e-WG failed to establish the scope, the Committee at its next session would recommend the discontinuation of work.

IBFAN’s Proposed Amendments to improve the Standard for Cereal-Based Foods
1. Cereal Content – at least 50% of the final mixture on a dry weight basis.
2. Energy density – a range to include the higher values and thus allow increased energy, cereals and decreased sugar content was not taken up at previous Committee meetings. As we well noted the lack of necessity for these products and that the requirements for increased energy, cereals and decreased sugar content could be addressed in the existing standard. We stressed that labeling and marketing was critically important, especially if terms as “underweight” are used. Such terms could mislead parents, suggesting that the products are superior to local home prepared family foods.

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Outcomes
New Zealand, a major exporter of formulas, was once more volunteering and then designated by the CCNFSU Chair, without objections from the Committee, to chair the e-WG on the revision of the FUF standard. With the help of the Committee Chair, New Zealand managed to ensure that the focus of the next phase of work remained only on age range and compositional requirements rather than on the need or suitability for the products, and how they are marketed and labelled.

At the prompting of Australia, WHO was given the opportunity to explain how and why WHO had developed its 2013 document: Information concerning the use and marketing of follow-up formula, the CCNFSU report on the meeting states:

“The Representative of WHO informed the Committee that in principle WHO considers that there is no need of a Codex Standard for products which are not necessary in general. The Representative emphasised that even if the composition would be modified based on a thorough scientific review of the nutritional needs of older infants and young children, and thereby ensure better quality of the product, this would not validate its necessity. The Representative however noted that as the products were currently on the market, regulation of its composition and marketing was needed” (IBFAN emphasis).

The majority of the African delegations (South Africa, Tunisia, Tanzania, Togo, Swaziland, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Uganda, Africa), African Union supported WHO’s position that there is no need for a separate standard and that the infant formula standard could easily accommodate the requirements for older infants who need replacement feeds. They expressed strong concerns about the impact of marketing of these products on breastfeeding rates in their countries. Speaking on behalf of the African Union, (representing 54 African national governments) the representative explained that new standards are costly and add difficulty and complications for public health and the barring of trade. Latin American Countries were much less clear – with several choosing the 3rd of 5 weak options put forward by New Zealand. Brazil stated that Growing Up Milks are not necessary and that marketing must be controlled, Chile, Costa Rica and Colombia went for Option 3 which opens the door for a separate standard. Mexico was less problematic than in previous years reflecting that this year only one industry representative was on its delegation. The Philippines, Thailand, Russia and several others, supported having a separate standard.

The IBFAN team made strong comments reminding the meeting that the problem was made worse by the Follow-on Formula standard being adopted in 1987. We stressed the critical importance of these products being covered by the International Code and Resolutions and that a separate standard would legitimize products that were not only unnecessary but potentially harmful.

The EU highlighted the new EFSA report on so called “Toddler milks” but failed to mention that they were not considered necessary. However the EU did insist that the e WG should consider the nutritional needs of children. 107. Some delegations and one Observer emphasized the need for scientific rationale which is critical in underpinning standards and therefore recommended that an electronic working group should continue to collect data which would enable CCNFSU to make an informed decision.

The producer/exporting countries – New Zealand, Canada, Australia, Germany and the EU – manipulated the debate so that the new Terms of Reference for the eWG would effectively delay a decision on marketing and the possibility of opening up the Infant Formula standard, giving yet more time for the market to grow.

Once again the powerful comments made by African countries who will no doubt be the recipients of these products was overlooked. Asian countries will be heavily affected by these products.
Agenda Item 7
Proposed Draft Revision of the List of Food Additives

Are the food additives necessary?
1. IBFAN notes that many food additives used are for cosmetic purposes in order to give the artificial milk products the appearance and consistency of milk. Hence this imposes known and unknown risks for newborn infants, older infants and young children who are fed these milks.
2. IBFAN agrees with a number of countries that thickeners such as Guaran Gum, Xanthan Gum and Gum Arabic are not necessary and should be deleted from the list. Additionally IBFAN agrees that mono and di glycerides should be removed from the list.

Are the food additives safe?
IBFAN wishes to note and concurs with the JECFA principle:
"Baby foods should be prepared without food additives whenever possible. Where the use of food additives becomes necessary in baby foods, great caution should be exercised regarding both the choice of additive and its level of use." (Annex 3 of TRS488).

IBFAN comment on the proposed draft revision
That the JECFA principles of 1971 be reinforced and fully implemented when adopting the standards for baby foods: “Baby foods should be prepared without food additives whenever possible. Where the use of a food additive becomes necessary in baby foods, great caution should be exercised regarding both choice of additives and its level of use.” (Annex 3 of TRS 488). We strongly urge the committee to apply it.

Outcomes
Several of our team noted the JECFA principles and ethical concerns related to the use and testing of food additives for infants and young children. As well IBFAN questioned the “technical” need for additives in the TOR for the electronic working group to be headed by Switzerland:
1. The use of additives in food for infants and young children should satisfy a technological need and their addition should be limited to the lowest level possible to achieve the required technological effect, in line with the principles contained in the GSFA Preamble Codex STAN 192-1995.
2. It is necessary to address in depth the comments received on the document CX/NSFDU 13/35/8 regarding the Proposed Draft Revision of the List of Food Additives in Codex STAN 72-1981.
3. It is important that the electronic working group evaluate the technical need of the food additives in foods for infants and young children (including the use of approved additives at different levels or in different products). This evaluation should take into account additives that have been authorize for use by competent authorities; the process by which JECFA evaluates additives in these products and technical information from industry and other relevant stakeholders.
4. Following this evaluation, the electronic working group will provide recommendations for the Committee on the actions and next steps and a revised list.

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Additional information: Agenda item 2, Matters from WHO and FAO

- The Research on the promotion of local foods for young children in Cambodia and Malawi has positive intermediate results and goes on.
- Essential nutrition actions: improving maternal, newborn, infant and young child health and nutrition, updated publication of June 2013 (http://www.who.int/nutrition/publications/infantfeeding/essential_nutrition_actions/en/index.html)

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Acronyms

BINGOs: Business Interest Non-Governmental Organizations
CCNFSDU: Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses
ENCA: European Network of Childbirth Association
e-WG: electronic Working group
FAO: Food and Agricultural Organization
IACFO: International Association of Consumer Food Organizations
IBFAN: International Baby Food Action Network
ILCA: International Lactation Consultants Association
JECFA: Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
UN: United Nations
WHAM: World Health Assembly
WHO: World Health Organization

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