

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization

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Dear Codex Contact Points,

Greetings from the Codex Secretariat. Firstly, I hope that you and your families are all safe and well in the current unprecedented situation in which we find ourselves. I imagine many of you are now working under a range of lockdown circumstances and for all of us the priority is the health and wellbeing of our families and colleagues.

While we have been providing updates on the Codex webpage on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the Codex work schedule, I wanted to reach out to you directly to provide an overview of the current situation and efforts underway to manage the future work. Of course, we are living in a time of immense uncertainty in terms of the evolution of the pandemic, the containment options for COVID-19 and its economic impact. In this situation, I believe that it is important to be open and transparent and remain in contact with our Members as much as possible. I have been having weekly discussions with the Chairperson and vice-Chairpersons of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, have convened two informal discussions with the Members of the Executive Committee and have had a meeting with the Chairpersons and host secretariats of the active general subject and commodity committees. We are also in contact with the Regional Coordinators and through them with Members of the Coordinating Committees. We have had virtual meetings with three of the regions to date; the other three are in the planning stages. I hope some of you have had the possibility to join those meetings.

With lots of changes forthcoming, I would also like to organize a webinar and discussion with all of you and we are planning this for June when we have more information about the Commission and the meetings scheduled for the second half of this year. But in the meantime, I am writing to you to give you an overview of the situation as it stands today.

I would like to begin with the subsidiary bodies meetings that had been scheduled for the first half of 2020.

52nd Session of the Codex Committee on Food Additives.

- CCFA52 was initially postponed from March to June 2021 and I can confirm that it will not take place in 2020. CCFA52 is now scheduled to meet on 8 – 12 March 2021. The Chairperson and the Codex Secretariat are in the process of following up with all the electronic working group (EWG) chairpersons to determine how best to continue work in the interim.

32nd Session of the Codex Committee on General Principles

- CCGP32 was cancelled and is being rescheduled for the first quarter of 2021. The work of the EWG on Committees Working by Correspondence will continue and the EWG welcomes new members as it continues its work. A message has been sent out by New Zealand, who is chairing this EWG,

inviting new Members to join and I strongly encourage you to contribute to this work that is more relevant than ever to Codex.

52nd Session of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues

- CCPR52 was initially postponed from March to later in 2020 and we have just confirmed with the host country the cancellation of this meeting in 2020. CCPR52 is scheduled to meet again on 12-17 April 2021. The Codex Secretariat is working with the CCPR Chairperson, the Chairperson of the EWG on priorities and the JMPR Secretariat to facilitate the continuation of the scientific advice on priorities.

14th Session of the Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food

- CCCF14 was cancelled for 2020 and has now been scheduled to take place on 2-6 May 2021. Efforts are ongoing to continue to work virtually with the EWGs in order to advance before the session convenes in 2021. Comments which were received by 30 April 2020 are now being shared with the Chairpersons/co-chairpersons of EWGs to revise the documents and continue the discussions in the relevant EWGs where needed.

25th Session of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection Systems.

- CCFICS25 was cancelled for 2020 and is in the process of being rescheduled for 22-26 March 2021 to ensure that it can meet before the CAC session in 2021. Work will continue in the EWGs with discussions based on comments received to date.

41st Session of the Codex Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling

- CCMAS41 was cancelled for 2020 and has been rescheduled for 17 – 21 May 2021. Work will continue in the EWGs with discussions based on comments received to date.

25th Session of the Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods

- CCRVDF25 was cancelled for 2020 and has been rescheduled for 25-29 January 2021. Work will continue in the EWGs with discussions based on comments received to date.

We are making every effort to ensure that the webpages of each of these committees are updated regularly to communicate how the work will continue over the coming months. It is also important to review the [Circular Letters webpage](#) where the latest deadlines to the Circular Letters are indicated.

CCEXEC79 and CAC43

I am sure many of you are wondering what is happening with CCEXEC79 and CAC43. You will have noted that no invitation has been issued for CAC43 and although we cannot publish any official notification yet, I can assure you that there will be no physical session of the Commission in July 2020.

The process of both planning and cancelling a high-level meeting like the Codex Alimentarius Commission is complex. Therefore, I would like to provide you with an overview of what has happened to date and what we might expect in the coming weeks.

The Chairperson of the Commission has written to FAO where the CCEXEC79 and CAC43 were scheduled to take place in June/July 2020, to propose that a physical session of CAC43 not take place and the CCEXEC79 be convened as a virtual meeting. This request is now under active consideration and we are awaiting final confirmation and further procedural guidance from the parent organizations.

We expect we will be able to progress with a virtual session of the CCEXEC, although with a reduced agenda focussing primarily on the Critical Review role of CCEXEC. The Codex Alimentarius

Commission is not the only Commission for which FAO is responsible, and in the current situation, the organization is trying to develop a somewhat uniform approach for all commissions. We hope therefore that we will be able to convene the Membership of the CAC in some way that would allow us to progress on key issues such as adoption of standards by the Membership at step 5 and final adoption, approval of new work, and discontinuation, revocation and amendments of standards and confirmation of regional coordinators. The mechanism is still to be defined and could include a combination of virtual opening and closing sessions separated by an online commenting period with standards progressing on a no-objection basis. I can assure you that whatever mechanism is proposed will be presented to the Membership for their agreement before moving forward and our core values of inclusiveness, collaboration, consensus-building and transparency will be central to whatever steps are taken to progress our mandate.

In light of the current uncertainties, the Codex Secretariat is in close communication with the host country secretariats for each of the committees that are scheduled to meet in the second half of this year (CCSCH, CCFL, CCFH, CCNFSU and TFAMR). While it is almost certain that some, if not all of these, will not meet physically this year, I hope to be able to provide more definitive information in June.

However, as it becomes impossible for more and more physical meetings to take place, we must start to think how we will address this as we simply cannot reschedule every meeting before the CAC meets in 2021. While uncertainty remains with the global situation, we also recognize that the burden for the Members to participate in many physical meetings when the world is also facing a recession would be impossible. Therefore, we must also look to new ways of working.

This week we successfully completed CCLAC 21 through virtual means. While I understand that we cannot simply replace all our physical meetings with virtual ones, we do have to start considering how we can use the available virtual tools to progress more of our work online so that when we do meet it is for critical issues. I also understand that our procedures were not developed for the situation we find ourselves in today, but this is also an opportunity to develop new and innovative ways of working.

The Codex web site has been an important means of communication in the current period. To assist with navigation we have prepared a [thematic page on COVID-19 and Codex](#) which brings together relevant information from Codex, FAO and WHO on managing food safety during the current pandemic as well as the latest updates regarding the Codex work programme.

I hope that out of these uncertain times we can develop even more efficient and inclusive ways of working to strengthen the functioning of Codex for the good of all. I welcome your input and support to make that happen

I will be in touch with a further update in June and in the meantime hope you and your families stay safe and well.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Heilandt
Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme