



# Should animals be pumped with growth drugs – just to increase global trade?

Codex Alimentarius Commission  
21-25 November 2022 Rome, Italy

While the rest of the world is, at last, waking up to the climate emergency and [COP27](#) draws to a close, the [WHO/FAO Codex Commission \(CAC45\)](#) started its meeting today, and will tackle matters that also have an important impact on human health and the environment, but it does its work largely away from the public gaze. (1)

The [aim of Codex since its foundation](#) in the early 60s has been to protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. However, by green-lighting the global trade of countless ultra-processed products, Codex has sadly, and perhaps inadvertently, done the reverse. The agri-food industry has used Codex to undermine bio-diverse, traditional food cultures and in many countries the deforestation, mono-cropping, land-grabbing and risky technologies that have followed have had a devastating impact on human and planetary health. The latest analysis shows that UPF consumption is a significant cause of premature death in Brazil.

IBFAN, along with partner NGOs ENCA, World Public Health Nutrition and ILCA, is attending Codex this week, as it has done since 1995 when [the World Trade Organisation recognised Codex standards](#) as the reference point for dispute settlement mechanism. We will remind governments of their duty to protect the most vulnerable members of society and ensure the [strongest possible standards for products for babies and children](#).

On Tuesday, Codex will resume another tortured and unresolved discussion – this time on [Zilpaterol hydrochloride](#), the steroid-like veterinary drug made by Merck that promotes growth in cattle, pigs, and poultry. One distasteful part of the corporate-driven food system. Zilpaterol is currently banned in the UK, EU, Russia and China and these countries oppose the adoption of a Codex standard to set Maximum Residue Level (MRLs) for it. Australia, the USA and other powerful exporting countries are keen to establish a Codex standard, some perhaps for safety reasons, others will know that having a Codex standard without strict marketing controls will turbo charge its global use and misuse.

The use of growth-enhancing drugs purely for commercial reasons touches on complex cross-cutting

issues that involve health, veterinary medicine, ecology, food systems and the political control of resources. Will resistant bacteria and resistance genes emerge and spread from food animals to humans through the food chain? Could such use increase the risk of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) – now recognised to be one of the greatest global threats to public health:

*„Already, AMR is estimated to lead to 5 million deaths every year<sup>1</sup> and will claim 50 million lives in the coming decades. If “COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated fundamental weaknesses in pandemic preparedness and response at both national and global levels [...] These same weaknesses are also true of the global response to AMR”, declared the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Gebreyesus, in early 2022. In fact, the risks entailed in AMR make the COVID-19 pandemic a rather amenable crisis in comparison..” (2)*

## Urgent reform of Codex needed

Eventually Codex must move to a [One Health](#) approach (as WHO and others are attempting to do) and address veterinary and environmental concerns as well as public health. But in the meantime, it must adopt effective Conflict of Interest and transparency safeguards. This is essential to safeguard its decision-making process and ensure that it is based on relevant, convincing and credible evidence rather than on political or commercial expedience.

Until this happens, any attempt by Codex to address the Climate emergency is likely to backfire and create endless greenwashing opportunities for the most culpable health and planet harming corporations. Codex is considering starting new work on ‘sustainability’ labelling. Will this work focus on mandatory warnings, independent monitoring and strong accountability safeguards – or will Codex put trade concerns over health and favour voluntary industry-inspired approaches?

## The UK and Zilpaterol

We are urging the UK to maintain its ban on the use of Zilpaterol. If a Codex standard is agreed, we want assurance that the hastily made UK/Australia deal will not undermine UK animal and human health safeguards. Any proposals to change should also be subject to full Parliamentary scrutiny. George Eustice, former Minister at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has publicly criticised the UK/Australia deal, saying (in some interviews) that it should be terminated if Australia insists on exporting its beef to the UK

*“One of the worst concessions highlighted by Mr Eustice was giving Australia or New Zealand full access to the UK market to sell beef and sheep, while Australia still bans the import of British beef. The former minister also took aim at the Defra Minister at the time Liz Truss for rushing through the deal. ... As a result the civil servants at the Department for International Trade (DIT) allowed Australian negotiators to “shape the terms” of the agreement to get completion for the G7 meeting.” (3)*

## Why IBFAN attends Codex

In addition to advocating policy coherence with World Health Assembly recommendations IBFAN has regularly exposed the corporate (and exporting country) dominance of Codex meetings. In the 2019 Codex Nutrition CCNFSDU meeting 44% (164) of the 370 delegates represented the food and related industries, who funding dinners, receptions and meetings, with 67 sitting government delegations. Perhaps partly as a result of this exposure and our work on the standards (4) there are fewer industry people on some government delegations and the standards on foods for infants and young children adopted after 1995, all refer in some way to the [International Code, or the Global Strategy and the subsequent WHA Resolutions on infant and young child feeding](#). However, as the Multi-Stakeholder Partnership ideology continues, the Food and Agriculture Organisation's partnership with the baby food company Danone and Croplife is an added challenge, as are the misleading names of Observers who represent industry.

The [Guidelines on Ready to Use Therapeutic Foods](#) (RUTF) were adopted today with only small changes, and debate continues about the levels of aflatoxins permitted in baby foods, including for food aid.

## Notes:

- 1 Russ K, Baker P, Byrd M, et al. [What you don't know about the Codex can hurt you: how trade policy trumps global health governance in infant and young child nutrition](#). International Journal of Health Policy and Management 2021; 10(12): 983-97.  
Baker et al. *Globalization and Health* (2021) 17:58. [Advocacy at Work During the Codex Committee on Food Labelling Meeting](#)
2. [Untangling Antimicrobial Resistance \(AMR\) Report 2022](#). World Health Organization (2022). [WHO Director-General's Remarks at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting side event on antimicrobial resistance](#). WHO, 23 June 2022, WHO's Roundtable [ONE HEALTH](#) meeting in Croatia 11/11/2022
- 3: [The Scottish Farmer George Eustice brands Australia free trade deal a 'failure' in brutal swipe at Liz Truss](#)  
Jon Craig @joncraig 14 November 2022; <https://news.sky.com/story/george-eustice-brands-australia-free-trade-deal-a-failure-in-brutal-swipe-at-liz-truss-12747723>. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics63627801>

4: [Codex Code of Ethics for International Trade](#) continues to require Member States to “...make sure that the international code of marketing of breast milk substitutes and relevant resolutions of the World Health Assembly (WHA) setting forth principles for the protection and promotion of breastfeeding be observed.” These citations are critically important, and all the standards must refer to these texts in a meaningful way to offset the harm caused by global trade.

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**International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)** was founded in 1979 and is a global network of more than 148 public interest groups in over 108 countries. Members include health worker, parent, consumer and development organisations. Social justice, human rights and environmental protection underscore all our work. IBFAN members help governments bring in legislation to support and protect families and health workers. Our work on breastfeeding and young child feeding is just one element in the global action to ensure an environment in which children can survive and reach the highest attainable standard of health. IBFAN does not seek or accept financial or other supports from manufacturers or distributors (or their trusts or foundations) of infant and young child feeding and related products. IBFAN is also cautious



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