

National priority areas for Codex participation

I. Introduction

The ***National priority areas for Codex participation*** is a strategic document that provides detailed information of North Macedonia's policy objectives and priorities in the work of Codex. It unites the dual mandate of the Codex Alimentarius: protecting consumer health and ensuring fair practices in the food trade through the development of international, science-based standards.

The document has been developed by the Food and Veterinary Agency (FVA) as a central authority competent for food safety and a Codex Contact point for Republic of North Macedonia, through a collaborative process including all the institutions involved in the food safety system in the country.

This document will be supported by a simple work plan that includes activities and milestones that permit tracking of progress toward accomplishment of the priorities.

II. Legal basis and background

Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC), was established in 1963 by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) with a mandate to protect consumer health and ensure fair trade practices through the development of international food standards that are based on science.

The Codex Alimentarius, or "Food Code," is a collection of voluntary standards, guidelines and codes of practice adopted by the CAC, which convenes annually to review the work of its many specialized committees. The standards established by Codex range from maximum limits for residues of pesticides and veterinary drugs in food to principles, guidelines and codes of practice covering such areas as food hygiene, contaminants, food labelling, inspection and certification and methods of analysis.

As a member of CAC since 1994, North Macedonia, should strengthen its capacity and build more effective engagement in Codex activities. Codex Trust Fund-2, a FAO / WHO initiative for the period 2016-2027, aims to assist developing and transition countries, as in the case of North Macedonia in building strong, solid and sustainable national capacity and structure, with an ultimate goal - Strengthened structure and capacity for active participation in the work of Codex Alimentarius.

The document has been prepared in accordance with the Project document titled Codex Trust Fund 2A – Republic of North Macedonia (GCR/GLO/893/MUL) and in accordance with Article 120 of the Food Safety Law.

III. Vision and mission

Vision

Food safety system that provides protection of consumers interests through adoption of international food standards and promoting fair practices in the food trade.

Mission

The National Codex structure of North Macedonia is recognized as an active member in the work of Codex

IV. Objective

A clear vision/statement of national policy objectives and priorities in Codex is a must in order to:

- Secure high level hierarchy commitment and budget for future Codex related activities;
- Make the best use of limited national resources and focus on priority issues and programmes;
- Facilitate a common understanding and common approach;
- Promote transparency and stakeholder support;
- Secure resources for Codex-related programmes and activities.

V. Priorities

The identified priorities aim to ensure the improvement of the food safety system and to protect the health of consumers.

Priority 1: Increase the effective participation of North Macedonia in Codex

The Procedural Manual of the Codex Alimentarius Commission describes the legal foundations and practical functioning of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. Knowledge of the contents of this Manual is essential for Codex members and observers to participate effectively in the work of the Commission. The committee that has the general responsibility for maintaining the Codex Procedural Manual, including recommending amendments for adoption by the Commission is the Codex Committee on General principles (CCGP).

CCGP is one of the general (horizontal) subject Codex committees, with a mandate to deal with such procedural and general matters as referred to it by the Codex Alimentarius Commission. It is also responsible for developing guidelines for Codex committees, developing a mechanism for examining any economic impact statements and for establishing a code of ethics for international trade in food.

Taking active participation in the work done by this committee is essential for North Macedonia if we consider the fact that there is still limited knowledge.

Activities:

- Hold regular meetings with all the institutions involved in the food safety system in the country in order to exchange opinions;
- Consult all interested parties on Codex matters;
- Improve knowledge and understanding of Codex, both within FVA and outside through targeted training and information workshops;
- Develop network of experts;
- Take active participation at CCGP meetings.

Priority 2: Contribution to the work done by CCEURO

For a small country economy and a country that is still in the process of developing its national Codex structure, such as North Macedonia, it is strongly recommended that the regional coordinating committee CCEURO is a committee to which part of the resources are directed. It is in this committee that issues of most significance to the country are discussed and the needs of the region regarding food standards are identified.

The scope of activities addressed by CCEURO is much broader than that of other Codex committees. The committee is responsible for defining the problems and needs of the region concerning food standards and food control. By working collectively at the regional level countries are able to highlight regulatory issues and problems arising from food control in order to strengthen food control infrastructures. Besides being able to influence strategic priorities, the committee affords the opportunity to network and develop working relationships with other professionals in the member countries of the region. This facilitates the exchange of information and the promotion of a country's position on key issues.

The regions can recommend to the Commission the development of global standards for products of interest to the region, including products considered by the Committee to have an international market potential in the future. Regions can also develop regional standards for food products moving exclusively or almost exclusively within a particular region.

These committees play a general coordinating role for the region and respond to requests by the Commission. They also work to promote the acceptance of Codex standards and maximum limits for residues by member countries.

Activities:

- Work closely with partners from the CCEURO region and pursue common strategies through teleconferences and pre-session meetings;
- Identify areas of the CCEURO strategic plan where North Macedonia can make a contribution and explore mechanisms for this contribution;
- Partner with trading partners to support the development of standards that are of mutual interest;
- Submit ideas and proposals of interest to North Macedonia;
- Take active participation at CCEURO meetings.

Priority 3: Improve the food safety system through adoption and use of new standards, guidelines or related texts for foods for special dietary uses

Since the area of food for particular nutritional purposes is not completely regulated in the current national legislation, one of the main priorities of the Food and Veterinary Agency in the forthcoming period is strengthening and improving of the national legislation through adoption and use of Codex standards, guidelines or related texts for foods for special dietary uses.

The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary uses (CCNFSDU) develops texts intended to ensure the quality and safety of foods for special dietary uses, in particular foods for infants and children.

Activities:

- Review existing legislation on Foods for Special Dietary uses;
- Adopt new standards in areas that are not covered with current legislation;
- Take active participation in EWG's in the development of draft standards that are important to North Macedonia;
- Active participation at CCNFSDU meetings.

Priority 4: Increased skills and knowledge on using Codex texts that might need to be taken in the National legislation regarding obligation raised by international organizations related to trade issues (WTO, CEFTA etc).

As a candidate country for EU accession, Republic of North Macedonia has an obligation to transpose EU legislation into its national legislation.

On the other hand, North Macedonia is a member of WTO and Codex standards are explicitly referenced in the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) as the international benchmark for food safety.

The Agreement provides member countries that adopt Codex standards as their national standards with a defence in situations where they are challenged by trading partners. National measures based on Codex standards are deemed necessary and thus in compliance with the SPS Agreement.

As a member of WTO and a major food importer, Republic of North Macedonia would benefit from implementation of harmonized standards. Food fraud is also issue, which needs to be tackled. It is a global trans-national problem that impacts on the local agri-food economy, consumer health and consumer trust.

Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS) has a mandate to develop principles and guidelines for food import and export inspection and certification systems with a view to harmonising methods and procedures which protect the health of consumers, ensure fair trading practices and facilitate international trade in foodstuffs.

Activities:

- Active participation in EWG's;
- Active participation at CCFICS meetings.

Priority 5: Contribution to the work done by Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods and Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues

The Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR) is mandated to establish maximum limits for pesticide residues in specific food items or in groups of food; to establish maximum limits for pesticide residues in certain animal feeding stuffs moving in international trade where this is justified for reasons of protection of human health; to consider methods of sampling and analysis for the determination of pesticide residues in food and feed etc.

Codex Committee on Contaminants in Foods (CCCF) has a mandate to establish or endorse permitted maximum levels or guidelines levels for contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed; to consider methods of analysis and sampling for the determination of contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants in food and feed; to prepare priority lists of contaminants and naturally occurring toxicants for risk assessment by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives, etc.

Activities:

- Provide North Macedonia technical expertise to international expert consultations and scientific panels;
- Provide scientific data and research information in support of international standards setting;
- Active participation in EWG's chaired by these committees;
- Active participation at CCPR and CCCF meetings.