Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) - Working Procedures

Geneva, February 2017

1. Introduction

The Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)[1] is an independent international scientific expert committee, a group of formally appointed experts convened jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO. It has been meeting since 1956, initially to evaluate the safety of food additives. Its work now also includes the evaluation of contaminants, naturally occurring toxicants and residues of veterinary drugs in food.

This document briefly describes the procedures applied to JECFA in accordance with the WHO Regulations for Expert Advisory Panels and Committees[2]. For more details please refer to the relevant sections in the WHO Basic Documents.

JECFA evaluates substances in response to requests by FAO and WHO Member States, by FAO and WHO Programmes, and by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

The WHO and FAO Joint Secretaries have overall responsibility for organizing JECFA meetings, inviting participants, ensuring that the appropriate documentation is prepared in advance of the meetings, providing secretariat support during the meetings, and editing and publishing the report and monographs in a manner that faithfully reflects the conclusions of JECFA.

FAO and WHO have complementary roles in this programme according to their mandates. The WHO JECFA Secretariat invites experts with expertise in toxicology, epidemiology and related fields, the FAO JECFA Secretariat invites experts with expertise in chemistry, food technology, analytical methods and related technical areas.

2. Structure of JECFA

WHO has expert advisory panels consisting of experts formally appointed by the Director-General of WHO, from whom the Organization may obtain technical guidance and support. For each JECFA meeting, the WHO selects members from the WHO expert advisory panel on Food Safety according to the expertise needed in relation to the agenda of the meeting.

1 http://www.who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/chemical-risks/jecfa/en/
2 WHO Basic Documents http://apps.who.int/gb/bd/

The scientific expertise of the JECFA members may include toxicology, pharmacology, metabolism, microbiology, pathology, epidemiology, molecular biology, veterinary medicine, biostatistics, exposure assessment. A balance between academic and regulatory experience and geographical distribution are important. Members are invited by the Secretariat as independent scientific experts, and they do not represent their employers, governments, or other institutions. Their travel expenses are paid by WHO under WHO's applicable policies and within WHO's limits; honoraria are not provided.

The Secretariat also invites temporary advisers to assist the expert committee in drafting working papers in advance of the meeting. These temporary advisers are selected from a roster of experts. A public call for expression of interest to be placed on the roster is published and applications are reviewed by the Secretariat and by an independent external reviewer, against the published criteria. All qualified experts are then part of the roster which is published on the JECFA website. Appointment to the roster is for a period of 5 years, with the possibility for renewal through the above described application process.

3. Working procedures

Call for data and preparation of meetings

The Joint Secretaries publish a call for data for the compounds on the agenda 10-12 months in advance of the meeting on the internet. The compounds are selected on the basis of priority lists established by the respective Codex Committees, requests by FAO and WHO and their Member States, and recommendations of earlier meetings of JECFA (see Annexes 1 and 2). The deadline for submission of data is usually 6-7 months before the meeting.

Based on submitted data (by manufactures and by Government authorities or other interested parties) and on publicly available information, the temporary advisers summarize the available toxicological, epidemiological and intake data and provide comments on their relevance and significance when preparing working papers for the meeting. Details on the preparation of working papers are published in specific guidance documents available on the JECFA website[3]. The working papers are distributed to all members in advance of the meeting and form the basis of discussion at the meeting.

The Secretariat organizes virtual meetings with all experts during the preparatory phase of the working papers to ensure efficient preparation and detailed discussions and interactions between experts. Closed virtual workspaces are also provided to enable efficient interaction in a confidential manner.

Discussions at the meeting are held in an open and transparent manner and in complete confidentiality. The final report of the meeting is adopted by the Members before closing the meeting.

Declarations of Interests

Before invitations can be issued and tasks assigned, members and temporary advisers have to declare any interests through the WHO Declaration of Interest form according to WHO rules

3 http://www.who.int/foodsafety/chem/jecfa/guidelines/en/

and procedures. The JECFA Secretariat evaluates these declarations and requests advice from the WHO office of Compliance, Risk Management and Ethics, as needed. Usually all Expert Meetings are private in nature and by invitation only. Experts are also required to sign a confidentiality undertaking, to assure that discussions can be held freely and proprietary information is kept confidential.

Before each meeting the list of participants is published on the JECFA website with short bio sketches. Public is invited to provide comments to the JECFA Secretariat up until 2 weeks before the meeting.

FAO follows the same declarations of interests process for JECFA purposes.

Decision-making process

Decisions on interpretation of key data, on evaluations and final conclusions are made by consensus. According to WHO rules scientific questions shall not be submitted to a vote. If no consensus can be reached a minority opinion can be expressed, this will be recorded in the meeting report and the minority view published as annex, stating the reasons for the divergent opinion.

4. Publications

For each JECFA meeting a report is published in the WHO Technical Report Series. This report is written and adopted at the meeting and may not be modified without JECFA's consent.

These reports, published by the World Health Organization, contain concise toxicological evaluations and the chemical and analytical aspects of each substance reviewed by JECFA, as well as information on the dietary exposure assessment. Reports reflect the agreed view of the Committee as a whole and describe the basis for their conclusions.

In addition, a monograph is also published in the WHO Food Additives Series after each JECFA meeting. These monographs contain detailed descriptions of the full biological and toxicological data base considered in the evaluation, as well as the dietary exposure assessment, including detailed references. Specifications for the identity and purity of food additives evaluated by JECFA and residue monographs for veterinary drugs are published by FAO in the FAO JECFA Monograph series.

Annex 1. Procedures for nominating compounds for evaluation by JECFA

Requests for the evaluation of certain food additives and contaminants, or for veterinary drug residues in food, and consideration of issues of a general nature by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) may come from a number of sources:

1. Codex committees

The relevant Codex Committees (Codex Committee on Food Additives CCFA, Codex Committee on Contaminants in Food CCCF, Codex Committee on Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Food CCRVDF) refers substances to JECFA based on priorities that it establishes using criteria that it has developed that are in accord with accepted procedures of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. For details on procedures in these Committees please refer to the Codex Procedural Manual[4].

2. FAO and WHO Member States

FAO and WHO Member States may request the inclusion of a substance on the agenda of JECFA through a direct request to the FAO and WHO Secretariats. Such a request must be accompanied by a commitment to provide the necessary data 6-7 months before the meeting, and a justification for the need for (re)evaluation.

3. JECFA Secretariat

The JECFA secretariat may place a substance on the agenda for re-evaluation even though no outside request has been received, if it becomes aware of significant new data being available that may impact the previous assessment.

4. JECFA itself

The Committee sometimes establishes a temporary ADI or temporary specifications for a food additive or a veterinary drug, with a request for further data by a certain time. These food additives, which have the highest priority for evaluation, are placed on the agenda of the appropriate meeting by the Joint Secretariat. A similar situation occurs when the Committee recommends that a contaminant be evaluated at a future meeting.

4 http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/procedures-strategies/procedural-manual/en/

Annex 2. Procedures for issuing the call for data

The Joint Secretariat issues a call for data on the food additives and contaminants, or veterinary drugs, on the agenda 10-12 months before the meeting, which is posted on the FAO and WHO web sites and is sent to Codex and other contact points. The substances are selected on the basis of priority lists that are established as outlined in Annex 1. The deadline for submission of data is normally 6-7 months before the meeting. The late submission of data may result in the postponement of the evaluation to a future meeting.

Before inclusion of a substance on an agenda for the first time, the JECFA Secretariat will have received a positive indication that there will be one or more submitters of data for the evaluation, or that the data are available from other sources such as a government organization or the published literature. For substances that are being re-evaluated, for example those that have a temporary ADI, the Secretariat assumes that the sponsor of the original evaluation will be providing the necessary data unless informed otherwise.

The data call details the task for the Committee and the information requested, and specifies a deadline for submission of the data.

When prioritizing and deciding on a final list of compounds for the call for data, the Joint Secretariat takes into consideration, inter alia, the following criteria: the priorities as indicated by the relevant Codex Committee, pending requests from previous JECFA meetings, the complexity of the tasks, the amount of work estimated for each evaluation, the number of experts required, the nature of the compounds under evaluation, and the resources available.