

WORKING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE JOINT COMMITTEE  
ON FOOD ADDITIVES AND THE CODEX COMMITTEE ON  
FOOD ADDITIVES

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The Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) consists of scientists who are chosen by FAO and WHO because of their knowledge and experience in the field of food additives. They act as independent experts and their decisions are based on scientific and technical considerations regarding safety in use of food additives. The Expert Committee elaborates specifications of identity and purity for the food additives and on the basis of available biological data, if adequate, makes recommendations about the acceptable daily intake (ADI) of food additives for human

The Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) is a subsidiary body of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) which was set up following recommendations of the Eleventh Session of the FAO Conference, the Twenty Ninth Session of the WHO Executive Board and a Joint FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards held in 1962. As is known, the CAC was established to implement the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, the main purpose of which is to protect the health of consumers, ensure fair practices in the food trade and to elaborate international standards for foods that move widely in international trade. The CCFA, making use of the recommendations of JECFA, provides a practical basis for regulatory action for use of food additives in food. This function, in addition to the information on ADI (provided by JECFA) needs examination of such other problems as (i) justification for the use of food additives; (ii) permissible levels of additives in various foods; and (iii) potential daily intakes of additives and their relation to acceptable daily intakes. Thus the activities of JECFA and the CCFA complement and supplement each other.

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Prior to the setting up of the Codex Committee on Food Additives, JECFA had not established any mechanism for selection of its priorities and in its early stages of life established them on an ad hoc basis. This was not a problem during the early years of this Committee since it took a number of sessions before the major groups of food additives could be evaluated. Later setting up of JECFA priority lists have not been carried out in a systematic way, in the absence of an agreed rule. Sometimes substances have been included in the agenda for which there appeared to be little demand or for which chemical and biological information was inadequate: at other times important new additives which have been extensively studied scientifically did not appear on the agenda. This situation improved soon after the setting up of the CCFA. This Committee, which is an intergovernmental body, has direct association with government agencies in each of its member countries and through them with the chemical and food industries in these countries. The CCFA identifies, through an intergovernmental forum, the food additives that require immediate attention by JECFA and makes a request to all the governments to provide available information to JECFA. Thus the CCFA facilitates the work of JECFA.

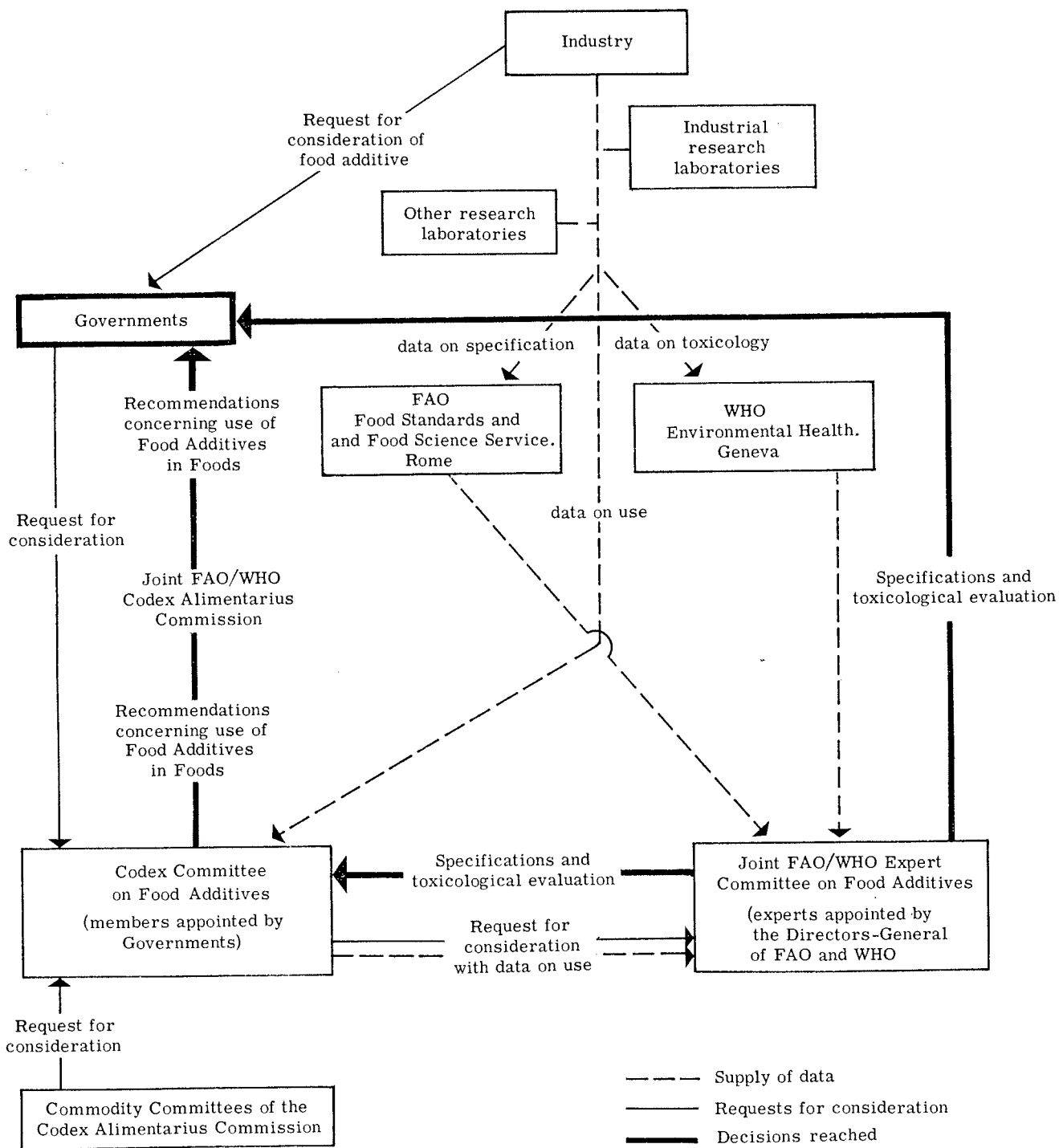
The association between JECFA and the CCFA has so far been a fruitful symbiosis. A flow diagram of the working relations between JECFA and the CCFA and their close links with governments and industry is shown at Appendix I.

On the basis of the urgent need for evaluation of food additives which are used in foods entering international trade in substantial amounts, the CCFA sets up its priorities for the work of JECFA. The Expert Committee in turn establishes as expeditiously as possible Specifications for Identity and Purity and Acceptable Daily Intakes for Additives so submitted.

During most of its 25 years of existence, JECFA has worked in close association with CCFA and has contributed significantly to the achievement of CCFA which includes among others:

1. General Principles for the use of Food Additives.
2. Approach to the regulation of flavours.
3. Approach to the regulation of processing aids.
4. Classification of food additives and appropriate class names for their label declaration.
5. Consideration of specifications for food additives.
6. Establishment of list of food additives (List A) plus their maximum levels in food and List C.
7. Consideration of the question of Food Additive Intake.
8. Endorsement of Food Additive Provisions and Limits for Contaminants in specific foods.

The CCFA is considering as a part of its future programme of work residues in food arising from (i) antibiotics used in animal husbandry and fish production; (ii) anabolic agents used in animal husbandry; (iii) migration of chemicals from packaging materials; (iv) environmental and industrial contaminants, and (v) various approaches to the regulation of food additives. As JECFA is an advisory body to the CCFA in matters relating to the safety of food additives and certain contaminants, the continued existence and role of JECFA is therefore of greater importance to the Codex Committee on Food Additives/<sup>and</sup> to the Members of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. It is to be hoped that the new International Programme on Chemical Safety will be able to make available increased resources to strengthen the activities of JECFA and CCFA.



Appendix I: A flow diagram of the working relations between JECFA and CCFA and their close links with the Governments and Industry.

In this working document, we tried to put in perspective, the achievements of YECFA during its 25 years of activities.

YECFA has reviewed both for establishment of specifications of identity and purity as well as of methods of analysis and also microbiological control and for toxicological evaluation, ideally ready to the allocation of acceptable daily intakes for men, the most important <sup>nutritional</sup> food additives used widely and in significant quantities for improving the storage, the processing, the texture and the organoleptic characteristics of foods.

At this point, it is worthwhile to put the accent particularly on the benefits for developing countries of contributing to establish positive lists of food preservatives which can help to prevent the wastage of food resources.

In addition to evaluating specific substances the Committee and two WHO Scientific groups have played an important role in outlining improved procedures both for controlling identity and purity criteria and for evaluating the results of toxicological studies in terms of the safety in use of food additives.

When its terms of reference were expanded the Joint Committee dealt with some of the most important of the food contaminants that were known to be hazardous to health, notably the heavy metals mercury, lead and cadmium. At its successive meetings, the Committee had responded

promptly and sensitively to new chemical (espe. 4-  
cally analytical) and biological (especially toxicologic  
and biochemical) discoveries that appeared to have  
a bearing on the control and safety aspects of  
food additives and contaminants, thus permitting  
adequate periodic reevaluations.

In recent years, the Committee had begun  
to examine enzyme preparations used in food  
processing and food flavourings. However, a  
large number of chemicals contained in food have  
never been studied by the Committee: some of  
these are intentional additives, the most important  
and largest group being flavouring substances,  
of which, till now, only few have been evaluated.  
Also, only few of the adventitious additives, such as  
residues of processing aids, residues of animal  
feed additives and substances migrating from  
packaging materials into food have been examined.  
Furthermore, comparatively little attention has been  
paid to the many contaminants with known or  
suspected toxicity, or to potentially toxic natural  
constituents of foods.

The problem raised by the large number  
of food additives and contaminants that have not  
yet been evaluated was recognized in the 1st report  
of JECFA and the recommendation was made  
that WHO should consider ways and means of  
expediting the FAO/WHO program on food additives  
and contaminants. Subsequently, the 1974 World  
Health Assembly adopted a resolution concerning the  
evaluation of the health effects of chemicals generally  
and requesting the Director general to undertake a  
study on the long-term strategies and possible options  
for international cooperation in this field. We shall not  
elaborate on this point and we will only remind that  
laboratory work on the toxicity of chemicals is now

In the light of what is written in the Report of the 13<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission (Rome, December 1979) and what was said at the opening of the 24<sup>th</sup> session of YECFA (Rome, 24<sup>th</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> April) by D<sup>r</sup> Z I Sabry, Director Food Policy and Nutrition D FAO, on behalf of the Directors General of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations and of the World Health Organization we understood that this wish will be satisfied

Thus, YECFA will continue its efficient and glorious activity.

R TRUHAUT  
March 1981