



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

NOTE FOR THE PRESS

WEBSITE

www.who.int

1211 GENEVA 27 SWITZERLAND - TELEPHONE: (41) 22.791.21.11 - FAX: (41) 22.791.31.11 - E-MAIL: inf@who.int

Joint Note for the media WHO/FAO/17
12 July 2005

CODEX COMMISSION ADOPTS MORE THAN 20 FOOD STANDARDS

Sets new guidelines on vitamin supplements; creates antimicrobial resistance taskforce

Rome/Geneva -- The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) adopted more than 20 new and amended food standards during its annual meeting, the food standards body announced today. Among the measures adopted were guidelines on vitamin and mineral food supplements and a code of practice to minimize and contain antimicrobial resistance.

Some 120 countries were represented at this year's Codex session, plus the European Community, a member organization. Codex is an international food standards-setting body established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It has 172 members, all of which are members of FAO or WHO or both.

Vitamin and mineral food supplements guidelines

The CAC adopted global guidelines for vitamin and mineral food supplements as one of its first decisions. The guidelines recommend labeling that contains information on maximum consumption levels of vitamin and mineral food supplements, assisting countries to increase consumer information, which will help consumers use them in a safe and effective way.

According to WHO, the guidelines ensure that consumers receive beneficial health effects from vitamins and minerals.

The guidelines say that people should be encouraged to select a balanced diet to get the sufficient amount of vitamins and minerals. Only in cases where food does not provide sufficient vitamins and minerals should supplements be used.

Antimicrobial resistance task force

Codex tentatively agreed to a task force addressing antimicrobial resistance. A formal decision is set for next year. WHO, FAO and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) have developed guidelines for the prudent use of antimicrobials in treatment of human illnesses and animal production, which the task force will carry forward to ensure food safety.

Antimicrobial resistance had been debated for several years and agreement has been difficult because it involves collaboration from different sectors: animal health and production, human health and drug manufacturing. The new task force will bring all these sectors together and develop a holistic approach to this growing problem.

Resistance to antimicrobial drugs, such as antibiotics, is an emerging public health problem caused by a number of factors, including the inappropriate use of antibiotics in humans; antibiotic treatment of illnesses in animals used for human consumption and, in some cases, to promote faster growth. The use of antimicrobials as pesticides is also a factor in antimicrobial resistance.

Resistant microorganisms developed in animals used for human consumption may be transmitted to humans mainly by contaminated food. For example, resistant strains of salmonella and other food-borne microorganisms are now frequently encountered, limiting the effective treatment of human infections, which in some cases can result in death.

In other decisions, the CAC decided to split the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants into separate committees beginning in 2007, in order to deal more effectively with each issue.

No standard planned on Parmesan cheese

On the issue of intellectual property concerns regarding the labelling and composition of Parmesan cheese, no consensus was reached and the CAC put the issue on hold allowing interested countries to continue consultations among themselves to seek a resolution of the issue. However, no date was set for the Commission to revisit this matter.

Dr Stuart Slorach, the out-going CAC Chairman, said: "This has been an extremely productive session. Even though only one year has passed since the last CAC meeting, we adopted over 20 standards which, when used appropriately, will better protect consumer health and improve their confidence in the products they consume. Moreover, we took important steps this week to involve partner organizations in the setting of these standards and to make the structure of Codex more efficient."

Elections at the 28th session of Codex resulted in the first ever CAC Chairman from an African country. Dr Claude Mosha of Tanzania was elected to the post for a term of one year and is eligible to stand for a second one-year term.

The CAC meeting ran from 4 July through 9 July

For further information, journalists can contact Gregory Hartl, Communications Adviser, WHO/SDE, Geneva. Tel: (+41 22) 791 4458; mobile: +41 79 203 6715; Email: hartlg@who.int or John Riddle, Information Officer, FAO, Tel: (+39) 06 570 53259; mobile: (+39) 348 257 2921; email: John.Riddle@fao.org

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