

Codex Attendance
06/07

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Know-how for Horticulture™

Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables attendance

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The purpose of the report is to provide readers with an account of Australia's representation at the 13th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.

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Media Summary

Codex standards are used as global benchmarks. Although Australia (and New Zealand and Chile) do not have domestically enforced quality standards, the other 39 countries around the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) table do. Many of these countries are our trading partners and others are developing countries with which Australia has social support programs through AUSAID and they base their standards for imports in part or in full on Codex. Australia thus has a vested interest in participation in the CCFFV in order to influence outcomes that best reflect the wishes of the Australian industry and government.

This project involves preparation for, and participation at, the 13th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (13CCFFV) and subsequent reporting back to industry. The CCFFV is hosted by the Mexican government and this session was held in Mexico City from 25 – 29 September 2006. The committee meets in approximately 18 month cycles with drafting, negotiation and possible face-to-face working group meetings occurring between sessions. The committee has addressed 25 product standards to date. This committee is currently addressing Codex standards for apples, table grapes, tomatoes and bitter cassava, as well as addressing the proposed layout for all future Codex fresh fruit and vegetable standards and revisions.

The major results and industry outcomes were:

- After seven years of debate on the Codex standard for table grapes, the committee agreed to forward this standard to the 30th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption.
- The proposed draft standard for bitter cassava was recommended for adoption at Step 5 in the eight step Codex process. A working group including Australia will now address outstanding issues
- The proposed draft Codex Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and vegetables have also been sent to CAC for adoption at Step 5.
- There was significant discussion on the draft Codex standard for apples, particularly on minimum requirements such as stalk attachment and water core, and the relationship between maturity and fruit size. However the committee could not reach consensus on these issues and the standard was not progressed. Australia will continue to participate in a working group for this standard.
- The committee also discussed provision for size and size tolerances in the draft Codex standard for tomatoes. Consensus was reached on a number of these provisions however no agreement was reached on specific limits and therefore this standard could not be finalised.

Technical Summary

The nature of the problem.

Codex standards are used as global benchmarks. Although Australia (and New Zealand and Chile) do not have domestically enforced quality standards, the other 39 countries around the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) table do. Many of these countries are our trading partners and others are developing countries with which Australia has social support programs through AUSAID and they base their standards for imports in part or in full on Codex. Australia thus has a vested interest in participation in the CCFFV in order to influence outcomes that best reflect the wishes of the Australian industry and government.

It would be easier for the Australian industry to let the CCFFV process continue without our involvement. As one of over 40 participants and a very small global trader in most commodities, it would be fair to say that Australia has a very minor ability to influence outcomes. However, it is often remarked that Australia “punches far above its weight” because we have come from a regulated environment to an unregulated one, we have had considerable experience over many years of international trade, our research and development and innovation are looked upon with envy, we are known as “free traders” and we are often aligned with the influential ‘quad’ group of countries (New Zealand, USA, Canada and Australia).

Finally, Australia is becoming known for being more commercially relevant at CCFFV. While our lack of standards and the bureaucracy to manage and enforce them was seen as unusual, if not amateur, in the past, our focus on commercial specifications that cover quality, food safety and other issues are now seen to be more relevant to the changing global economic environment. The more other countries move in the same direction, the more balanced the playing field will become for Australian fresh produce exporters.

The science undertaken

There is no science in this project although the preferred outcomes often depend on validated outcomes of past research. The project is largely based on process: a standard is being drafted; we ‘do our homework’ based on evidence that applies to the Australian industry such as maturity parameters, sizing, defects and attributes, etc; we develop an Australian brief to respond to issues with the standard/s in development; we present those preferred points of view to the CCFFV meeting and discuss them in that forum; we report on the outcomes of the CCFFV meeting back to industry.

Major findings and industry outcomes

- After seven years of debate on the Codex standard for table grapes, the committee agreed to forward this standard to the 30th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption.
- The proposed draft standard for bitter cassava was recommended for adoption at Step 5 in the eight step Codex process. A working group including Australia will now address outstanding issues
- The proposed draft Codex Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and vegetables have also been sent to CAC for adoption at Step 5.
- There was significant discussion on the draft Codex standard for apples, particularly on minimum requirements such as stalk attachment and water core, and the relationship between

maturity and fruit size. However the committee could not reach consensus on these issues and the standard was not progressed. Australia will continue to participate in a working group for this standard.

- The committee also discussed provision for size and size tolerances in the draft Codex standard for tomatoes. Consensus was reached on a number of these provisions however no agreement was reached on specific limits and therefore this standard could not be finalised.

Recommendations to industry, research peers and HAL

The main recommendation from the Australian delegates is that Australia continue to present sound, logical argument on quality parameters where appropriate, in the larger context that the provisions relating to quality are sound, based on the criteria of essentiality and do not constitute disguised barriers to trade. Elements of the standards must be globally representative and must reflect global variation in acceptable compositional, maturity and visual quality attributes. Finally, the standards must live the Codex mantra (Article 1 – Statutes of Codex Alimentarius Commission) that the standards “*protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade.*”

Contribution to new technology and any future work suggested.

This work is highly unlikely to lead to new technology. Future work is possible if the development of standards reveals fundamental gaps in our knowledge that must be addressed by research. No gaps are currently obvious.

Introduction

This project involves preparation for, and participation at, the 13th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (13CCFFV) and subsequent reporting back to industry. The CCFFV is hosted by the Mexican government and this session was held in Mexico City from 25 – 29 September 2006. The committee meets in approximately 18 month cycles with drafting, negotiation and possible face-to-face working group meetings occurring between sessions. The committee has addressed 25 product standards to date¹. This committee is currently addressing Codex standards for apples, table grapes, tomatoes and bitter cassava, as well as addressing the proposed layout for all future Codex fresh fruit and vegetable standards and revisions.

The main reason for participation is that the current standards under consideration include commodities that are significant export products for Australia, namely apples and table grapes. Being involved in the development of these standards provides the opportunity to ensure that issues and criteria that are significant for Australia are included in the discussion, and that the criteria that are brought to the table by other countries do not jeopardise the export potential of Australian exports. Noteworthy examples are size, maturity and water core of apples and size and maturity of table grapes. While bitter cassava is of low economic importance to Australia, domestic production of tomatoes is significant although exports are minimal.

Australia is able to contribute to the discussion because our experience and industry knowledge is extensive and our researchers have addressed a number of the issues under debate. In particular, current and former HAL/HRDC projects such as TG04026 *Sensory*

¹ www.codexalimentarius.net/search

evaluation of crimson seedless table grapes and TG05011 *Improving consumer experience of early season white seedless grapes* have provided invaluable data on how the proposed table grape maturity aspects of the new standard did not reflect global variation. Similarly, Australian (and other) research on water core of Fuji apples conflicted with that of a number of (European in particular) countries that see water core of any description as a defect rather than a valued quality attribute.

The Australian delegation also has the ability to draw on the former Export Control (Fresh Fruits and Vegetables) Orders, otherwise known as the former AQIS Standards, for a range of products. These standards were withdrawn from use in July 1991 after AQIS decided that the standards were not serving their intended purpose and quality should be left to customers and suppliers to negotiate, within the bounds of quarantine and food safety considerations. Elements of these standards have been a useful reference, for example to indicate a precedent for export trade in apples below the minimum size this Codex committee sought to impose.

Other useful references have been Australian retailer specifications. The specifications for Coles Group² and Woolworths³ are freely available on the internet, to the surprise of many delegates, and focus on the commercial aspects that many at CCFFV wish to regulate. Many delegates now view the non-regulatory management of quality as an effective commercial instrument while others realise that relying on such an instrument would do away with the bureaucracies that manage standards. Job protection is evident at CCFFV.

Finally, delegates often have difficulty in describing what they mean when it comes to quality attributes and the AHC Product Description Languages have been a valuable tool to reduce confusion and ambiguity, as well as to demonstrate the range of quality that may be specified between customer and supplier.

While CCFFV sessions are seemingly endless days of debate over at times trivial issues, the end result is that delegates help shape global standards that are used by governments and commercial interests around the world to measure quality. The networking and understanding that takes place and the ability to ensure Australian research and innovation is recognised as a serious contributor is a valuable side benefit.

Materials & Methods

Materials that contribute to this project include:

- Product Description Language – Apples (AHC, 1999)
- Guide to Quality Management – Apples (AHC, 1993)
- Bagshaw, JS Ledger, SN & Maltby, JM (1997) Tomato Quality Guide (Department of Primary Industries, Queensland)
- Coles and Woolworths retail specifications for fresh produce
- Export Control (Fresh Fruits and Vegetables) Orders (various; AQIS, 1988)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Standards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
- Little, CR & Holmes, RJ. (2000) Storage Technology for Apples and Pears (Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria)
- Research reports and personal communication relating to TG04026 & TG05011

² http://www.supplier.coles.com.au/quality_control/specifications.asp

³ <http://www.woolworths.com.au/Vendors/qa/specification-fresh.asp>

Results

The following is a summary of the results. Further discussion is included in the Australian Delegation Report included as Appendix 1 and the full official report of the session Alinorm 07/30/35 http://www.codexalimentarius.net/download/report/665/al30_35e.pdf.

After seven years of debate on the Codex standard for table grapes, the committee agreed to forward this standard to the 30th Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption. This was after agreement was reached on two outstanding issues.

For Maturity Requirements, the following was agreed:

Table grapes must be sufficiently developed and display satisfactory ripeness. In order to satisfy this requirement, fruit must have obtained a refractometric index of at least 16 degrees Brix. Fruit with a lower refractometric index are acceptable provided the sugar:acid ratio is at least equal to:

- a) 20:1 if the Brix level is greater than or equal to 12.5 degrees and less than 14 degrees Brix, and
- b) 18:1 if the Brix level is greater than or equal to 14 degrees and less than 16 degrees Brix

For Minimum Bunch Weight, it was agreed that the minimum be set at 75 grams with an exception for single servings. Australia campaigned hard that minimum bunch weight is a typical commercial requirement that has no impact on quality and safety and should be left to market forces to determine. Other delegations argued "...that a minimum bunch weight was necessary to guarantee the quality of the product..." and the majority ruled.

The proposed draft standard for bitter cassava was recommended for adoption at Step 5 in the eight step Codex process. A working group including Australia will now address outstanding issues.

The proposed draft Codex Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and vegetables have also been sent to CAC for adoption at Step 5.

There was significant discussion on the draft Codex standard for apples, particularly on minimum requirements such as stalk attachment and water core, and the relationship between maturity and fruit size. However the committee could not reach consensus on these issues and the standard was not progressed. Australia will continue to participate in a working group for this standard.

The committee also discussed provision for size and size tolerances in the draft Codex standard for tomatoes. Consensus was reached on a number of these provisions however no agreement was reached on specific limits and therefore this standard could not be finalised.

Discussion

Progress at CCFFV is often slow and tedious and must be achieved respectfully and with tact and tolerance. This is at times a difficult forum with long-held views and processes that must be acknowledged. Australian delegations have long had a fundamental difficulty with the conflict between the Codex mantra, that is standards that are developed to “...*protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in food trade...*” and the impinging of the standards on commercial trade issues that the Australian industry considers should be negotiated between customer and supplier.

This situation arises because Australia is one of the few countries represented at CCFFV that does not have government set and inspected food quality standards for fresh produce. The other countries are Chile and New Zealand but it appears that these countries are understandably not as active in defending their commercially-focussed systems for fear of upsetting their major European and North American trading partners. Both Chile and New Zealand have a far greater reliance on export markets compared to Australia and Chile now makes up over 50 per cent of southern hemisphere fresh fruit and vegetable exports to the northern hemisphere.

An extensive review of the discussion surrounding the negotiation of the applicable Codex standards is included in the Australian Delegation Report, attached as Appendix 1.

Technology Transfer

The major source of technology transfer is this report and other presentations and ad hoc reports to industry.

Recommendations

The main recommendation from this work is that the Australian horticultural industry should remain connected to the work of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables through the DAFF Codex Australia desk. While Australian interests will be unlikely to represent the majority view around the CCFFV table, Australia has gained a reputation for commercial logic that needs to be reinforced.

The engagement with CCFFV is recommended at both the full meetings and appropriate Working Groups. Product-specific Working Groups, such as for apples, are where a lot of the ground work is done between full meetings and often seem to have greater influence than the full CCFFV meetings themselves. While attendance at full CCFFV meetings should be funded through the Across Industry program of the HAL Industry Management Committee, on the basis that a number of products plus the overall operating framework are being addressed, participation in sector-specific Working Groups should be funded through the industry sector concerned.

Appendix 1

Australian Delegation Report

13th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

25 – 29 September 2006, Mexico City, Mexico

(This report should be read in conjunction with the official report of the session Alinorm 07/30/35)

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

The Committee agreed to postpone the discussion of the standard layout to after the specific standard discussions i.e. after agenda item 4.

Agenda Item 2(a) Matters Arising from the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and its Subsidiary Bodies referred

The Codex Secretariat introduced the item with a brief summary of discussions at CAC relevant to CCFFV and reiterated the directive from CAC for each committee to inform the Executive Committee of a proposed timeframe for completion of all items that commenced prior to 2004.

CCFFV noted the direction CAC provided regarding the timelines for the development of standards. The Committee noted that the tomato and grape standard and the quality inspection for fresh fruit and vegetables guideline had been under development for a significant period of time and suggested that as these items were being discussed as part of the agenda, a note be made of the anticipated finalisation schedule which would be notified to CAC.

Tonga noted that the CCFFV recommendation to CAC was to review the current Codex Standard for Sweet Cassava to broaden it to allow trade in bitter cassava. However CAC decided to recommend that CCFFV elaborate a new standard for bitter cassava with a view to consolidating the two cassava standards into a single one at a later stage. While Tonga acknowledged the work of the Committee with regard to cassava, they did note that it was not the exact outcome they wanted.

Agenda Item 2(b) Matters Arising from other International Organisations on the Standardisation of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables - UNECE and OECD

Agenda Item 2(c) UNECE Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Standard for Table Grapes Standard for Tomatoes Standard for Apples

Both organisations provided an update on the standards they had elaborated and other activities carried out since the last CCFFV meeting.

The Committee noted the progress made on the UNECE standards for table grapes, tomatoes and apples.

Agenda Item 2(d) Proposed Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

This agenda item was discussed after Agenda Item 4(d) and prior to Agenda item 5. The Codex Secretariat apologised for the late circulation of this paper. The Secretariat agreed with the Chair's suggestion that, given the shortage of time, only preliminary comments be sought at this session.

Key comments raised included an intervention from the USA seeking clarification of subjective terms like slight, superficial, practically, etc.

NZ queried the justification for mandatory country of origin labelling provisions in fresh fruit and vegetable standards given that such provisions were already outlined in the General Standard for Pre-packaged Foods. Canada supported this position adding that country of origin labelling should be left up to national authorities. Australia supported this position.

The Secretariat noted that the general discussion had yielded information on approaches to the proposed standard layout and undertook to take these into account in drafting the next iteration which would be circulated for specific comments.

Action for Australia

Provide specific comments when circulated.

Agenda Item 3(a) Draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes

The Chair did not open this item for discussion noting that most of the text had already been agreed to after considerable debate and his aim for this session of CCFFV was to concentrate on the unresolved issues only. Therefore no comments were taken from the floor.

Agenda Item 3(b) Provisions concerning Sizing and 4.2 – Size Tolerances (draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes)

There was true consensus on retaining the first sentence of the sizing provisions – ‘size is determined by the maximum diameter of the equatorial section’.

Consensus was not reached on the deletion of the second sentence – ‘the minimum size is set at 15mm for “cherry” and “cocktail” tomatoes...etc’. Rather than the actual minimum size requirement per se, the debate was around the likelihood of consumers being misled by varying sizes of cherry and cocktail tomatoes offered for sale if a size for trade was not stipulated. Therefore the discussion moved to an allowable maximum size for cherry and cocktail tomatoes. Switzerland suggested a maximum of 30mm for cherry and/or cocktail tomatoes. Australia responded noting that our commercial specifications for cherry and cocktail tomatoes are between 40 and 45 mm.

The subsequent debate was on two possible sizing approaches. These were:

no specific sizing provisions with size tolerances being the mechanism to ensure uniformity;

OR

retaining sizing provisions in the standard.

If sizing provisions were to be maintained then the options presented were to have either a sizing table or a maximum/minimum size range.

The debate firstly concentrated on whether or not sizing provisions should be outlined in the standard. A number of countries, including Australia and USA, supported the option of not having sizing provisions in the standard arguing that this was best left up to commercial decisions between buyers and suppliers.

Countries opposed to this approach, including Mexico and Cuba, wanted a sizing code table to serve as guidance to those countries which either do not have domestic regulations or those seeking guidance from Codex in setting up their regulations.

A third tranche of countries, including Brazil, did not support the inclusion of a sizing table but did want text outlining minimum and maximum sizes.

After lengthy debate and off-line negotiation, the US suggested a hybrid option which would allow sizing to be determined either according to a table or alternate parameters. It was envisaged this option would be:

“Tomatoes may be sized in accordance with the following table:

(insert table)

However, other sizes are permitted and are guided by the following parameters

+/- 15mm if the diameter of the smallest fruit is <70mm

+/- 20 mm if the diameter of the fruit is between 70-100mm and

No limit for more than 100mm”

The US also wanted a provision to allow tomato classification by other methods such as weight or count.

This option was not supported by the EU, who noted that this would not allow international harmonisation. EU also wanted the tolerance of 15mm for tomatoes less than 70mm to be reduced to 10mm.

Notwithstanding substantial to- and fro-ing and even an Indian suggestion to vote on the cherry tomato maximum size, the tolerance for small tomatoes and the use of other tomato classification methods, the discussion did not progress to consensus. The US and the EU were openly antagonistic in this debate.

Ultimately, it was decided that no gain could be made and these provisions should be retained in draft form for finalisation at the next session of CCFFV. The Chair did emphasise that he would not reopen debate on any other sections of the standard other than any consequential amendments that may arise as these contentious provisions were finalised. The Chair also asked countries to come to the next session with a spirit of compromise and resolve to finalise this standard.

Action for Australia

Liaise with industry to determine fall back positions for the next meeting.

Agenda Item 3(c) Draft Codex Standard for Table Grapes

The Chair did not open this item for discussion noting that most of the text had already been agreed to after considerable debate and his aim for this session of CCFFV was to finalise the unresolved issues only. Therefore no comments were taken from the floor.

Agenda Item 4(a) Proposed Draft Sections 2.1.1 – Maturity Requirements and 3.1 – Minimum Bunch Weight

Maturity Requirements

Chile as Chair of the Table Grapes Working Group (WG) introduced this item and outlined the main discussions had by the WG.

Chile pointed out the Proposal A included all varieties of table grapes and accommodated regional and seasonal variability and the underlying premise was that if brix levels were below 16 degrees then a certain sugar/acid ratio was also required to confirm maturity. Proposal B, by allowing for certain exceptions, set a precedent for additional exceptions to be included and it was inappropriate to only allow certain exceptions in the standard without considering a process to add more exceptions if necessary.

The OIV member also provided a paper and a verbal report on the research undertaken as requested by the Table Grapes WG at the February meeting. According to the OIV member, setting exceptions based on minimum brix levels and sugar acid ratios was difficult because of seasonal and regional variations for eg different figures for the same varieties from different regions.

The first two paragraphs under Section 2.1.2 – Maturity Requirements, were agreed to without debate.

In the discussion following, most countries were in support of Proposal A given that the provisions were generic and took into account wide natural variation, however US and India argued for Proposal B.

India proposed a variation to Proposal A as follows:

“Taking into account the difference in characteristics of grape varieties produced in different countries, fruit with a lower refractometric index introduced into international trade may be accepted provided the sugar: acid ratio is greater than 20:1”

This was not acceptable to a number of countries because it did not allow for a sugar: acid ratio of 20:1.

One of the main issues of contention around Proposal B was that there is no process in place if other countries want to include their exceptions in the standard as well. This was followed by a discussion that if a number of countries wanted to include their particular exceptions then this provision would become meaningless.

The outcome of the long and at times difficult debate was that Proposal A was accepted with the report noting that a mechanism to include exceptions should be explored. USA and India expressed reservations at the outcome of this debate.

Minimum Bunch weight

Australia made an intervention suggesting minimum bunch weight was a commercial decision best left up to buyers and sellers and that if it was specified in the standard, it should be only as a ‘recommended’ figure. This was acknowledged by the Chair as being Australia’s usual philosophical position. The US supported Australia’s position.

The EU wanted a minimum bunch weight of 100g. This was supported by Mexico and Italy.

India wanted different minimum bunch weights for different sizes and varieties, but this was not supported by a number of countries.

The EU was willing to compromise if the following text was included:

“Bunches below 75g are permitted for institutional/catering purposes provided the packages contain only bunches below 75g and is labelled as ‘bunches below 75g’.”

The EU and member states were unwilling to allow bunches below 75 gm without accompanying labelling. There was also a great deal of discussion around the interpretation of ‘institutional’ packages. Germany in particular, was of the opinion that ‘institutional’ was not well understood.

The US proposed a compromise position that would both address the issues with the use of the word ‘institutional’ and would allow for bunches below 75gm to be permitted. They suggested a labelling provision be inserted as third bullet point under sub clause 6.2.4 so that the relevant clauses would read:

“3.1 Minimum Bunch weight

The minimum bunch weight shall be 75 gm. These provisions do not apply for packages intended for single serving”

And:

“6.2.4 Commercial identification

- *class*
- *net weight (optional)*
- *labelled for single serve (optional)”*

This was not accepted by the EU unless ‘optional’ was replaced with ‘where appropriate’ (not in brackets).

Finally, after a great deal of debate, the EU position of ‘where appropriate’ was the compromise outcome and the Committee agreed to forward this standard to CAC for final adoption.

Discussions in the margins with the US indicated that they would interpret ‘where appropriate’ to mean ‘where appropriate according to national legislation’. In separate conversations with the EU, ‘where appropriate’ was interpreted as ‘when the packages are intended for single serve then it should be labelled as such’.

Action for Australia

Support the final adoption of this standard at CAC.

Provide input when the process for including exceptions is discussed and provide results from Australian research (when it becomes available) to ensure Australian exceptions are considered appropriately. Australian industry has also undertaken to provide Australian research results to the OIV.

Agenda Item 4(b) Proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples

The US delegation gave the Committee an update on discussions held in the Apple Working Group meeting in Chile in February 2007.

The main issues discussed at the Plenary were stalk attachment and presence (or absence) of water core as a minimum requirement.

There was significant debate around the inclusion of provisions allowing the stalk to be missing. India and Argentina wanted the provision to stipulate the presence of stalk as a minimum requirement. This was opposed by US, Mexico, NZ and France.

Water core was also discussed with views expressed regarding water core as a desirable characteristic or an undesirable defect.

Considerable discussion was had around the relationship between size and maturity and the use of brix levels as an indicator for maturity. A number of countries, including Australia, reiterated that it was not necessary to specify a minimum size and that size was not an indicator of maturity.

The Committee was informed about research in the EU, US and NZ relating to size and maturity and decided that outcomes of this research should be taken into account in resolving this issue.

Due to time constraints, further debate was limited to the expression of preliminary views on the 3 proposals outlined for uniformity. A number of countries supported Proposal 3 some with suggesting that this option should be amended to retain only the first paragraph i.e. remove references to the allowable differences in diameter or weight of the fruit in the same package.

The Chair concluded by thanking the committee for the useful comments and suggested that a WG led by the US consider these in further detail and present a revised document to be circulated at Step 3 for further discussion at the next session.

The US noted that there may be need for a physical meeting of the WG and that they needed to consult internally before committing to leading this WG.

Australia nominated to be a member of this WG.

It is envisaged that this standard will be presented to CAC for final adoption in 2010.

Action for Australia

Represent industry views when participating in WG.

Agenda Item 4(c) Proposed draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava

Tonga updated the Committee with discussions held by the informal Working Group.

Fiji noted that the descriptors 'bitter' and 'sweet' were not really appropriate for cassava because it neither has significant amounts of sugar nor is it bitter tasting per se. The Committee noted that these descriptions were accepted as being in common use.

India raised a number of technical concerns which were discussed by the Committee. India also noted that an Indian research institute had carried out substantial work on cassava and

recommended the range of hydrogen cyanide (HCN) in bitter cassava as between 50 – 150 mg/kg. India also wanted the cyanide content to be expressed as cyanide equivalents.

Tonga noted that NZ had offered to confirm the upper levels being recommended by Fiji and Tonga (There are some concerns that this was misrepresented by Tonga – because NZ in the informal WG had only agreed to assist Tonga with this process.)

Switzerland noted Australia's comments regarding the health and safety issues around consumption of inadequately and inappropriately prepared bitter cassava. The committee agreed that the consumption risks of bitter cassava varieties relative to the upper levels of HCN need further research before they can be set.

Australia did not comment on this issue during the plenary (although we did make our views clear during the informal working group meeting.

Canada queried whether a final bitter cassava standard needed to be adopted prior to merging the sweet cassava and bitter cassava standard.

The FAO Secretariat noted that the only two differences between the draft bitter and sweet cassava standards was the footnote regarding HCN levels and the sizing provisions.

The Chair concluded discussion on this item by suggesting that the footnote and sizing provisions remain in [square brackets] while the rest of the standard is recommended to CAC for adoption at Step 5. He also suggested that the merging of the two standards should be considered at the next session of CCFFV with a view to putting forward a recommendation in this regard to CAC.

The Committee decided to establish an electronic WG with the potential to have a face to face meeting if required. The WG mandate is to support progress of the bitter cassava standard and collecting and analysing data on 'safe' upper levels of HCN to assist with this task. Tonga will chair the WG and India, NZ, Jamaica, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji and Australia volunteered to be members.

Action for Australia

It is recommended that Australian representation on the eWG ensures that the data collected and analysed is robust and any outcomes of that process address our concerns.

Agenda Item 4(d) Proposed draft Codex Guidelines for the Quality Control of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Canada introduced the item.

OECD noted that CRD 10 contained the OECD Council decision C (2006)95 revising the OECD 'Scheme' for the Application of International Standards for Fruits and Vegetables.

The EC suggested that given the work done by the OECD on the Scheme, the Committee may want to consider referencing the OECD document.

The Secretariat clarified that process wise – there is established practice of Codex taking on other international standards by reference.

However concerns were raised by Committee members around:

- the OECD membership not being aligned to Codex membership and therefore the appropriateness of referencing the OECD document in a Codex Standard

- the lack of time to examine the OECD document in detail
- whether any changes to the OECD document would result in the need to revise the Codex document and whether CCFFV would be able to provide input into any revisions that the OECD may be considering.

The Codex Secretariat provided clarification noting that Codex cannot make any changes to an OECD document and if the CCFFV wishes to adopt the OECD document then it needs to accept it as it is. The other option suggested was to examine the OECD document and adopt provisions as considered appropriate.

The Committee was distinctly divided between the EU camp who strongly supported referencing the OECD document because it was work that had already been done and other countries who were more cautious and recognised that the OECD document may not meet the whole range of needs of the CCFFV.

In response to the debate regarding the interface between this document and other CCFICS texts and referring this to CCFICS, the Codex Secretariat noted that in the long history of development of this document, special consideration had been given to CCFICS documents which covered general aspects of inspection and certification.

In view of the shortage of time, detailed discussion was not entertained and the Committee decided to recommend the draft Codex standard for adoption at Step 5 and for the Canadian led WG to continue its work on it and also examine the feasibility and appropriateness of integrating the OECD text and other appropriate UNECE and CCFICS texts. While it was decided that the WG work mainly electronically, there is a possibility of a physical meeting as well.

The Chair stressed that one of the reasons for progressing this standard at this stage is to signal to CAC that work is being progressed. In response to this, Canada asked whether this item could be moved further ahead in the agenda for 14CCFFV to ensure that there was time to discuss it in detail.

While Australia did not formally volunteer to be on the WG, a conversation with Canada was had in the margins to stress that Australia would like to be involved to the extent of ensuring that the text as developed clearly indicates that this a guidance document only.

Action for Australia

When document is circulated for further comment, ensure notion of this document being ‘for guidance only’ is captured.

Agenda Item 5 Proposals for the Amendments to the Priority List for the Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetable

Thailand presented a proposal to start new work on durian. This was supported by a number of countries including India, EU and Indonesia.

The Quads countries supported the US suggestion that it would be better to assess the current workload of the Committee and attempt to finalise some of the long term ongoing standards prior to beginning work on other standards and never having the time at the meetings to actually progress them in a meaningful way.

Given this intervention, the Chair decided that Thailand would be given the opportunity to introduce durian at the next meeting when it was hoped that significant progress and finalisation as appropriate would occur in other standards being currently considered.

Mexico indicated that it hoped to develop a new work proposal on garlic to be tabled at the next session. It was also decided that a project document with revised text to accommodate new avocado varieties could be presented at the next session. A request for a standard for yam was deferred indefinitely.