

Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables participation

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The purpose of this report is to provide information to HAL members regarding the preparation for, attendance at, and outcomes from, the 14th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables held in Mexico City, Mexico on 12 – 17 May 2008.

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Media Summary

International fruit and veg standards make slow but useful progress.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex) is the international food standards setting body recognised under the World Trade Organisation Agreements on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) as being the reference point for food standards applied in international trade. Its objectives are protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in food trade (<http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/codex>).

Australia's Codex contact point, Codex Australia, is housed within the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). HAL works with staff in Codex Australia and other areas in DAFF to provide input into the development of Codex fruit and vegetable standards. HAL is involved in this process to provide technical assistance to DAFF on the detail of standards in development and because Codex standards are used by inspection agencies in some of our export markets.

The Codex Committee for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) met in May in Mexico City to progress a number of international standards of interest to Australia. These included apples, tomatoes and bitter cassava and the Standard Layout for all Codex fruit and vegetable standards. Standards for oranges and table grapes have recently been completed and new work proposed for CCFFV includes a revision of the standard for avocados and new work on durian, tree tomato and chilli peppers.

Progress with these standards is slow, partly because there are representatives of over 40 countries with their own perspectives on what the standards should and should not contain, so gaining consensus is often an exhaustive process, and partly because the committee only meets every 18 months, although there can be product-specific working group meetings between sessions.

The following were achievements of note at the recent CCFFV meeting:

- The apple standard has progressed to Step 5 in the Codex 8-Step process on the back of:
 - agreement to include a draft provision for 'firmness' in the Minimum Requirements;
 - an appreciation that location, climate and production practices make classifying varieties according to colour very difficult and potentially misleading, so this provision is now open to further debate;
 - a minimum Brix level of 10.5° or 12.0° was not agreed for small apples between 50 and 60 mm diameter but is open to debate; and
 - the section on presentation was deleted while the related section on uniformity were unable to be agreed.
 - Electronic Working Group and physical Working Group meetings are intended to take place to seek agreement on these issues before the next CCFFV session in October 2009.
- After reaching agreement on the sizing provisions and minor consequential amendments to other parts of the text, the Committee agreed to forward the draft

Standard for Tomatoes to the 31st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) for final adoption (Step 8).

- The proposed draft Standard for Bitter Cassava will be forwarded to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for final adoption after the Committee agreed to:
 - sections related to the level of cyanogenic glycosides necessary to differentiate bitter from sweet cassava;
 - inclusion of an amendment to indicate that bitter cassava should be fully cooked and that the water used for rinsing and cooking should be discarded after use; and
 - addition of a footnote to indicate that information on preparation practices needs to be provided at point of retail sale for unpackaged bitter cassava,.

For further information and the full report of the CCFFV, please contact <http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/archives.jsp?lang=en>. For information on Codex Australia, please contact <http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/codex>.

Introduction

The Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) has been in place for approximately 20 years and is hosted by the Government of Mexico. The Terms of Reference for the CCFFV are as follows:

- (a) to elaborate world wide standards and codes of practice as may be appropriate for fresh fruits and vegetables;
- (b) to consult with the United Nations Economic Committee for Europe (UN/ECE) Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce in the elaboration of world wide standards and codes of practice with particular regard to ensuring that there is no duplication of standards or codes of practice and that they follow the same broad format; and,
- (c) to consult, as necessary, with other international organizations which are active in the area of standardization of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Specifically, the Objectives of CCFFV are to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in food trade.

The Committee meets face-to-face every 18 months in Mexico City to progress an agenda of standards development. In May 2008, these standards included apples, tomatoes and bitter cassava and the Standard Layout for all Codex fruit and vegetable standards. Standards for oranges and table grapes have recently been completed and new work proposed for CCFFV includes a revision of the standard for avocados and new work on durian, tree tomato and chilli peppers.

HAL is involved in this process for a number of reasons. A representative of the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) is most likely to attend CCFFV and HAL is in a position to provide technical support with expertise in product standards and specifications, production and postharvest practices across a range of horticultural products and an understanding of domestic and international trade in horticultural products. This combination of Government and industry expertise ensures that the unique aspects of Australian horticulture are considered in the development of international standards.

Secondly, HAL funds this work to provide an active role in the development of standards that are used by a number of importing countries either 'as is' or as the foundation/minimum of retail specifications for products imported from Australia.

Finally, there is a 'global good' role to assist developing nations, that do not have the infrastructure and expertise to develop their own standards, with standards that provide consumer protection and fairness in trade, without which these nations would be disadvantaged.

Method

The process of engaging with Codex does not have a clear commencement or completion. It is a continuous process that uses face to face meetings to consolidate

the processes of member country internal consultation and possible electronic and/or physical working group meetings of participating countries between CCFFV sessions.

For HAL, the process is usually triggered when Codex documents are circulated in the lead up to a session. These documents are circulated from the Codex Alimentarius secretariat in Rome, Italy, to Codex Australia, housed within DAFF. Codex Australia circulates committee documents to an email list of individuals and organisations with an interest in that particular committee. There are numerous Codex committees.

Such individuals and organisations can respond directly to Codex Australia. Alternatively, the HAL manager contacts relevant individuals and organisations and seeks feedback on the specific issues to be discussed at the forthcoming Codex session. These comments are consolidated and forwarded to the nominated person in DAFF. DAFF staff then develop a draft “Australian Brief”, effectively the Australian response to all agenda items consolidated into one document.

The HAL manager has input into this process and also attends the Codex Australia CCFFV Panel Meeting in Canberra. This meeting was held on 16th April 2008 and comprised relevant DAFF staff and R Bennett, who collectively edited the draft Brief. When complete and agreed, the Australian Brief becomes the ‘policy’ for each agenda item, providing the existing status, issue background and the position Australia will take in session. Excerpts are provided to the Codex secretariat where country comments are called for and circulated prior to the session.

The Codex Committee for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables is hosted by the Government of Mexico and the meetings appear to have been always held in Mexico City, at the offices of the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Codex Session is preceded by a ‘Quads’ meeting, that is Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA representatives ‘compare positions’ on agenda items on the Sunday afternoon before the session commences. This is useful to gain a better understanding of allied perspectives and attempt to gain consensus on potentially contentious issue. A number of other ‘blocs’ have similar meetings.

The Session itself is usually 8:30AM to 6:00PM daily Monday to Thursday with the possibility of a Friday morning session. This allows the Session secretariat to prepare the official report of the session before delegates report back on Saturday morning. Saturday is spent editing the report paragraph by paragraph to ensure it is a true and correct record of the session. The session concluded when the report is adopted by delegates.

For the 14th Session of CCFFV there were a number of working group meetings out of session, usually before normal daily proceedings commenced and specifically to tackle difficult aspects of the draft apple standard.

The final part of the process is reporting back in Australia. This is usually accomplished by producing a Delegation Report (for DAFF use; see attachment I) and this report, for industry. This report will be generally available and will be circulated to industries and individuals who contributed to and/or are implicated in, the process, and the Industry Management Committee.

Results

The following is an overview of the outcomes of the 14th Session of CCFFV. The committee agreed to:

- forward the draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes and the draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava to the 31st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for adoption at Step 8;
- forward the proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples to the 31st Session of the Commission for adoption at Step 5;
- discontinue work on the draft Codex Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards;
- request the approval of the Commission for new work on Codex Standards for Durian, Chilli Peppers, and Tree Tomatoes (Tamarillos) and revision of the Codex Standard for Avocado;
- append the proposed Layout for Codex Standards on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to the report for comments and consideration at its next session;
- continue to request comments on proposals for amendments to the Priority List for the Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for consideration at its next session; and
- support the ongoing dialogue between the Codex and UNECE Secretariats to further enhance cooperation between the two Bodies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made as actions arising from the 14th Session of CCFFV. They relate to DAFF/Codex Australia and/or industry.

- Consider involvement in UNECE fruit and vegetable standard development activities as well as those of Codex.
- Participate in the eWG on a glossary of terms for the proposed Standard Layout.
- Consider capacity to lead an eWG on the proposed Standard Layout after the next Session of the Committee.
- Strongly support adoption of the Draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes at Step 8 by the Commission.
- Support adoption of the Draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava at Step 8 by the Commission only after referral of the labelling provisions to CCFL for endorsement, noting that 36CCFL failed to endorse the previous labelling provisions at Step 5.
- Support discontinuation of work on the Draft Codex Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards at the Commission.
- Strongly support adoption of the Proposed Draft Standard for Apples at Step 5 by the Commission.
- Participate in the eWG and any pWGs on the Proposed Draft Standard for Apples.
- Participate in the eWG on Avocado.

Attachment 1 Delegation Report

Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

14th Session

Mexico City, Mexico

12th–17th May, 2008

Delegation Report

**To be read in conjunction with the official report of the Session:
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Introduction

The 14th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (14CCFFV) was held in Mexico City, Mexico, from 12th – 17th May 2008.

The Chair of the Committee, Dr Francisco Ramos Gómez, appointed Ms Ingrid Maciel Pedrote, International Standardisation Director, Ministry of Economy, to chair the Session on his behalf.

The Australian delegation consisted of Dr Robert Solomon, Delegation Leader, Manager (a/g), International Food Standards, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and Mr Richard Bennett, Product Integrity Manager, Horticulture Australia Ltd.

Overview of outcomes of the 14th Session

The Committee agreed to:

- forward the draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes and the draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava to the 31st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission for adoption at Step 8;
- forward the proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples to the 31st Session of the Commission for adoption at Step 5;
- discontinue work on the draft Codex Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards;
- request the approval of the Commission for new work on Codex Standards for Durian, Chilli Peppers, and Tree Tomatoes (Tamarillos) and revision of the Codex Standard for Avocado;
- append the proposed Layout for Codex Standards on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to the report for comments and consideration at its next session;
- continue to request comments on proposals for amendments to the Priority List for the Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for consideration at its next session; and
- support the ongoing dialogue between the Codex and UNECE Secretariats to further enhance cooperation between the two Bodies.

Summary of Action for Australia

1	Consider involvement in UNECE fruit and vegetable standard development activities as well as those of Codex.
2	Participate in the eWG on a glossary of terms for the proposed Standard Layout.
3	Consider capacity to lead an eWG on the proposed Standard Layout after the next Session of the Committee.
4	Strongly support adoption of the Draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes at Step 8 by the Commission.
5	Support adoption of the Draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava at Step 8 by the Commission only after referral of the labelling provisions to CCFL for endorsement, noting that 36CCFL failed to endorse the previous labelling provisions at Step 5.
6	Support discontinuation of work on the Draft Codex Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards at the Commission.

7	Strongly support adoption of the Proposed Draft Standard for Apples at Step 5 by the Commission.
8	Participate in the eWG and any pWGs on the Proposed Draft Standard for Apples.
9	Participate in the eWG on Avocado.

Summary of the 1st Session

Quads meeting

Delegates of the Quads countries met the day before the plenary Session to discuss positions on the main agenda items. The meeting was also attended by the Chair of the Session, Ms Ingrid Maciel Pedrote.

The Chair explained her goals for the Session, which included completion of the tomato and bitter cassava standards and progress on apples and the inspection guidelines.

It was agreed that there was scope for a compromise to be worked out on the tomato sizing provisions, and it was suggested that an in-session Working Group could help to reach that goal.

It was clear that both the US and the Chair were very keen to see the cassava standard advance. Australia's objections to this were expressed, based on food safety concerns and the need for safe handling guidance. With a fair amount of pressure being applied to agree to it going through, options for acceptable compromises were discussed.

A wide ranging discussion on the inspection guidelines led to agreement (including that of Canada, which had led the work for many years) that they were best discontinued, since they duplicated or conflicted with other work undertaken by Codex and other international organisations.

The other main area of discussion was on the standard layout. It was felt that the member countries needed to take control of what had been, up to now, a Codex Secretariat text, with a view to ensuring it met the needs of Codex rather than being a copy of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) standard layout. It was suggested that a Quad country might offer to lead an electronic Working Group (eWG), but no volunteers were forthcoming.

Plenary

The Session was attended by over 100 delegates from 46 Member countries, one Member Organisation and observers from 2 international organisations.

Opening of the Session

Lic. Carlos Arce Macias, Undersecretary of Foreign Investment, Regulations and International Trade Practices, Ministry of Economy, opened the Session. Amb. Erendira Araceli Paz Campos, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, M.V.Z. Enrique Sanchez Cruz, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food, and Ms Marcela Madrazo Reynoso, Federal Commission for the Protection Against Health Risks also addressed the Committee.

Agenda Item 1: Adoption of the Agenda

The Committee agreed to defer discussion on the draft tomato standard and its sizing provisions (agenda items 3a and 3b) until after an in-session working group was held, and to defer discussion on the standard layout (agenda item 2d) until after discussion on the items in the Step process and on the priorities for new work.

Agenda Item 2a: Matters referred to the Committee by the Codex Alimentarius Commission and/or its Subsidiary Bodies

The Committee noted the Matters Referred and agreed to defer discussion on specific issues until the relevant agenda item.

Agenda Item 2b: Matters arising from other International Organisations on the Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Outcome

The Committee agreed to support the ongoing dialogue between the Codex and UNECE Secretariats to further enhance cooperation between the two Bodies.

Discussion

The Committee noted the main issues of interest arising from sessions of the *UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards* and its *Specialised Section on Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* and the *OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruits and Vegetables* that had been held subsequent to the last session of the Committee.

The Representative of the UNECE highlighted:

- adoption of revised UNECE Standards for Table Grapes and Apples;
- adoption of revised general texts on the Conformity Certificate and the Standard Layout;
- new work on standardisation of various commodities including fresh chilli pepper;
- the need to align the UNECE and Codex standard layouts;
- ongoing consultation between the UNECE and the OECD on concentrating agricultural quality standards work from the OECD Scheme into the UNECE;
- the adoption by the UNECE of new Terms of Reference to allow equal rights to all United Nations members in the work of the Working Party and its Specialised Sections; and
- the outcomes of an informal meeting between the Codex and UNECE Secretariats (October 2007) on ways to increase cooperation between them.

Australia supported close collaboration between the respective Secretariats and the “theoretical ideal” of having a single international standard for a particular produce, but noted that the purpose and goals of Codex and the UNECE differed and thus deviations between UNECE and Codex standards might occur because of the need to address the concerns of Codex’s worldwide membership. We noted that Codex was uniquely placed to elaborate worldwide standards for fresh fruits and vegetables.

The EC expressed its support for close collaboration between the two Secretariats. The Delegation highlighted the cooperative work between Codex and UNECE, eg on table grapes. The EC acknowledged that the mandate of Codex in regard to protecting the health of

consumers was broader than the UNECE aims, although Codex and UNECE shared the same aim of ensuring fair trade practices in the food trade.

Action for Australia

1. Consider involvement in UNECE fruit and vegetable standard development activities as well as those of Codex.

The opening up of membership of the UNECE to all UN member countries presents both a challenge and an opportunity to Australia.

One of our main arguments against close harmonisation of Codex fruit and vegetable standards with those of the UNECE was the limited membership of UNECE and the subsequent European (or at least Northern Hemisphere) focus of their standards. Opening up of membership reduces the validity of that argument.

Given the strong drive toward alignment of standards and formats between the two bodies, particularly the drive toward adoption by Codex of texts developed by the UNECE, Australia needs to consider the possibility, advisability and practicability of involvement in UNECE fruit and vegetable standard development activities as well as those of Codex. The US, New Zealand and other non-European countries participate in both. Australia (through AUS-MEAT) already participates strongly in the work of the UNECE *Specialised Section on Standardisation of Meat*.

Agenda Item 2c: UNECE Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

The Committee noted that the UNECE standards for tomatoes and apples were made available for reference when discussing the relevant agenda items.

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

Outcome

The Committee agreed to establish an electronic Working Group (eWG), led by France, to prepare a glossary of terms used in the proposed Standard Layout, with particular regard to the definitions of "Extra" Class, Class I and Class II.

The Committee further agreed to append the proposed Standard Layout to the report of the Session for comments and consideration at its next Session.

Discussion

The Committee noted that the proposed Standard Layout was a guidance document for use by the Committee to ensure consistency across Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables, with deviations from these provisions due to the characteristics of the produce provided for in the Introduction and various footnotes.

The Committee also noted that the proposed Standard Layout followed the format of the Standard Layout for UNECE Standards on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

Australia acknowledged the Terms of Reference of the Committee in relation to cooperation with the UNECE, but we reiterated our view that the mandate of Codex and UNECE differed and therefore a different approach might be required in terms of format and specific provisions to meet Codex aims and the needs of its membership.

The Committee agreed that a thorough revision of the proposed Standard Layout should be completed prior to harmonisation to the UNECE Layout.

The Committee considered the proposed Standard Layout section by section down to Section 3.1 (Minimum Requirements) and made minor amendments before running out of time to further work on the document.

The Committee discussed whether the proposed Standard Layout was the right place to differentiate between the role of Codex and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) in regard to setting international quality and phytosanitary standards for fresh fruits and vegetables and to clarify the difference between “pests” and “quarantine pests” regulated under the IPPC.

This was an issue that was raised several times during the Session, particularly by Thailand and India, and particularly focussed on Australia’s quarantine requirements. A more experienced Chair might have brought these discussions to a halt more quickly and with agreement to the differences in interpretation, as they consumed time needed for discussion of matters of greater relevance.

The Committee had an exchange of views on the need for a glossary of terms used in Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables, including on the most appropriate place to incorporate this in the proposed Standard Layout. The Committee agreed to establish an electronic Working Group (eWG) to prepare a glossary of terms, with particular regard to the definitions of “Extra” Class, Class I and Class II.

The Committee further agreed to append to the report of the Session the proposed Standard Layout, for comments and consideration at its next Session.

Action for Australia

2. Participate in the eWG on a glossary of terms for the proposed Standard Layout.

The proposal by the EC to link definitions of each class of produce to a percentage of market share by each class should be resisted. There is also the possibility that other definitions might be set with the aim of supporting an existing trade position. For these reasons, involvement in the eWG is recommended.

3. Consider Australia’s capacity to lead an eWG on the proposed Standard Layout after the next Session of the Committee.

Given our strong views in regard to the need for Codex to develop a Standard Layout specific to its needs, rather than to adopt the UNECE Standard Layout; noting the support of the Quads countries on this matter; and in the interests of gaining some control of the process, it might be prudent to offer to lead an eWG on the Standard Layout after the next session of CCFFV, subject to having adequate staff resources and capabilities. It would be undesirable to allow such a Working Group to be led by either European or American delegations, given their polarising opinions and inability to work constructively together.

Agenda Item 3a: Draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes

&

Agenda Item 3b: Draft Sections 3 - Provisions Concerning Sizing (Draft Standard for Tomatoes)

Outcome

After reaching agreement on the sizing provisions (agenda item 3b) and minor consequential amendments to other parts of the text, the Committee agreed to forward the draft Standard for

Tomatoes to the 31st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) for adoption at Step 8.

Discussion

An in-session Working Group instituted to finalise the sizing provisions of the tomato standard agreed to focus on the sizing table and to no longer consider the maximum size for “cherry” and “cocktail” tomatoes.

In view of various opinions expressed by members, the Working Group recommended that this Section should allow sizing according to the sizing table; according to uniformity provisions; or in accordance with legislation of the importing country (either by count, diameter or weight).

The Committee supported the approach recommended by the Working Group, which accommodated various concerns of members and allowed for greater flexibility.

The EC expressed concern over the third option for sizing because, in their view, this provision allowed importing countries to adopt unique sizing by count, diameter or weight that could be even more prescriptive than the first two options and failed to assist the harmonisation of national requirements and facilitation of international trade. The EC stressed that members should be encouraged to adopt one of the first two options for sizing.

The Committee agreed to forward the draft Standard for Tomatoes to the Commission for adoption at Step 8.

Action for Australia

4. Strongly support adoption of the Draft Standard at Step 8 by the Commission.

Given the entrenched and opposing views of various member countries on the sizing provisions, the referral to national legislation of the importing country seems to be the only way out of an impasse. Along with the removal of a maximum sizing provision for cherry/cocktail tomatoes, this can be seen as a favourable outcome for Australia, and one that Australia helped to initiate.

Agenda Item 3c: Draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava

Outcome

The Committee agreed to advance the draft Standard for Bitter Cassava to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for adoption at Step 8, noting that the possibility of having a single Codex Standard applicable to both sweet and bitter cassava should be considered by the Committee at a later stage in line with the recommendation of the 28th Session of the Commission.

Discussion

Informal discussions were held with some of the delegations keen to get the standard finalised, including Fiji, Kenya and the USA. Australia’s unwillingness to see the standard adopted with an upper level for cyanide in bitter cassava that might be taken as an indication of a safe upper level for consumption was understood and accepted, and a compromise worked out to allow the upper level to be left to the importing country’s legislation, based on its own safety assessment.

The Committee discussion was conducted in the context of the outcomes of the Codex Committee for Contaminants in Food (CCCF) consideration of safe levels of cyanide in cassava and other foods and the failure of the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL) to

endorse the labelling provisions because the preparation instructions did not appropriately address safety concerns.

The Committee was informed that the CCCF had noted that the levels indicated in the footnote to the draft standard were not subject to endorsement by the CCCF since the objective of these levels were to differentiate bitter from sweet cassava rather than to define a safe level of cyanide. The CCCF had however agreed to assess all available data on cyanogenic glycosides with a view for possible re-evaluation by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). Australia is leading a CCCF eWG on this matter.

Australia's view that the lack of data on safe levels of hydrogen cyanide in bitter cassava and the ongoing work in CCCF (and possibly JECFA) meant that the Committee was not in a position to finalise the standard was noted.

The view of other delegations that the Standard was necessary to overcome difficulties in trade in bitter cassava varieties was also taken into account, and the Committee agreed on the compromise worked out in the informal discussions, ie that the maximum level for cyanide be left to national legislation of the importing country, with a view to revisiting the matter, if necessary, once a safety assessment had been carried out by JECFA and/or a decision had been taken by CCCF.

Several delegations expressed their concern with this decision, since many countries' legislation did not have such levels and they relied on Codex as a reference.

Discussion on the labelling provisions and the need for adequate preparation instructions to ensure safety of the produce exposed the wide range of practices employed to prepare bitter cassava varieties for consumption across the main growing regions of the world.

It was agreed that the key practices to ensure safety were to ensure that cassava was fully cooked and that cooking or rinsing water was discarded, since hydrogen cyanide was soluble in water. On that basis, the Committee agreed to amend Section 6.1.2 to indicate that bitter cassava should be fully cooked and that the water used for rinsing and cooking should be discarded and should not be used for other purposes, with a footnote added to indicate that information on preparation practices needed to be provided at point of retail sale for unpackaged bitter cassava.

Australia suggested that the labelling provisions might also need to be reconsidered in the light of outcomes from CCCF/JECFA, but no support was received and this was not agreed to.

The Committee noted the reservations expressed by New Zealand that the Section 6.2.3 provision for mandatory country of origin labelling on non-retail containers did not contribute to food safety, could create considerable compliance costs, had no effect on quality and could create barriers to trade, but the Committee did not agree to a proposal to remove the provision.

The Committee agreed to advance the proposed draft Standard for Bitter Cassava to the Codex Alimentarius Commission for adoption at Step 8.

Action for Australia

5. Support adoption of the Draft Standard at Step 8 by the Commission only after referral of the labelling provisions to CCFL for endorsement.

Noting that 36CCFL failed to endorse the previous version of the labelling provisions at Step 5, the Committee sought to strengthen the consumer protection aspect. It would seem prudent to pass the revised provisions by CCFL to ensure that the concerns of that Committee have been met.

Agenda Item 3d: Draft Codex Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards

Outcome

Noting that existing Codex texts were sufficient for the purpose, the Committee agreed to discontinue work on the draft Guidelines for the Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for Conformity to Quality Standards and to inform the 31st Session of the Commission through the Executive Committee of this decision.

Action for Australia

6. Support discontinuation of work on the Draft Guidelines at the Commission.

Agenda Item 4a: Proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples

Outcome

The Committee agreed to advance the proposed draft Standard for Apples to the 31st Session of the Commission for adoption at Step 5.

The Committee further agreed to reconvene the eWG on the proposed draft standard, noting that there might be a need for a physical Working Group (pWG) meeting both between sessions of the Committee as well as immediately prior to the next session of the Committee. The Committee agreed to the proposal of the EC that reports of the pWG should be finalised during its meetings.

Discussion

An in-session Working Group met on several occasions to work on the main areas of contention in the proposed draft standard, including provisions for classification, sizing, quality tolerances, presentation and uniformity, but it failed to resolve many of those difficulties due to delegates defending deeply entrenched positions and being unwilling to consider compromise positions. In addition, some delegations with strongly held views failed to attend these Working Group sessions and subsequently raised their objections in plenary. The Chair eventually lost patience and reprimanded those delegations for their lack of input to the Working Group discussions and their lack of commitment to finalising the proposed draft standard.

The Committee considered the proposed draft Standard section by section, with the main areas of discussion being:

Section 2.1 – Minimum Requirements

Several delegations proposed the inclusion of a provision for firmness as an important attribute in ensuring that the produce remained in good condition until it reached the final consumer. In view of a lack of consensus, the Committee agreed to include “firm” as a minimum requirement in square brackets for further consideration by the Committee.

Section 2.3 – Classification (Colouring)

A proposal by Australia to delete classification of apple varieties by colour on the basis that such classification was potentially confusing and impractical and hence would be difficult to implement, that significant trade was taking place without reference to colour and that such classification could prevent new varieties of apples with varying colour ranges from entering the market received support from several delegations but consensus was not reached.

The Codex Secretariat informed the Committee that classification by colour had been removed from several Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables since inspection would be difficult to carry out without the aid of explanatory materials such as brochures which the Committee did not have a mandate to develop.

Several delegations expressed support for classification of apple varieties according to colour since this was an essential part of classification and that the colour chart in Annex I was useful and should be maintained.

The USA proposed that a list of varieties limited to those most traded internationally be included in the Annex, noting that it could be feasible to limit the list of varieties to 40 at maximum.

On this point, Australia and other delegations pointed out that according to geographic and climatic conditions as well as agricultural practices a single variety could fall into more than one colour group and that limiting the number of varieties would hinder trade in certain varieties and limit innovation.

The Committee, noting the various views expressed, agreed to keep colour as a requirement for classification of the three quality classes and to place Annex I on colour classification in square brackets for further consideration at its next session.

Section 3 - Provisions Concerning Sizing

The Committee agreed to work from Proposal A which was seen to provide a more flexible approach to sizing. The reference to size codes in Section 6.2.4 was deleted as a consequence of the decision to focus on Proposal A.

No agreement was reached on the Brix level for smaller sized fruits of less than 60 mm. Some delegations were of the opinion that a Brix level of 10.5° was too low and proposed a Brix level of 12°. Other delegations pointed out that a Brix level of 12° would be too high, that there was no direct correlation between size and maturity, and that a level of 10.5° was consistent with the UNECE Standard on Apples. In view of a lack of consensus, the Committee agreed to include both levels in square brackets for further consideration.

Section 4.1 - Quality Tolerances

There was an extensive and fruitless discussion on the proposal of the Working Group to include provisions for tolerances for decay and internal breakdown for the three quality classes of apples, starting with the need to clearly define each defect.

Several delegations pointed out that some degree of decay and internal breakdown was inevitable during transportation over long distances and that zero tolerance for decay and internal breakdown could result in large scale rejection of consignments.

Delegations opposed to the proposal believed that it was inconsistent with the provisions for quality tolerances that usually apply in Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables. It was further noted that this provision was inconsistent with the UNECE Standard for Apples.

The discussion was sidetracked by a long and unnecessary discussion on the cause of decay and the role of quarantine pests. Although it was clarified several times that the proposed draft Standard only pertained to quality and that phytosanitary issues were beyond the scope of Codex and adequately addressed by the work of the IPPC, Thailand and India, in particular, continued to raise the issue and to make comment on Australia's quarantine requirements. It did not seem to occur to them that Australia was sanguine about an allowance for decay due to internal feeding pests precisely because we were confident that the standard would only apply after quarantine issues had firstly been considered.

The Committee noted the proposal of the Codex Secretariat to insert a footnote to the term "pests" indicating that such pests did not refer to quarantine pests regulated by the IPPC. The Committee further noted that provisions that might envisage phytosanitary risks in Codex

standards for fresh fruits and vegetables had been already dealt with by the Committee without prejudice to the applicable plant protection rules, e.g. in the Codex Standard for Table Grapes.

The Committee could not reach consensus on this section and agreed to leave the proposals of the Working Group for tolerances for decay and internal breakdown in all three quality classes unchanged and in square brackets for further consideration by the next session of the Committee.

Sections 5.1 – Uniformity and 5.3 - Presentation

Discussions on the allowed maximum difference in diameter or weight between apples in the same package (Section 5.1) failed to make significant progress at least partly due to poor understanding of the consequence of the provisions and of the effect of the interaction between this section and Section 4.2 – Size Tolerances. It seemed that some delegations were keen to exploit that lack of understanding to introduce highly restrictive values which would be difficult to meet without access to sophisticated machinery for sizing of apples.

Given the confusion and lack of consensus, the Committee agreed to the proposals of the in-session Working Group to leave provisions for uniformity in square brackets and to delete the section on presentation.

The Committee agreed to advance the proposed draft Standard to the 31st Session of the Commission for adoption at Step 5.

The Committee further agreed to reconvene the eWG on the proposed draft standard, noting that there might be a need for a physical Working Group meeting both between sessions of the Committee as well as immediately prior to the next session of the Committee. The Committee agreed to the proposal of the EC that reports of the pWG should be finalised during its meetings.

The USA proposed that were a pWG held, the first day of the meeting would be set aside for a workshop on the practical application of provisions, especially with regard to inspection of defects and organoleptic tests, in order to provide delegates with a better understanding of the practical application of some provisions in the Standard with a view to facilitate its discussion.

The Chair exhorted the Committee to make a commitment to make every effort to work in a spirit of compromise in order to finalise the Standard at its 15th Session

Action for Australia

7. Strongly support adoption of the Proposed Draft Standard at Step 5 by the Commission.

The standard has been under development by CCFFV since work was initiated by the 8th Session in 1999. If it fails to progress, the Committee should give serious consideration to discontinuing the work.

8. Participate in the eWG and any pWGs on the proposed draft standard.

Given the support of our domestic industry, and noting the ongoing desire of many delegations to introduce prescriptive and potentially trade-restrictive provisions into the standard, Australia needs to continue its active involvement in the development of the standard to protect our commercial market access position.

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

Outcome

The Committee agreed to request the approval of the 31st Session of the Commission for new work on Codex Standards for Durian, Chilli Pepper and Tree Tomato (Tamarillo) and revision of the Codex Standard for Avocado (CODEX STAN 197-1995), on the understanding that countries that had proposed new work would submit revised project documents through the Codex Secretariat to the 61st Session of the Executive Committee.

The Committee agreed to establish the following eWGs to develop proposed draft texts for circulation for comments at Step 3 and consideration at the 15th Session of the Committee:

- Durian, led by Thailand;
- Avocado, led by Cuba;
- Chilli Pepper, led by Mexico; and
- Tree Tomato, led by Colombia.

The Committee also agreed to continue to request comments for amendments to the Priority List for the Standardisation of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables for consideration at its next session.

Discussion

The Committee noted proposals for new work on chilli peppers, garlic, durian, passion fruit, tree tomato, table grapes (revision), lúcuma (sapote), avocado (revision), pomegranate and black pepper.

The Committee noted that based on the progress made during the current session, its next session could take up three to four items as new work.

It was decided not to consider proposals submitted as conference room documents (pomegranate and black pepper) because they were made available only during the meeting and there was not enough time for members to consider them. Given the support of some delegations for new work on pomegranate, the Committee noted that this proposal could be brought to the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for the Near East (CCNE) and that once it was adopted as a regional standard it could be proposed for conversion into a worldwide standard, recognising that it was grown and traded internationally.

Mexico withdrew their proposal for new work on garlic and the USA withdrew their proposal for revision of the Codex Standard for Table Grapes in anticipation of future work on development of criteria for exceptions to the minimum maturity requirements in the standard.

Peru agreed to bring the proposal for new work on lúcuma to the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Latin America and the Caribbean (CCLAC), recognising that it was traded mainly within that region and noting that procedures existed to convert regional standards into worldwide standards at a later stage.

Colombia agreed that standardisation of tree tomato had higher priority than that for passion fruit and withdrew its proposal for new work on the latter.

The Committee recalled that its 13th Session had agreed to give priority to the revision of the Codex Standard for Avocado and standardisation of durian for reconsideration by the current session based on the outcome of its deliberations on ongoing work.

The Committee noted that the Codex Standard for Avocado did not cover new varieties currently marketed internationally and that relevant sections needed to be revised to cover these varieties, taking into account the recently revised UNECE Standard for Avocados. Many delegations supported new work on this revision as a matter of urgency because the existing Codex Standard could restrict the trade of new varieties in the market.

The USA requested that the proposal for new work on durian be referred to the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Asia (CCASIA). Thailand argued strongly that durian, though

mainly produced in Southeast Asia, was also produced in other regions and traded internationally; that some Latin American countries had expressed interests in production; and that it was expected to become a more international product in the near future.

The Committee noted that chilli pepper was an international product in terms of production, trade and consumption and that it was sensible to initiate new work at this point of time because UNECE had also decided to initiate new work on chilli pepper and that cooperation between the two Bodies should be encouraged.

After clarifying for some delegations that tree tomatoes (aka tamarillo) were botanically different from tomatoes and hence not covered by the draft Codex Standard for Tomatoes, the Committee agreed to initiate new work on a standard for the product.

The Committee noted that conversion of the Codex Standard for Fresh Fungus “Chanterelle” (European Regional Standard CODEX STAN 40-1981) into a worldwide standard had been referred to the Committee as a result of an earlier recommendation of the Commission and included in the Priority List since its 8th Session. Noting that the UNECE had recently decided to initiate work on chanterelle, the Committee agreed to keep chanterelle in the Priority List for the time being and to revisit this issue once UNECE finalised their Standard.

In view of the number of proposals for new work made during the current session, New Zealand suggested that it would be worthwhile to consider screening of proposals in a working group before discussion in the plenary, as practised in some Committees, and developing criteria specifically applicable to this Committee.

Action for Australia

9. Participate in the eWG on Avocado.

Australia’s avocado industry produces up to 46,000 tonne/annum (with a value up to \$120m), with a strong reliance (~75% of production) on the Hass variety. Specific issues for Australia in regard to the proposed revision are the need to include new varieties already in international trade and to expand the existing provisions to include small sizes of Hass avocados.

Agenda Item 6: Other Business

No other business was discussed.

Agenda Item 7: Date and Place of the Next Session

As requested by the Commission, the Committee considered the interval between sessions and the duration of sessions and agreed that the current interval of 18 months and a duration of 5 days were appropriate taking into account the need for sufficient time to prepare and consider documents and that working groups had been established that would work between sessions as well as immediately prior to the next Session of the Committee to facilitate the work of the Committee.

Australia noted that a five-day session was sufficient for the workload of the Committee only if the inter-session mechanism was fully utilised and delegations participated in working groups and the plenary sessions of the Committee in a spirit of compromise and with a commitment to see work progress.

The Committee was informed that the 15th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables was tentatively scheduled to be held in Mexico in approximately 18 months. The exact time and venue would be decided between the Codex and the Mexican Secretariats.

Agenda Item 7: Adoption of the Report

The Committee adopted the draft report of the Session with minor revisions.

The 8-Step Codex Process Explained

Step 1: The Commission approves a new standard for debate.

Step 2: The first cut of a new standard is drafted.

Step 3: The draft standard is circulated to member governments and relevant international organisations for comment. Note: This is your first chance to comment on and influence the direction of the draft standard.

Step 4: Member country comments are reviewed and incorporated into the draft standard for discussion.

Step 5: The Commission or its Executive Committee adopts the draft standard.

Step 6: Draft text is circulated to member countries for another round of comment. Note: at this point, you get another chance to comment on the draft standard before it is forwarded to the Commission for adoption.

Step 7: Amendments are made to the revised draft based on comments received and the proposed standard is referred to the Commission for adoption.

Step 8: At this final stage, member governments have a last opportunity to debate the proposed standard before its final adoption as a Codex standard or text.