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European Union comments

CODEX COMMITTEE ON FOOD HYGIENE

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Agenda Item 5: Proposed draft revision of the Code of hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CAC/RCP 53-2003)

*Mixed Competence
European Union Vote*

General comments

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) would like to thank and congratulate France and Brazil as chairs of the EWG for the approach taken and the work done on the revision of the Code. The EUMS can largely support the revised work subject to some specific comments presented below. However the EUMS consider that Annex II still requires a substantial revision as regards structure and content.

Specific comments to the basic Code

Paragraph 2

It is proposed to add ", including food allergens," after "chemical" in the first sentence.

Rationale: It is important to refer specifically to food allergens as chemical hazards since they are often forgotten while being of increasing concern.

Paragraph 7

1. It is proposed to replace the term "hydroponics" by a more general one "soil-less systems"

Rationale: This general term is widely used nowadays.

2. It is proposed to delete the definition of "Ready-to-eat fresh fruits and vegetables".

Rationale: The definition is very unclear and confusing ("fresh" <-> "cooked"). In addition it is only used once as such (in Annex I) in a context which explains what it refers to. From a control point of view, only the fact that a food is considered "ready-

to-eat" is essential, but defining "ready-to-eat" does not seem necessary because it is well understood.

3. It is proposed to introduce a definition of "Processing – peeling, slicing or cutting fresh fruit and vegetables, but excluding any treatment (e.g. cooking) which would prevent the product of being considered as "fresh".

Rationale: This would clarify the meaning of the term for this specific code, as in other Codes its meaning is much broader.

Title of section 3.1

It is proposed to replace the title "Environmental hygiene" by "Site Assessment"

Rationale: this wording gives a better description of the content of section 3.1.

Paragraph 11

It is proposed to include "industry" in the parenthesis that says (e.g. crop growth, feed lot, etc ...)

Rationale: as relevant as the other examples given.

Section 3.1.1

An additional paragraph is proposed:

"17bis Knowledge of the geology and soil metal content should be considered when determining which fruit and vegetables can be grown, as certain crops are more susceptible to absorb certain heavy metals (e.g. root crops and cadmium)."

Rationale: The soil type and geology might influence the safety of the food and should therefore be considered.

Paragraph 21, 3rd sub-bullet under 1st bullet

Include "storage" as follows "...provided the integrity of the water capture, **storage** and distribution system....."

Rationale: storage must also be considered.

Paragraph 21, 5 last bullets:

These bullets should become sub-bullets to the preceding bullet.

Rationale: editorial

Paragraph 22:

It is proposed to add an additional recommendation at the end: "**Where possible, primary producers should have a contingency plan in place that identifies an alternate source of water.**"

Rationale: It is unlikely that many of the listed corrective actions will have immediate effect and therefore there may be a need for an alternative safe supply whilst the compromised supply is restored to safety.

3.2.1.2 Title:

It is proposed to replace the term "natural fertilizer" by "organic fertilizer".

Rationale: natural fertiliser can include some inorganic fertilisers from natural sources. This is not the intent of the section.

Section 3.2.1.3

This Section would be better placed under Section 3.1.1

Rationale: seems to fit better under that Section.

Paragraph 67

It is proposed to move this paragraph to section 3.1.2.

Rationale: Section 3.4 focuses on cleaning, maintenance and sanitation at and after harvesting while paragraph 67 is on pest control at primary production (growing), which is addressed in section 3.1.2.

Paragraph 82

It is proposed to delete this paragraph

Rationale: It is a general statement that is not only relevant for the control of the operation but for the whole Code.

Paragraph 117

It is proposed to amend the paragraph as follows: "~~Operators such as Growers or, in cases where contract harvesters are used, they~~ should keep current all relevant information on agriculture activities such as information concerning each lot, sprays used, date harvested, grower contact information, harvest practices and water quality, if water used in harvesting."

Rationale: The responsibility for the described activities lays with the growers as defined in section 2.3.

Paragraph 121

It is proposed to replace the word "aggressive" by "efficient".

Rationale: The key point is the efficiency.

Specific comments to Annex I

Paragraph 3

It is proposed to delete this paragraph.

Rationale: Duplication of paragraph 2.

Paragraph 5

It is proposed to delete the last sentence.

Rationale: Repetition of the last sentence of paragraph 4.

Specific comments to Annex II

A logic order should be used representing the production chain in particular in Section 5 on the control of operations. Specific examples of moving texts are below.

Section 2.3

It is proposed to delete the definitions of "seed producer", "seed distributor" and "sprout producer".

Rationale: The EUMS consider that the meaning of these wordings is so obvious that no definition is needed.

Paragraph 18

It is proposed to replace this paragraph by the following: "**Decontamination of seeds prior to the sprouting process might be considered. Although there are other options like the use of lactic acid bacteria, liquid microbiological decontamination treatment is generally used. Alternative treatments such as heating seeds, alone or in combination with other treatments, could greatly improve the efficacy of seed decontamination. Such decontamination should never replace good hygiene practices during seeds production and distribution as no method of decontamination is available to ensure elimination of pathogens. Decontamination of seeds would need to be optimised for each type of seeds since its safety and efficiency should be evaluated including the consequences on the background microflora and its potential impact on pathogenic bacteria during sprouting. When decontamination is used, the manufacturing instructions for their**

intended use should be closely followed. The use of chemical decontamination may be subject to approval by the competent authority."

Rationale: The paragraph should not promote the use of antimicrobial agents for decontamination taking into account the increasing concern of antimicrobial resistance by the use of such products in the food chain. In addition, their safety and efficiency are not always demonstrated. There is no need to detail how decontamination should be used as long as the manufacturer's instructions are followed.

Measures to prevent the introduction of pathogens in sprouted seed production (as well as primary production of seeds) remain of the foremost importance. Alternative treatments such as heating seeds, alone or in combination with other treatments, could greatly improve the efficacy of seed decontamination. However, the temperature/time parameters should be optimized for each type of seed variety as not all of them will be suitable for the same treatment. Decontamination treatments should not kill seed or reduce the germination rate.

“Paragraph 20

The EUMS believe that this paragraph should be placed after section 5.2.2.3.1.

Rationale: This paragraph relates to sprouts, not seeds. It has probably been inserted in the wrong place.

Paragraphs 29 to 36

These paragraphs should be moved to Section 5 to follow a logical order of operations.

Rationale: The EUMS are aware that the Annexes try to follow the structure of the basic document; however Section 5.3 is on requirements for incoming materials for further processing after primary production. In Annex II, this is on control of seeds. The order used is therefore in contradiction with the structure of the basic texts and confusing as it does not follow the order of operations.

Paragraphs 37 and 38

Paragraph 38 should be deleted

Rationale: Paragraph 38 is a repetition of paragraph 37.

Paragraphs 39 and 40

Paragraph 40 should be deleted and paragraph 39 moved to Section 5.2.2.

Rationale: Paragraph 40 is a repetition of paragraph 39. Paragraph 39 should be moved to be consistent with the place of section 5.2.2.2.

Paragraphs 41

An additional sentence/paragraph should be inserted before paragraph 41: "**As regards recall procedures for sprouts: refer to items 5.8 of the Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CAC/RCP 53-2003)**".

Rationale: Section 5.8 only refers to recall of seeds while recall of sprouts should also be considered, as sprouts are identified as risky products.

Section 6, 7 and 8

It should be made clear if these sections refer to seeds, sprouts or both. The EUMS are of the view it should be both.

Rationale: Clarity.

Specific comments to Annex III

Paragraph 1

It is proposed to amend the last sentence as follows: "Fresh leafy vegetables are marketed both locally and globally to provide year round availability to consumers and a sold as fresh, fresh-cut, pre-cut or **other often sold as** ready to eat products such as pre-packed salads."

Rationale: All products mentioned are often RTE, not only the pre-packed salads.

Paragraph 2

It is proposed to delete the fourth sentence (starting "Fresh leafy vegetables are marketed ...")

Rationale: Repetition of paragraph 1.

Paragraph 19

It is proposed to delete the first sentence of the second bullet point and the whole third bullet point. In addition the second sentence of the second bullet point should be amended as follows: Consumers need specific and clear guidance on how to safely handle fresh-cut, pre-cut or **other often sold as** ready-to-eat (~~RTE~~) leafy vegetables."

Rationale: Fresh-cut and pre-cut products often are also ready-to-eat. No need for the abbreviation at the end of the document.

Specific comments to Annex IV

Section 2.3

It is proposed to delete the definition of melons.

Rationale: It does not seem to improve the understanding. Examples are given in the first sentence of paragraph 1 where other examples could be added if considered appropriate.

Paragraph 20

It is proposed to replace the last bullet point by the following: "**If microbiological agents are added to the water, levels must be sufficient for the temperature used.**"

Rationale: The use of antimicrobial agents should not be "recommended".