

EU reply

CL 2023/65/OCS-EXEC

Request for comments on the development of the Codex Strategic Plan 2026-2031 – Part 1 – how Codex works as part of the multilateral system on food and trade

Mixed Competence Member States Vote

The European Union and its Member States (EUMS) are pleased to provide the following comments to the questions raised in the Circular Letter.

- 1. Codex standards, put in place for food safety, quality, and nutrition, may also contribute to other areas. In your view, how could Codex support “*the broader global goals around sustainability, one health, food security and environmental protection through the development of international food standards that address any potential issues for consumer health protection or fair trade practices arising from implementation of initiatives to advance sustainability interests*”? Where do you see particular priorities for Codex?**

The EUMS acknowledge that the purpose of Codex as described in Article 1 of the Procedural Manual including “a) protecting the health of the consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade” and “b) promoting coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organisations” is broader than food safety, nutrition, and quality as currently considered in the development of Codex standards. The EUMS welcome this question and support full exploration of the potential of Codex to support global goals around sustainability, One Health, food security and environmental protection.

The EUMS are of the view that CAC should strive to prioritize such normative work that optimizes consumer health without compromising the health and wellbeing of animals or ecosystems.

To this end a first priority for Codex should be to systematically integrate considerations associated with the One Health approach and on sustainability in the submission of new work proposals. This priority includes the revision of the current procedures for the development of Codex MRLs of pesticides and veterinary drugs or Maximum Use Levels of additives. This approach would enable Codex to prioritize work that brings the most benefits to the sustainability of food systems. It would also help to identify from the outset possible concerns that would need to be addressed in the context of a One Health approach including the need to broaden the expertise used by Codex or to put in place close collaboration with other international organisations.

The second priority would be to ensure that Codex members remain fully abreast of the developments and needs associated with the transformation of systems and emerging challenges and in capacity to address these challenges. In this respect, the EUMS appreciate the ongoing discussion on New Food and Production System that was initiated by FAO and WHO. Codex should continue to assess information on emerging risks on food provided by its Members, its parent organisations and other international organizations.

2. The Quadripartite One Health Joint Plan of Action[1] focuses on supporting and expanding capacities in six areas, including the assessment, management and communication of food safety risks. It also promotes multinational, multi-sector, multidisciplinary collaboration. What benefits might there be to Codex and its Members from such collaboration across the multilateral system for trade and food?

As one of the purpose of Codex is the coordination of all international food standards, the EUMS are of the view that Codex can provide a major contribution to the One Health Joint Plan of Action. The EUMS note that the first paragraph of point 2.2.2 of Annex I states that

“Recent discussions in CAC and elsewhere have drawn attention to the broad meaning of terms such as ‘health’ and ‘fairness’. The meaning of these are well understood as related to food safety and quality in the context of Codex standard setting to ‘protect the health of consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade’. In broader contexts the terms ‘health’ and ‘fairness’ will naturally incorporate different aspects depending on the nature of the global initiative or the focus of the multilateral institution, for example, Codex standards, guidelines and codes of practice, should be implemented together with standards for other areas so as to have a holistic approach and address the synergistic impact of hazards from the diet, water, air and all sources when setting risk management measures.”

Codex, by expanding its work on the coordination of international food standards including the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), would allow to facilitate the implementation of a holistic approach that is required for a One Health approach.

The collaboration of Codex within the multilateral system would also enable to identify possible weaknesses in the current system to support the transformation of food systems. The long-standing experience of Codex for the development of science-based standards could be used to address these weaknesses.

In addition to the high-level global initiatives identified under paragraph 2.2.1, the EUMS note that the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Biodiversity Convention (CBD), the Rotterdam Convention, the Stockholm Conventions, or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are carrying out work that is relevant to food systems.

The review of Codex priorities (see reply to question 1) and the collaboration across the multilateral system should ensure that Codex standards:

- fully take into considerations recommendations or normative efforts of other international organization dealing with One Health issues and the sustainability of food systems;
- rely on a more comprehensive scientific basis;
- do not duplicate normative efforts of other international “One Health” organizations, including the members of the Quadripartite.