

**European Community comments on
CODEX CIRCULAR LETTER CL 2005/55-EXEC
Draft Strategic Plan 2008 - 2013
(ALINORM 06/29/3, paras. 35-36 and Appendix II)**

In response to Codex Circular Letter 2005/55-EXEC (“*Draft Strategic Plan 2008-2013*”), the European Community and its 25 Member States are pleased to offer the following comments.

The Member States of the European Community (MSEC) note the progress made and fully support the endorsement of the course of action recommended by the 57th Session of the Executive Committee for the preparation of the Strategic Plan 2008-2013. In particular, the MSEC support the new Strategic Plan structure and format comprising three parts as well as the procedure for its elaboration.

The Member States of the European Community would like to take this opportunity to forward a general comment on the schedule of the meetings of Codex Committees and Taskforces. We understand that a lot of constraints apply on this schedule but would like to question whether an effort could be made to spread these meetings more evenly over the year.

Part 1 of the Draft Strategic Plan 2008 - 2013

DECISION-MAKING BASED ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE

- The MSEC wish to express their deep concerns regarding the serious budgetary situation of the FAO/WHO expert committees and consultations. The MSEC therefore urge FAO and WHO to put in place the appropriate mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainable funding of this essential activity at the basis of the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, as indicated by the 55th Session of the Executive Committee.

GOAL 1: PROMOTING SOUND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

- On Paragraph 6, 1st bullet, 1st sentence: the MSEC wish to suggest to add the words: “**including feed when appropriate**” at the end of the sentence.
- Paragraph 6, 1st bullet, last sentence: the MSEC propose to replace “*safe food*” with: “*safe, **sound and wholesome** food*”.

GOAL 2: PROMOTING WIDEST AND CONSISTENT APPLICATION OF SCIENTIFIC PRINCIPLES AND RISK ANALYSIS

- The MSEC consider that in implementing the 2008-2013 strategic plan it is essential to take account of the capacity within WHO/FAO for providing scientific advice to support activities identified in the plan.

- Paragraph 8, a new 2nd sentence is suggested:

“The CAC recognises that it is of utmost importance to develop working principles for risk analysis intended for governments as required by article 5.1 of the SPS Agreement which requests WTO members to take into account of risk assessments techniques developed by the relevant international organisations”.

In this context the MSEC wish to recall that both the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) have issued guidance on risk analysis intended for governments, and that the Codex Alimentarius Commission remains the only WTO recognised international standard setting body not to have carried out this task.

GOAL 3: STRENGTHENING CODEX WORK-MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES

- Paragraph 14, 2nd bullet: in order to insist on the fact that work prioritisation should be carried out in an harmonised manner and that it should be avoided to develop specific rules for a particular subsidiary body, the MSEC suggest the modification of the sentence as follows:

“Ensuring that the Commission and its subsidiary bodies make decisions about work prioritization in an harmonised approach, using criteria...”.

GOAL 4: PROMOTING COOPERATION BETWEEN CODEX AND RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

- The MSEC are of the opinion that cooperation with other relevant international organisations dealing with food standardisation should be further improved, as it is essential to avoid co-existence of conflicting international standards and duplication of work. In addition it is of primary importance to confirm clear lines of demarcation between the officially recognised organisations while ensuring the coverage of the whole food chain.

The MSEC consider in particular that it is essential that “the relevant international organizations , and their subsidiary bodies, in particular the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the International Office of Epizootics (OIE - World Organization for Animal Health), and the international and regional organizations operating within the framework of the International Plant Protection Convention” strengthen their cooperation, their coordination of work, and exchange information and expertise where appropriate.

E.g. ongoing works on regionalisation, electronic certificates and certification, traceability, antimicrobial resistance have demonstrated that all relevant international organizations may have a complementary role and that dialogue and cooperation should be encouraged and strengthened as often as possible.

Possible problems such as overlap of work, conflicting international standards (or lack of international standards) should be avoided. Technical consultations, ad hoc working groups or any other possible form of regular dialogue between the relevant international organizations, including FAO and WHO, should be encouraged. Particular attention should also be paid to cover the entire food chain (including feed when appropriate) and avoid gaps.

- It is rather odd that while “Promoting cooperation between Codex and relevant International Intergovernmental Organizations”, none of the latter are clearly mentioned under paragraphs 14 and 15. The only **direct reference to other relevant International Intergovernmental Organizations, as listed in Article 3.4 of the SPS agreement (i.e. OIE and IPPC)**, is found in Part 2 of the Draft Strategic Plan 2008 - 2013 (“Programme Areas and planned Activities 2008-2013”; under “4.4 Consider cooperation with other relevant international intergovernmental organizations”).

To facilitate the promotion of this cooperation, the relevant International Intergovernmental Organizations concerned should be clearly mentioned (at least those referred to in Article 3.4 of the SPS agreement). To this end, a sentence could be added to **paragraph 15**:

“Priority should be given to linkages/relations between the main relevant international organizations, including FAO and WHO, and their subsidiary bodies, in particular the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), and the international and regional organizations operating within the framework of the International Plant Protection Convention. Linkages with the relevant international conventions (e.g., Environment field) for Codex standards setting could also be considered as a priority.”

GOAL 5: PROMOTING MAXIMUM AND EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS

- It is important that developing countries actively participate in international standard setting bodies, including Codex. The **FAO/WHO Fund for Enhanced Participation in Codex (Codex Trust Fund)** has been established through the generosity of a number of donors keen to promote this objective. Generally the participation of experts from developing countries has led to increased awareness on Codex in the developing countries and has had positive effects on the national environment, including in some cases the setting up of a national food safety system.

The European Community is the largest donor to the Fund having contributed over € 560,000 between 2003 and 2005. Some Member States of the European Community, in particular Germany, Ireland, The Netherlands and Sweden (as well as non-EC Members of the Coordinating Committee for Europe (CCEURO) such as Norway and Switzerland) are also contributing significantly.

- The **Regional Coordinating Committees** have demonstrated their usefulness in terms of preparation to the work of the Commission and of its subsidiary bodies, in terms of training and raising of awareness on Codex among Members and, last but not least, in terms of Regional Coordination and dialogue.

In order to keep uniformity and coherence in the terms of reference of all Regional Coordinating Committees, the MSEC are in favour of recommending to apply the same amendment to the terms of reference of all Coordinating Committees.

Part 2 of the Draft Strategic Plan 2008 - 2013 (“Programme Areas and planned Activities 2008-2013”

- There is a continuing need to promote the use of the working languages in Codex work, including in working groups. In that regard, a specific effort should be undertaken as regards availability of Codex documents in all working languages.

The MSEC suggest to add a new objective between current 5.2 and 5.3 which could be formulated as follows:

5.3 Promote the widest use of the official working languages in Codex work
Description: Put in place the facilities which allow all Codex meetings (including working groups) to be followed and conducted in all official working languages. Ensure that all Codex documents are available in all the official working languages.
Timeline: Continuing
Responsible parties: CAC, all subsidiary bodies