

# Science-Based Standards for the Global Marketplace: Codex Alimentarius and Spices

Mary Frances Lowe

U.S. Codex Office

2014 ASTA Legislative/Regulatory Workshop

October 15, 2013

# Overview

- What is the Codex Alimentarius?
- Relationship to Trade Agreements
- Core principles and values
- International Codex Organization
- Committees of interest to the spices industry
- U.S. Codex Organization and Policy

# What is the Codex Alimentarius?

- Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Program (180+ members, 200+ observer organizations)
- Dual mandate:
  - Protect consumer health
  - Ensure fair practices in the food trade
- Responsible for coordinating international standards with the goal of harmonization
- Codex standards are voluntary

# How Countries Use Codex Standards

- Some Codex members use Codex standards as their domestic standards and/or apply them to imported foods (may make standards mandatory)
- The U.S. does not automatically accept
- U.S. regulatory agencies must base their decisions on the procedures and standards established in U.S. law
- May also be used in private commercial transactions

# Relationship between Codex Standards and Trade Agreements (SPS & TBT)

- Trade agreements encourage harmonization and call for WTO members to base their standards on international standards
- Codex is recognized as *the* international standards-setting body for food safety standards (this means....)



# Codex Standards and Trade Agreements

- Countries that adopt Codex standards benefit from a presumption that their standards are consistent with their obligations under the SPS Agreement that requirements be based on science and risk assessment.
- This presumption is of particular benefit to countries with limited resources. Adoption of Codex standards not only fulfills their trade obligations, it also ensures that they have food safety standards in place that are based on international scientific review.

# Core principles and values: The Role of Science in Codex

The food standards, guidelines and other recommendations of Codex Alimentarius shall be based on the principle of sound scientific analysis and evidence, involving a thorough review of all relevant information, in order that the standards assure the quality and safety of the food supply....

Consideration of other factors should not affect the scientific basis of risk analysis.

---Codex Procedural Manual, Statements of Principle

# Codex Core Values

- Collaboration
- Inclusiveness
- Consensus building
- Transparency

---Strategic Plan of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, 2014-2019



# Codex Strategic Goals

- Establish standards to address current and emerging issues
- Ensure application of risk analysis principles, including using expert scientific advice to the fullest extent possible and securing sustainable access to expert scientific advice
- Facilitate effective participation by all members
- Implement effective and efficient work management practices

---Strategic Plan of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, 2014-2019

# International Codex Structure

- Codex Committees recommend standards
  - --Types of committees and standards (horizontal, general, commodity)
  - --Committees chaired by host governments, who bear costs of hosting
  - --Varying schedules
- Final adoption by Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) through 8-Step procedure

# Risk Assessment and Risk Management in Codex

- For certain types of standards, Codex relies on independent international FAO/WHO expert bodies to perform risk assessments
- Based on those risk assessments, Codex Committees make risk management recommendations to the CAC

# Codex Committees Relevant to the Spices Industry *(It depends on the issue...)*

- “Horizontal” Committees (food safety focus)
  - Committee on Food Hygiene (U.S.) (recently completed Code of Hygienic Practice adopted in 2014)
  - Committee on Pesticide Residues (China) (MRLs)
  - Committee on Contaminants (Netherlands) (Maximum Limits for mycotoxins, heavy metals, etc. Electronic working group on feasibility of Code of Practice for mycotoxins in spices, chaired by India and co-chaired by EU and Indonesia)
  - Committee on Methods of Analysis and Sampling (Hungary) (potentially relevant, depending on standards that are developed in commodity committee)

# Codex Committees Relevant to the Spices Industry (2)

- General Subject Committees (potentially relevant)
  - Committee on Food Labelling (Canada)
  - Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (Australia)
  - Committee on General Principles (France)
- Commodity Committees (focus on quality, not safety)
  - Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (U.S.)  
("borderline" products; recently recommended that standards for paprika, and dried ginger, garlic and pepper could be handled by CCSCH)
  - Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (India)



# Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs

- **Newest Codex Committee:** created in 2013, first meeting in February 2014 (U.S. and ASTA/IOSTA played key role in keeping Terms of Reference in line with Codex scope)
- **Mandate:** develop quality standards for spices and culinary herbs in their dried and dehydrated state in whole, ground, and cracked or crushed form, consulting as necessary with other international standards organizations
- **Standards currently under development:** black, white and green (and red?) pepper; oregano; thyme; cumin; also working groups on prioritization and grouping issues)

# Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (2)

- **Next meeting:** September 2015. Working group reports, proposals for additional standards
- **U.S. Leads:**
  - Delegate: Dorian LaFond (Agricultural Marketing Service)
  - Alternate Delegate: George Ziobro (FDA)
  - U.S. Codex Office Staff Officer: Ken Lowery
- **Public Meeting** in advance of meeting to review U.S. positions
- **ASTA** also has input through IOSTA as an official Codex observer organization

# U.S. Codex Organization

- U.S. Codex Office, located in USDA/FSIS—policy, coordination, and outreach responsibilities. Staff Officers for each Codex Committee
- Delegates drawn from responsible regulatory agencies
- Political level Codex Policy Committee, chaired by USDA Under Secretary for Food Safety
- Senior staff level Codex Technical Committee

# Over-arching Goals of U.S. Food Policy and Regulatory System

- Safe, varied, abundant and affordable food supply for consumers
- Predictable and accountable regulatory environment for all stakeholders
- Leadership in science and technology for safety and quality

# How the United States Benefits from Codex

As a major agricultural importer:

- Enhances protection for American consumers
- Facilitates compliance with harmonized standards

As a major agricultural exporter:

- Opens markets
- Enhances acceptance of new technologies
- Fair trade in safe food



# Questions?

## Contact information:

Mary Frances Lowe

U.S. Manager for Codex Alimentarius

202 720 2057

202 205 7760

[maryfrances.lowe@fsis.usda.gov](mailto:maryfrances.lowe@fsis.usda.gov)

## Web sites:

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov/codex/>

(U.S. Codex information, including public meeting info)

<http://www.codexalimentarius.org/>

(reports and international meeting documents)