

## **Report prepared by Guyana- Crystal Nunes, Senior Food Inspector (ag)**

**Name of Codex Committee Meeting attended:** CCFL 47 Codex Committee on Food Labelling, 15/05/2023 to 19/05/2023, Gatineau (Ottawa) Canada

The National Codex Committee (NCC) consists of nineteen members from governmental, private, academic, consumer and non-governmental organisations. Members of the NCC do not change often unless they are unable to represent their organization. The Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the NCC are elected biennially. They are nominated by the NCC and the Chairperson is required to be a senior manager from the public sector. Responsibilities of the Committee include: advising the government on decisions regarding Codex standards, the composition of Guyana's delegation for Codex meetings, formulating the country's response to the proposals from the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) and appointing sub-committees. The meetings are conducted every quarter. The national sub-committees are established in the identified Codex Committees of Interest. Members of the sub-committee are tasked with reviewing related circular letters and participating in Electronic Working Groups and Codex meeting documents. Sub-committee members consist of experts in the related subject areas and may also include members of the NCC. The meetings of the sub-committee are not regulated and they may meet at any time to discuss matters.

The documents for the meeting were downloaded and circulated to members of the sub-committee for their input on the agenda items of interest. The sub-committee on Food labelling consisted of representatives from the Government Analyst- Food and Drug Department, Guyana School of Agriculture, Veterinary Public Health Unit, Guyana Food Safety Authority and the New Guyana Marketing Corporation. A timeline was established for the submission of comments from members. A meeting was conducted for the sub-committee to discuss the items and a draft national position was formulated based on the discussions. The draft report was then sent to the National Codex Committee for their input and comments. On approval by members of the National Codex Committee, the national position was submitted to the Codex secretariat for submission as a Conference Room Document (CRD).

Please see the attached Conference Room Document presented during the meeting.

Results Achieved:

These are the outcomes of the agenda items that national positions were submitted for on behalf of Guyana.

1. There were many discussions on the Priority list of allergens and the list of regional allergens that may be declared in the proposed revision of the GSLPF. The FAO representative explained the risk analysis conducted by the Expert Working Group to determine the placement of these allergens in the respective

lists. As such, the committee voted to retain the lists as proposed and to move the section, Provisions relevant to allergen labelling, to step 5 with Australia retaining the Chair of the Working Group and the USA and UK as co-chairs. The working group will further develop the revision taking into account the discussions at the session for circulation at Step 6 and consideration for CCL48.

The committee agreed to return the proposed draft Annex, Guidelines on the use of precautionary allergen labelling to Step 2 for further drafting under the supervision of the previous Chairs and co-chairs: Australia, UK, USA. Also, Request CCMAS to recommend suitable analytical methods and guidance on their validation and applications including sampling plans for determining allergenic protein in foods.

2. CCFL 47 agreed to retain the original WTO definition of the term “e-commerce” with an amendment that it is related to foods: *“The production, distribution, marketing, sale or delivery of goods and services by electronic means as applicable to foods.”* The Secretary noted both proposed definitions were workable however the broader definition might be more suitable to cover any future developments in the e-commerce of foods. The committee also agreed to retain the definition in square brackets until the related text in section 5.3 was finalized.
3. The Proposed draft guidelines on the use of technology to provide food information were agreed to be made a stand-alone document. This document will be referenced and linked in the GSLPF. The committee agreed for the section to be advanced to Step 5 of the standard development procedure. The Working Group chaired by Canada with New Zealand and India will reconvene to further develop the section based on the discussions had at the meeting.
4. Colombia presented on the discussion paper to determine the gaps in the GSLPF with regards to joint presentation and multipack formats. The committee agreed to start new work on this matter and to have a project document submitted for approval by CAC46. A working group that is Chaired by Colombia and co-chaired by Jamaica will be developed.
5. The committee agreed for Costa Rica to prepare a discussion paper on the definition of added sugars and that the discussion paper would take into account the need for including sugar on the nutrient declaration list.

The objective of the project, which was “To promote development in the countries of the capabilities required

to participate more effectively in and benefit more from the Codex Alimentarius and to promote a regional approach to Codex issues (CCLAC)” was achieved. CCLAC members from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Haiti, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago were able to attend the meeting in person whilst the others were able to join virtually. CCLAC members met daily to discuss matters and positions on Agenda items for the respective days. CCLAC also met with the EU delegation to discuss Agenda items of mutual concern. Representation was vital since CCLAC members successfully supported Colombia to continue their work on the labelling requirements for joint presentation and multipack formats.

Guyana’s ability to attend this meeting was the most fitting since our dated regulations for prepackaged foods do not adequately address the modern issues regarding the labelling of foods. As a regulator, it was also quite beneficial for me to first learn of the procedures involved in the development of standards, and the rationale behind certain requirements and also learn from the more experienced players in the food trade. As I continue to work within the committee, I endeavour to have Guyana work and present on a Discussion paper of interest or even chair or co-chair a working group. This can only be achieved through Guyana’s commitment to allow for continuous participation in these committees and research as required, and also the support by sponsorship from our partners.

It is amazing how much work has been done and will continue to be done internationally on food labelling standards and yet Guyana still enforces a 1977 labelling regulation. A labelling regulation that does not adequately address the matters arising in the current world, matters such as food allergen labelling, labelling of foods sold in multipacks, labelling of foods offered via e-commerce, and labelling exemptions in emergencies, amongst others. Though Codex standards are used as a reference document, these requirements cannot be enforced when required. The usefulness of Codex standards is universally known and in Guyana should be more easily enforceable as required. Training of stakeholders can attempt to bridge the gap of them being aware of these internationally accepted standards and have them implemented.

Guyana has commenced work on the review of the current Food and Drugs legislation. This is the most opportune time for considerations to be made to include the requirements of the Codex Guidelines for the Labelling of prepackaged foods.

Improvement of the laboratories' analytical capabilities must also be considered to determine compliance with labelling declarations; especially for nutritional facts declarations (including added sugars), Precautionary Allergen Labelling requirements and so on.

This has been a very rewarding experience for me to attend my first Codex meeting and for this, I am most grateful. I would love to continue to work on this committee, share my knowledge with our local experts, and learn how we as a country can improve our local food industry and facilitate trade. This will entail keeping abreast with the documents generated by the committee, commenting and contributing to the development of

national positions, participating in the working groups and lending support to my CCLAC colleagues, as needed. In preparation for CCFL48, I intend to lend support to Costa Rica, Colombia and Jamaica for the preparation of the Discussion Paper and the Electronic Working Group.

One area that should be noted for improvement is that a designated translator should be assigned to CCLAC during meetings to allow for better communication between the English and Spanish delegates. The official language of the majority of the CCLAC delegation was Spanish, therefore it was easier for them to deliberate in that language, oftentimes leaving the English delegates (minority) out of the conversation. English delegates miss the real essence of the discussions and therefore are not able to contribute meaningfully to the discussions. Another intervention that can also be made is for more English CCLAC members to attend the meetings to balance the sessions.