



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



**High Level Political Forum 2021
6-15 July 2021**

“Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”

ANNEX 5

Inputs by CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

The Codex Alimentarius Commission, hereafter Codex, develops international science-based food standards that protect the health of the consumers and ensure fair practices in the food trade. Codex is the central pillar of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (the others being scientific advice and capacity building). Codex standards are adopted primarily by consensus by Codex’ 189 Members. They provide a framework for food safety and quality, creating a transparent rule-based trading environment reducing risks for those operating in the increasingly complex international trading system while ensuring the protection of consumers’ health. For the ongoing pandemic not to disrupt the vital international food supply chains, food must continue to adhere to food safety standards and measures to reduce possible transmission of the virus causing the pandemic must also be followed to keep workers safe. Applying general principles of food hygiene essentially contribute to both goals. Codex standards offer a framework and guidance to support the continuation of the production of safe food and open food trade amid the pandemic thereby supporting in particular SDG 1, 2 3 and 8.

Digital technology has been key to ensuring Codex continues its standard-setting work in the context of the pandemic. One of the characteristics of Codex is its global network and forum to address food safety issues. Prior to 2020, this was built on an extensive programme of physical meetings of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies hosted by various governments in their countries. The successful transformation into a virtual network and forum has ensured that Codex could continue developing its standards and beyond that Codex will incorporate the experiences of the pandemic into its strategic planning and prioritization of work. The actions taken will ensure that both now and beyond the pandemic, Codex standards and the process of their development are sufficiently resilient and flexible to continue to underpin national efforts of protecting consumers and expanding food trade.

Suggested outline¹

¹ The headings and bullets are included as per the suggested outline annexed to the letter of the President of ECOSOC.

a. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the SDGs under review

The response measures to COVID-19 initially stalled international standard-setting work and presented new challenges for countries in overseeing the implementation of food standards, threatening in particular access to safe and nutritious food, key to the achievement of SDG 2 and 3.

However, the pandemic has driven a rapid transformation in the standard setting and implementation arenas with a significant shift to virtual technology for meetings permitting Codex to continue adopting standards including key texts on food hygiene, which underpin food safety and help counteract concerns related to food safety and COVID-19, and regional commodity standards which are key to trade and economic development. Delays in standard setting in some areas such as Maximum Residue Levels have been felt particularly by the industry. Dialogue to identify ways of minimizing further delays and optimizing the tools available to support progression is ongoing.

Virtual technology has maintained and indeed increased Member engagement in Codex standard-setting work and reaffirmed the importance of Codex standards and the role they play in the context of managing food safety particularly during a global pandemic. Core values such as inclusiveness and transparency have guided all the measures taken by the Codex Secretariat, the Executive Committee and the Commission and helped strengthen the partnership that the Codex Alimentarius represents. There has been a stronger narrative on the value and impact of Codex standards and how they support national efforts to achieve the SDGs leading to the development of a report on Codex and the SDGs with case studies illustrating how Codex work supports efforts to achieve SDG 1, 2, 3, 8 12 and 17².

b. Actions, policy guidance, progress, challenges and areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the SDGs

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of facilitating trade and the movement of food to ensure access in line with SDG 2. With the measures to curb the pandemic reducing the availability of personnel to undertake checks, digital technology became key to preventing delays particularly in the case of perishable goods and ensuring smooth and timely delivery of goods.

Codex standards related to food import and export inspection systems already lay a strong foundation to facilitate food trade but additional standards to facilitate the widespread acceptance and uptake of digital technology in this field are required and initial discussions will begin this year to map out the way forward (CCFICS). The implementation of the internationally agreed standards of Codex as a means of ensuring confidence in the safety of the global food supply remains critical to SDG 1, 2, 3 and 8 and is an area where further investment is needed.

Ongoing concerns about the potential for COVID-19 to be transmitted via certain food routes and how these concerns are managed is critical to ensure that such concerns do not lead to food waste and

² Codex and the SDG. 2020. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb0222en/cb0222en.pdf>

undermine SDGs 12 and 2. The strength of virtual engagement which Codex has achieved in 2021 will form an important basis for addressing these issues in 2021 and beyond.

c. An assessment of the situation regarding the principle of “ensuring that no one is left behind”

Codex provides the global community with science-based standards that can help countries to meet a number of SDG targets especially across SDGs 1, 2, 3, 8, 12 and 17³. When countries participate fully and effectively in the development of Codex standards, they are better able to benefit from the economic development offered by access to international trade in food. This is particularly important as the economy of many of these countries is heavily reliant on agriculture.

While virtual technology can make Codex committees more accessible, Codex has also recognized that operating virtually may also actually increase the divide to those that are more vulnerable. Members have tasked the Secretariat to undertake a study in 2021 on barriers to effective engagement in Codex work and to identify approaches to overcome them. This, together with efforts to showcase the role that Codex standards can play in supporting country efforts to achieve the SDGs and monitoring of progress in the context of the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-25 will underpin the efforts of Codex to ensure no one is left behind.

d. Cooperation, measures and commitments at all levels in promoting sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of an evidence and science-based approach to standard setting and decision making and there have been ongoing calls from Members to continue to strengthen the scientific basis of Codex. FAO had responded to this request by allocating additional resources to the provision of scientific advice and WHO have underlined this in their recent WHA resolution on Food safety. Having strong science-based standards that Members can trust is key to moving forward and will ensure that food safety is a keystone to resilient food systems.

e. Various measures and policy recommendations on building an inclusive and effective path for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

Codex established a sub-committee entitled “Codex and the Pandemic – Strategic challenges and opportunities” to develop ideas to avoid further delays in the Codex standard development process caused by the current pandemic and build resilience for future crises. This work has given Codex the flexibility and engagement to continue to develop the standards countries need during the pandemic and the recovery period that will follow.

Codex has strengthened its engagement in other global initiatives such as the UN Food Systems Summit under the auspices of monitoring the implementation of the Codex Strategic Plan 2020-2025.

³ Codex and the SDG. 2020. Available at <http://www.fao.org/3/cb0222en/cb0222en.pdf>

This ensures a regular forum for discussion and adaption of approaches to support and contribute to the ongoing global initiatives for strong resilient food systems producing safe good quality food that can be traded internationally.

The Codex Secretariat has also worked closely with FAO and WHO to develop policies and guidance (<http://www.fao.org/food-safety/covid-19-materials/en/>) to help members mitigate the impacts of the pandemic and boost their resilience for the longer term by facilitating and accelerating food and agricultural trade, and transforming food systems.

Selected recommendations for accelerating progress towards achievement of specific SDGs under review in 2021, which are, 1 on no poverty, 2 on zero hunger, 3 on good health and well-being, 8 on decent work and economic growth, 10 on reduced inequalities, 12 on responsible consumption and production, 13 on climate action, 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, and 17 on partnerships.