



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

# Lifting the lid on world food standards

## What the Australian food industry needs to know about CODEX

**Codex Alimentarius is Latin for "code" and "food". Simply translated, it means "food code".**

The Codex Alimentarius Commission has its headquarters in Rome and is a body set up by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the World Health Organisation.

It coordinates input from more than 160 countries (including Australia) to develop and endorse the standards that comprise the international food code.

Called "Codex" for short, the code was set up in 1962 to protect consumer health and ensure fair practices in world food trade.

With more than 200 standards already endorsed by member countries throughout the world, the code continues to grow with new standards being debated and endorsed each year.

### What does an organisation based in Rome have to do with me?

Even though the Commission is based in Rome, its work could have a bearing on your future as a food processor, food producer and food exporter – particularly if there is a draft standard under debate with the potential to impact dramatically on your core business.

### What are the issues for me as a food producer and food exporter?

Codex standards are a global reference point for international food trade. Many countries insist on compliance with Codex standards for their imports. So if you plan on doing business across a number of markets and you can't comply with relevant Codex standards, you may add significant costs to production.

Codex standards are also linked to World Trade Organisation agreements; and at least two of these agreements require member countries to align their domestic standards with international standards wherever possible.

The important part for you (if you are exporting or considering exporting) is that Codex standards are increasingly being used as benchmarks in World Trade Organisation dispute settlement processes.

And the bottom line with Codex compliance? Where a trade dispute arises between countries, you may find you are excluded from exporting.

Another point to be aware of is that many developing countries rely on Codex because they don't have the resources to develop risk-based food safety systems.

So if you plan to export to developing countries, Codex compliance is a wise business decision.

## Why is Australia involved in Codex standards?

The Australian Government contributes to the development of Codex standards because food is one of our most important exports and we export more than half of all the food we produce.

We also contribute to Codex to ensure that international standards are based on sound scientific principles.

By doing this, we maximise our opportunity to influence the success of Australian food exports by creating a more level playing field on which exporters can compete.

## But we need your help.



To help understand the potential impact of Codex proposals on Australia's food industry and consumers, the Australian Government requires industry input and the provision of expertise and comment on the key standards under debate.

This brochure explains how you can help and how you can play a part in influencing the direction of standards that may affect your industry.

It outlines the Codex committee process and the Codex consultation processes that exist within Australia and on an international level. It also explains how Codex standards are developed, debated and endorsed and when and how you can contribute to them.

And even if you think you have nothing to offer, this brochure lets you know how you can join the debate on new standards and be across planned changes that may affect your business.

## The more involved you are, the more you can influence the process – and the greater your competitive advantage.

With knowledge of the standards under debate, you gain two major advantages – the chance to have your say and the chance to plan for future impacts on your company from applying or being forced to comply with a newly-adopted Codex standard.

With time to plan for the impact of future changes and time to get involved in the Codex debate to ensure your company's future, factoring Codex into your strategic planning process now is definitely a smart business move.

## What are Codex standards about?

Standards under debate by Codex have the potential to affect the majority of food producers. Depending on what you produce or export, you may find the need to keep abreast of quite a number of Codex activities.

### Food processing standards

There are nine Codex committees and one task force that develop general standards and guidelines that cut across industry. These are:

- Pesticide Residues
- Food Import and Export Certification and Inspection Systems
- Residues of Veterinary Drugs in Foods
- Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses
- Food Labelling
- Methods of Analysis and Sampling
- General Principles
- Food Additives and Contaminants
- Food Hygiene
- Animal Feeding (taskforce).

### Food commodity standards

There are eleven committees and one taskforce that develop specific standards and guidelines related to food commodity groupings. These are:

- Processed Fruits and Vegetables
- Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
- Fruit and Vegetable Juices (taskforce)
- Natural Mineral Waters
- Cocoa Products and Chocolate
- Fish and Fishery Products
- Sugars
- Milk and Milk Products
- Fats and Oils
- Meat Hygiene
- Cereals, Pulses and Legumes
- Vegetable Proteins.

## So how can industry play a part?

Australia has consultative mechanisms that allow all interested parties to play a role in contributing to the Codex standards setting process.

### Introducing Codex Australia

Codex Australia coordinates Australia's position on priority Codex standards. It expresses Australian views in Codex Alimentarius Commission forums and it distributes documents under consideration to interested members of the food industry for comment.

### How can industry provide input?

Members of the food industry are invited to register with Codex Australia (see contact details at the back of this brochure) to provide input to the development of Australian positions on Codex standards under debate.

Besides commenting on Codex discussion papers, you can contribute by providing input to meetings of the National Codex Committee and Codex Advisory Panels or nominating representatives to attend meetings as part of Australian delegations.

The National Codex Committee and Codex Advisory Panels are consultative forums coordinated and convened by Codex Australia.

### National Codex Committee

The National Codex Committee comprises government, food industry and consumer representatives. It provides high-level advice on Australia's input to the Codex Alimentarius Commission and it endorses Australia's priorities for input to Codex work.

### Codex Advisory Panels

Codex Advisory Panels coordinate technical and policy input to Codex issues between government, industry and consumer organisations. They also make recommendations to the National Codex Committee regarding priorities for Codex work.

### Australian delegations

These delegations travel to Codex committee meetings to present and argue Australian positions on Codex issues. Delegations are led by Australian Government officials but your attendance at these meetings is welcome.

## CASE STUDY

## How Australian orange juice producers protected their export market.....

In May 2003, an Australian delegation attended the 3rd session of the Ad Hoc Codex Intergovernmental Taskforce on Fruit and Vegetable Juices in Brazil – at that meeting they secured a significant win for Australian orange juice exporters.

Thanks to the committed involvement and input of Australia's orange growers and orange juice exporters prior to the meeting, the delegation argued successfully that a Codex standard proposing changes to soluble solids (Brix) levels in orange juice should be amended.

Thankfully, the amendment was adopted into the standard – because without it, the standard under debate would have required Australian exporters to meet soluble solids levels much higher than the naturally occurring levels that exist in Australia.

It was a government-industry partnership that has paid handsome dividends.

## So how are Codex standards developed?

**The Codex Alimentarius Commission chooses proposals for new international standards using a set of established criteria.**

Requests for new standards may come from individual member governments or through the Codex committee system and, once approved, work is allocated to the most suitable committee.

All new proposals must then undergo an 8-Step standards development process before a new standard can be adopted by a full meeting of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Throughout the development process, expert technical bodies are often engaged and more than 160 countries are consulted. And because of this, it can often take many years before a new standard is endorsed and adopted into the food code.

### How long does the 8-Step process take?

Some standards take longer to be endorsed than others, particularly if the issues involved are contentious.

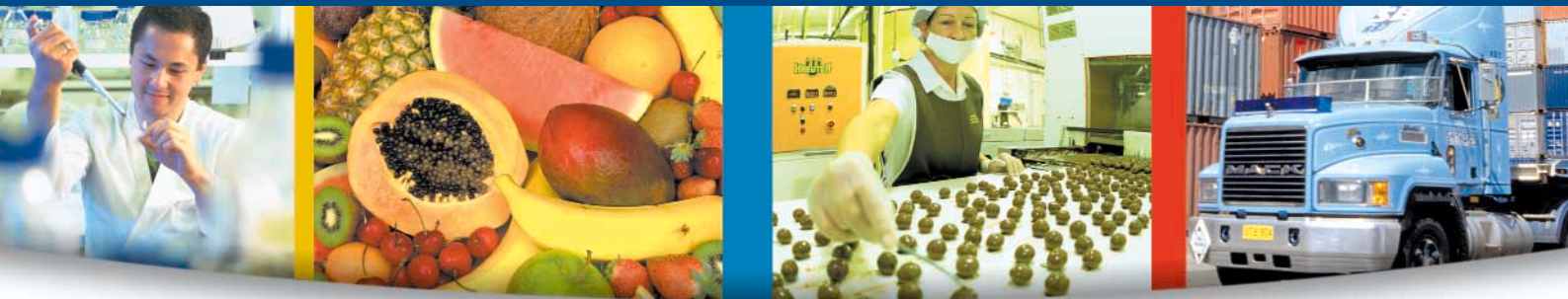
We can't give an average timeframe because the standards development process doesn't run to a timetable — the most important part is that all member countries are included and all member countries agree.

It is a requirement of the process that consensus is achieved on technical and policy matters for each proposed standard before it can progress to the next step in the process.

This requirement, and the lengthy time between meetings of the Commission and its committees, means that progressing a standard through all eight steps of the process can take many years — and that's why Codex should be considered a long-range planning process.

### What the 8-Step Codex process involves





### **Don't miss your chance to comment**

Step 3 and Step 6 are the best times for you to submit comments to the Codex process. Don't leave it until Step 8 because debate and amendments at this stage are minor in nature. Proposals don't usually reach Step 8 unless it is likely that the standard will be adopted, so get in early if you want to influence the process.

### **What happens when a standard is adopted?**

World Trade Organisation members (including Australia) are required, where possible, to align domestic food standards with Codex standards.

Because Codex standards play a part in influencing Australian food standards and local competitive conditions, it makes good business sense for the food industry to take an interest in Codex developments and contribute actively to Codex standards setting activities.

### **How can I get involved?**

Codex Australia encourages your input to specific agenda items being considered by Codex committees. It distributes Codex papers widely to stakeholders for comment and it holds regular forums where stakeholders can discuss Codex matters.



## **How Australian food producers are influencing their trading futures through Codex.**

### **Milk and milk products**

An Australian delegation with dairy industry representation recently succeeded in proposing that the Codex standard on fermented milks be amended to include drinkable water as a raw ingredient. Without this amendment, the export of Australian milk powder may have decreased dramatically due to the inability of manufacturers in the destination market to use milk powder and water in their end product.

Australia has also persuaded Taiwan to adopt a Codex standard on dairy products. This means we can keep exporting our milk powder to Taiwan and the adoption of this standard may set a trend for neighbouring countries to follow.

### **Olive oil**

Australia has been successful so far in arguing that a Codex standard for olive oil production keeps linolenic acid content at a level Australia can achieve. The new Codex standard will supersede standards set by the International Olive Oil Council in trade situations so the future of Australia's trade in olive oil depends on our success in this debate.

## Join the Codex web community now and get involved with Codex issues.

### Comment on Codex discussion papers and give opinions in stakeholder forums

To join in our stakeholder forums and receive Codex papers for comment, call Codex Australia on (02) 6272 4542 or email [codex.contact@affa.gov.au](mailto:codex.contact@affa.gov.au)

### Subscribe to our FREE e-news bulletin

For all the latest on new draft standards and progress with standards under debate including results of Codex committee meetings, subscribe to the *Setting the Standard* e-news bulletin at the Codex Australia web community:

[www.codexaustralia.gov.au](http://www.codexaustralia.gov.au)

### Read Codex discussion papers

You can also read and download copies of Codex discussion papers and existing standards at the Codex international website:

[www.codexalimentarius.net](http://www.codexalimentarius.net)

### Join a Codex Advisory Panel

Convened by Codex Australia, these panels seek stakeholder views on the development of an Australian position to take to Codex meetings. If you wish, you can choose to attend the subsequent debrief meetings.

### Be part of an Australian delegation as an observer

Australian delegations attend meetings for priority Codex issues. When a Codex committee meets about an issue you are interested in, you are welcome to send a representative along.

Delegations are made up of Australian Government officials and only government officials can speak at the meetings, however we would appreciate having you there to contribute your technical and operational knowledge to our efforts.

