Overview of current trends within the Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH)

The Codex Committee on Food Hygiene (CCFH) was established in 1964 and is hosted by the government of the United States of America. This Committee works according to the following terms of reference:

a. To draft basic provisions on food hygiene applicable to all food;
b. To consider, amend if necessary and endorse provisions on hygiene prepared by Codex commodity committees and contained in Codex commodity standards, and
c. Consider, amend if necessary, and endorse provisions on hygiene prepared by Codex commodity committees and contained in Codex codes of practice unless, in specific cases, the Commission has decided otherwise, or
d. To draft provisions on hygiene applicable to specific food items or food groups, whether coming within the terms of reference of a Codex commodity committee or not;
e. To consider specific hygiene problems assigned to it by the Commission;
f. To suggest and prioritize areas where there is a need for microbiological risk assessment at the international level and to develop questions to be addressed by the risk assessor;
g. To consider microbiological risk management matters in relation to food hygiene and in relation to the risk assessment of FAO and WHO.

In 1997, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) adopted the ‘Revised Recommended International Code of Practice – General Principles of Food Hygiene’, which emphasised a risk-based approach for establishing food hygiene measures and included an annex on the application of HACCP systems to improve food safety management. With the revision of this fundamental text, CCFH recognised the need to reconsider older codes of practice with a view to bringing them in line with the ‘General principles of food hygiene’.

Where there are many common issues for consideration in codes of practice for related products, these products could be considered together. It was agreed that a risk-based approach incorporating HACCP principles be used to identify those aspects of general hygienic practice which are of critical importance to the hygienic production and/or processing of products within the scope of each sector or product specific code.

Another important trend within the CCFH is its emphasis on microbiological risk assessment to guide its work on standards development. A 1995 Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation on Application of Risk Analysis to Food Standards Issues recommended that, in relation to biological hazards in foods:

“...standards, processes and procedures contained within Codex standards and codes of practice should be based on sound science and quantitative risk assessment to the maximum extent possible. This would imply an analysis of individual biological hazards in a broad range of foods, rather than the study of multiple risks associated with single foods.”
FAO and WHO convened an expert consultation in March 1999 to examine the issue of microbiological risk assessment (MRA) in an international forum. In accordance with the recommendations of this consultation, a Joint Expert Committee on Microbiological Risk Assessment (JEMRA [www]) was established to advise CCFH on selected pathogen/commodity combinations.

CCFH finalised Principles and Guidelines for the Conduct of Microbiological Risk Assessment that were adopted by CAC in 1999. The Committee is currently developing Principles and Guidelines for the Conduct of Microbiological Risk Management.

**Ongoing and recent work of CCFH:**

Click here [www] for the full text of the Codex Alimentarius publication “Food Hygiene Basic Texts”, available from the Codex website.

Recent and ongoing work within the CCFH is consistent with the recognised importance of a more ‘horizontal’ and risk-based approach to standards development. Up-to-date information on discussions within CCFH and the scheduling and agendas for upcoming meeting are available at the Codex Alimentarius website [www].