

# TECH UPDATE



## CODEX

### *the facts without fiction*

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

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), headquartered in Rome, was set up in 1963 to protect consumer health and ensure fair practices in world food trade. Codex was founded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Codex coordinates input from more than 160 countries (including Australia) to develop and endorse the standards that comprise the international food code.

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.

The Australian Government contributes to the development of Codex standards because food is one of our most important exports. Australia also contributes to Codex to ensure that international standards are based on sound scientific principles. By doing this, Australia maximises the opportunity to influence the success of Australian food exports by creating a level playing field on which exporters can compete.

Codex standards are a global reference point for international food trade. Many countries insist on compliance with Codex standards for their imports. Not complying with relevant Codex standards could add significant costs to production. Codex standards are also linked to WHO agreements and at least two of these agreements require member countries to align their domestic standards with international standards wherever possible.

Codex standards are increasingly being used as benchmarks in World Trade Organisation (WTO) dispute settlement processes - and where a trade dispute arises between countries, you may find you are excluded from exporting. Many developing countries also rely on Codex because they don't have the resources to develop risk-based food safety systems of their own.

### ***The facts:***

- **Codex standards relate to food only, they have no influence or status in the regulation of Australian Therapeutic Goods.**
- Australia is a signatory to the WHO, but this does not mean that Australia has to adopt the Codex standards. The WHO agreement has provisions for countries that have mature food regulatory provisions to opt out of automatically adopting the Codex standards.
- 200 Codex guidelines have been completed. The majority of Codex guidelines are in the drafting stage. The Codex consultative process can take over 8 years to complete.

- Food Standards Australia and New Zealand (FSANZ) develop standards for foods in Australia. If FSANZ were to consider adopting a particular Codex guideline/standard either wholly or partly they would commence a consultative process with the Australian food industry. FSANZ regularly references Codex standards within industry consultation papers.
- Many products are marketed in Australia as foods that fall into the interface between foods and therapeutic goods, because of improper presentations, or form, or therapeutic claims. These products do not conform to the Australia New Zealand *Food Standards Code* or the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989* and are in some cases imported from non licensed overseas manufacturing facilities. The important thing to remember is that imported goods must conform to Australian regulatory provisions.
- In Australia vitamin and mineral supplements are regulated as Therapeutic Goods and are not required to comply with the *Food Standard Code* or Codex Standards. Persons/companies whose products conform to the Therapeutic Goods Act and are legitimately listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG) should not be fearful of any Codex issues.
- The vast majority of angst towards Codex circulated on the internet originates from those who do not fully understand how Codex operates, Australia's regulatory environment for foods and the interaction between the two.

The development of Codex guidelines/standards through various committees is no different from any other regulatory standards setting body and therefore it has to be carefully monitored to ensure that standards are appropriate and based on good science. It is important that all stakeholders directly affected by Codex decisions actively participate in the consultative process coordinated by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (Codex Australia). Further information on the work of Codex Australia is available at [www.daff.gov.au](http://www.daff.gov.au).

### **CHC Codex and Food Standards Policy**

- The CHC monitors the work of Codex and provides comments on issues deemed important to our industry through our international associate organization the International Alliance of Dietary Supplement Associations (IADSA).
- The CHC is registered as a stakeholder with Codex Australia and contributes to the development of standards relevant to our industry.
- The CHC monitors the development of the Australia New Zealand *Food Standards Code* and regularly provides submissions on relevant consultation documents.

***CHC strongly urges all members to be cautious of Codex information circulated on the internet and in other forums. Not all information is accurately presented and in some cases conveys alarmist views by the ill informed. The majority of Codex angst originates from countries that have little or no regulations on dietary supplements that are sold as foods.***



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