Dear Codex Contact Points,

Greetings from the Codex Secretariat!

I hope that you and your families are all safe despite the challenging and unprecedented times that we are all going through caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Codex meeting calendar has been hit hard by the situation and it is now clear that there will be no physical Codex meetings this year.

As I informed in my letter of 15 May 2020, all seven Codex subsidiary body sessions originally scheduled for the first half of 2020 had to be cancelled. Those on a yearly schedule (CCFA, CCGP, CCPR, CCCF and CCMAS) will miss one year and meet in 2021. For those on an 18- or 24-month schedule (CCFICS and CCRVDF), we have found new session dates during the first half of 2021 (see the Codex website for the new dates).

Unfortunately, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Codex meeting schedule continues for the second half of 2020, and we have had to cancel also the physical sessions of CCSCH, CCFL, CCFH, CCNFSDU, and TFAMR.

For the two committees that meet on an 18-month schedule, the session of CCSCH has been rescheduled for 26-30 April 2021, whereas the session of CCFL will be rescheduled for the 3rd quarter of 2021, dates to be confirmed. The committees that meet annually, CCFH and CCNFSDU will miss a year and meet in the second half of 2021, CCNFSDU on 22-26 November 2021 and CCFH on 29 November-3 December 2021. The session of TFAMR has been rescheduled to 14-19 June 2021. The Codex website has been updated with all confirmed changes and will be continuously updated as we have new information.

I would like to thank all Codex host governments and their secretariats, the Committee chairpersons and the Electronic Working Group chairpersons for their excellent cooperation during this difficult time in trying to keep Codex working and find new creative solutions.

We are working closely with all to consider the various tools and mechanisms, including virtual meetings, that are available to the committees in order to progress the important work in preparation for the physical sessions to take place in 2021.

The Codex Secretariat is making every effort to ensure that the webpages of each of the committees are updated regularly to communicate how the work will continue over the coming months. It is also important to review the Circular Letters webpage where the latest deadlines for the Circular Letters are indicated.
I also wanted to give you a first-hand update on CCEXEC79 and CAC43. As you already know, the physical sessions originally planned for June/July 2020 cannot take place. I am pleased to inform you that CCEXEC79, with the agreement of the CCEXEC Membership, will most likely take place virtually, in July 2020. We are currently in dialogue with the parent organizations of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Chairperson and Vice-chairpersons of CAC regarding the formalities and the logistical details. We expect a reduced agenda focusing primarily on the Critical Review role of CCEXEC. The documents are published on the CCEXEC79 page on the Codex website.

I am also optimistic that we will be able to convene a virtual CAC43 that would allow us to progress on key issues related to the Codex standards setting work such as final adoption of standards, adoption at step 5, approval of new work, and discontinuation, revocation and amendments of standards, and confirm the appointment of regional coordinators. In line with our discussions with the legal and protocol offices of FAO and WHO, elections would be postponed until CAC44, which is scheduled to take place in Geneva in July 2021.

We are currently still working on the exact mechanism to propose for CAC43, but I can assure you that it will uphold strongly the principles of Codex and give ample possibilities for members to intervene – orally in a virtual session and in writing. Such a session will only go ahead with the consent of more than half of the Codex membership and we will formally advise you of the proposed mechanism. The imagined time-frame is to have an opening session and virtual sessions in September, a commenting period on the draft report of about four weeks and a formal virtual report adoption in October.

To prepare for these events which are a first for Codex and quite exciting and possibly challenging for all of us, we will host a virtual session for all Codex members and observers on 28 July 2020 where everybody will have the opportunity to ask questions and voice their views on the process.

In the meantime, I would like to advise you that the documents are now available on the CAC43 page of the Codex website.

The Codex Secretariat is also convening videoconferences with the Codex members regionally to provide an update on Codex work during these unprecedented times and facilitate networking. So far, well-attended and constructive videoconferences have been held for members in the CCAFRICA, CCEURO, CCNASWP and CCASIA regions, while the CCLAC and CCNE regions will meet virtually later in June 2020.

The Codex website has been an important means of communication in the current period. To assist with navigation, we have prepared a thematic page on COVID-19 and Codex which brings together relevant information from Codex, FAO and WHO on managing food safety during the current pandemic as well as the latest updates regarding the Codex work programme.

As the celebrations for this year’s World Food Safety Day draw to a close, I would like to congratulate you on all your efforts to mark this occasion and encourage you to visit the World Food Safety Day webpage to read about any of the events that took place around the world. If there is something missing, I encourage you to send us a short story of your event to be included on the webpage.

I will be in touch with further updates as they become available and look forward to seeing you at our virtual meeting on 28th July. In the meantime, I look forward to continuing the good and dynamic collaboration with you all to strengthen food safety globally and wish you and your families good health.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Heilandt
Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme