Codex Alimentarius

"International standard-setting body for controlling the global food trade"

What is Codex?

The Codex Alimentarius Commission: the shady, inter-governmental organisation blamed by many for spreading genetically modified (GM) crops around the world, contaminating foods with pesticides – and limiting the availability of natural health products. To others, Codex is viewed as the bastion of free trade. So, what does Codex actually do – and how does its work influence our daily lives? How much of what we hear about Codex is disinformation, and should we be concerned about what governments are agreeing at Codex? And, most importantly, is there anything we can do to influence Codex?

The Codex Alimentarius Commission was set up in 1963 jointly by two United Nations organs, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), to develop standards, guidelines and recommendations for the global trade of food. Its stated aim is, "Protecting the health of consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade". It also works to coordinate food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There are currently 185 country members of Codex, and the work is performed by committees and task forces.

Codex has issued standards, guidelines and recommendations that have a direct bearing on member governments' policies for all categories of food, ranging from fresh fruit and vegetables, genetically modified (GM) foods and canned foods, through to additives, pesticide residues, irradiated foods, contaminants, gluten-free foods, dairy, organic foods and food supplements.

alliance for
natural health
INTERNATIONAL

good science & good law

anhinternational.org
anh-europe.org
anh-usa.org

- Although Codex does not issue legislation, country members of Codex subsequently harmonise their laws with the Codex guidelines and recommendations

- Because members of Codex delegations are unelected bureaucrats, rather than democratically elected representatives, the Codex decision-making process is almost entirely divorced from the democratic process

- The most influential players at Codex are those countries most heavy engaged with the global trade of food, along with the key stakeholders represented by agri-business and biotech trade associations. Local, community-based growers, food producers and suppliers have little influence

- The consensus voting system used at Codex concentrates power in the hands of the main power groups, such as the USA, European Union (EU), Canada and Australia. Trading blocs like the EU have undue influence over decisions

- The pro-corporate agenda at Codex has created a regulatory platform that suits the largest corporations, while stifling innovation, diversity and small-scale producers and suppliers. The results have included inadequate safety testing for GM foods, dumbing-down of organic standards, acceptance of potentially harmful levels of pesticide residues in food, approval of large numbers of chemical food additives as well as food irradiation, the creation of very onerous scientific substantiation requirements for health claims, and flawed risk assessment methods for vitamins and minerals

- The World Trade Organisation (WTO) acts as the defacto 'policeman' to force countries to harmonise to Codex Alimentarius standards, guidelines and recommendations.

Solutions

- While it's difficult for citizens to directly influence undemocratic bodies like Codex, they still have huge power by avoiding or minimising their use and purchase of globally traded – and especially processed and genetically modified – foods

- At the same time, they should buy, consume and promote locally and regionally produced, natural, whole foods – ideally sustainably produced and organic!

- At the Codex level, smaller nations need to be supported to help them coordinate better to apply combined influence on Codex Alimentarius

- Communicate directly with your government and show your objection to particular standards, guidelines and recommendations that you consider to be against the interests of public health or the environment.