

CODEX ALIMENTARIUS

“Intergovernmental system for controlling the global food trade”

What is it?

An intergovernmental body set up and coordinated by the Food & Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It aims to protect consumer health, ensure fair trade practices in the food trade, and promote coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organisations. Over 170 countries are members and the work is carried out by committees and task forces.

Guidelines, standards or recommendations have been issued relating to virtually all categories of food, ranging from genetically modified (GM) foods, to additives, pesticide residues, contaminants, gluten-free foods, dairy, organic foods and food supplements.

Challenges for natural health

- Provides a set of rules that are built around the largest corporations and players in the global food trade, often at the expense of local, community-based growers, food producers and suppliers
- Promotes the global food trade and dietary simplification, rather than more sustainable and ecological regionally or locally produced foods
- Guidelines or standards generally the result of intense lobbying and pressure by major corporations
- Consensus voting system used to make decisions in committees drastically limits contribution of smaller nations outside main ‘power groups’ (e.g. USA, Canada, EU, Australia)
- Trading blocs, especially EU, have undue influence over decisions
- Difficult for consumers and citizens to influence process given intergovernmental control

Solutions for natural health

- Smaller nations need to coordinate better to apply combined influence on Codex Alimentarius
- Consumers should avoid or minimise purchase of globally traded, especially processed, foods
- Promote production and consumption of locally and regionally produced, natural, whole foods