

codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
ORGANIZATION
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



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TO: Codex Contact Points
Interested International Organizations

FROM: Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission,
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme,
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla, 00153 Rome, Italy

SUBJECT: **Request for comments at Step 6 on the Draft Section 6 - Marking or Labelling
of the Draft Codex Standard for Bitter Cassava (ALINORM 08/31/35, Appendix II)**

DEADLINE: **31 March 2009**

COMMENTS: **To:**
Secretary
Codex Alimentarius Commission
Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme
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00153 Rome, Italy
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E-mail: codex@fao.org (*preferably*)

BACKGROUND

1. The 31st Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (July 2008) had an exchange of views on the preparation instructions (Section 6.1.2) relating to proper handling of bitter cassava roots. The Commission noted that the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables had extensively discussed this provisions vis-à-vis the safety concerns associated with the content of hydrogen cyanide, as recommended by the Committee on Labelling, and agreed on a revised provision by which cassava must be fully cooked before consumption to inactivate the process leading to the production of hydrogen cyanide and the cooking or rinsing water must not be consumed or used for other food preparation due to solubility of hydrogen cyanide in water. The Commission further noted that the Standard applied to the fresh product whereas processed cassava such as different types of cassava flours was excluded from the scope of the Standard and the mandate of the Committee. However, the Delegation of Nigeria, supported by several delegations, pointed out that the labelling instructions did not sufficiently address the safety of the product and ignored other processing methods such as soaking and further processing of cassava roots.

2. In the light of the above discussion, the Commission decided to return the labelling section to Step 6 for further comments, in particular on the preparation instructions, for consideration by the 15th Session of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (2009) and endorsement by the 38th Session of the Committee on Food Labelling (2010) and to hold the other sections at Step 8, with a view to the adoption of the Standard by the Commission in 2010. The Commission recalled its earlier decision that merging the standards for bitter and sweet cassava could be considered after the finalization of the current draft Standard.¹

¹ ALINORM 08/31/REP, paras 37 – 38.

Additional information

3. The terms of reference of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables provide for the development of worldwide standards for fresh fruits and vegetables; consequently, the produce intended for industrial or further processing is excluded from the scope of Codex standards developed by this Committee and therefore from the present draft Standard for Bitter Cassava and the adopted Standard for Sweet Cassava (CODEX STAN 238-2003). For processed cassava, there are two existing Codex standards², namely the Standards for Edible Cassava Flour (CODEX STAN 176-1989) and for Gari (CODEX STAN 151-1989), both developed by the Committee on Cereals, Pulses and Legumes.

4. In this context, the commercial quality provisions in the draft Standard for Bitter Cassava have been established for the product to be supplied fresh to the consumer. However, in view of the safety concern associated with the intake of hydrogen cyanide arising from the cyanogenic glycoside in cassava roots, specific preparation instructions on packages destined to the consumer have been included in the Standard for Sweet Cassava. These instructions have been strengthened in the draft Standard for Bitter Cassava in view of the higher content of cyanogenic glycosides in these varieties. In addition, as cassava roots are cooked in various ways and used in a variety of dishes³ across different regions, no specific ways of cooking are given in Section 6.1.2 of the current draft, to keep the Standard as inclusive as possible. A comprehensive discussion on this matter led the 14th Session of the Committee to agree upon the provisions as currently drafted⁴.

Request for comments

5. Codex Members and Observers wishing to submit comments at Step 6 on the **Draft Section 6 – Marking or Labelling** of the draft Standard for Bitter Cassava are invited to do so in conformity with the Uniform Procedure for the Elaboration of Codex Standards and Related Texts (Codex Alimentarius Commission Procedural Manual). Particular attention should be paid to Section 6.1.2 on preparation instructions in order to provide further language to improve the clarity of the document if necessary and thus to facilitate the finalization of the Standard at the next session of the Committee.

² Codex standards and related texts can be downloaded from the website at: <http://www.codexalimentarius.net/> under “Official Standards”, “Official Codex Standards”.

³ Cassava roots are used in different forms of cooking throughout regions and countries. They are mainly used as an essential ingredient or complement to traditional meals. The cooking follows the peeling and may include, among others, boiling, baking, frying, grilling, roasting, stewing, etc. The boiled roots can replace boiled potatoes or plantains or made into purées, dumplings, soups, stews, gravies, etc. The fried roots (after boiling or steaming) can replace fried potatoes or plantains. Cassava roots can also be chopped, mashed or grated, rinsed, dried, pressed and boiled, fried and/or baked in the form of balls and cakes. Other preparations depend upon culinary traditions of the country.

⁴ ALINORM 08/31/35, paras. 51-53.