

Coalition for an Enhanced Codex

The Trade Function of the Codex Alimentarius

FACT SHEET

“

International trade has the potential to stabilize markets and reallocate food from surplus to deficit regions, helping countries adapt to climate change and contribute towards food security (...). For this reason, in recent years, the relationship between agricultural trade and food security has become an increasing part of both trade and development agendas.”

José Graziano Da Silva, Director General of the FAO¹

Codex standards ensure that food is safe and can be traded²

As the most important international standard setting body in food safety, the Codex Alimentarius plays a crucial role in protecting the health of the consumers while enabling fair trade of agricultural products to the benefit of farmers and consumers.

One of its most important responsibilities is Codex's role in setting international Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for trace levels of pesticides. Given the importance of global trade and the significance of MRLs in facilitating trade, the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues (CCPR) plays a critical trade enabling role.

Empowering Codex to perform its role more effectively and efficiently by addressing current capacity challenges, embracing new scientific and administrative methods of evaluation, and ensuring adequate resources are available, is essential to supporting global food safety, security and international trade of food products. Delays or failure to establish MRLs and the resulting lack of national and international harmonization causes an unpredictable international trade environment with avoidable risks for traders of food and agricultural commodities. This has **important consequences for market access, productivity and farmer livelihoods.**

A fully functioning, adequately financed, global Codex MRL system would significantly facilitate trade and make it easier for growers (especially in emerging markets) and exporters to produce compliant crops and to avoid market access risk

Wide-ranging policy actions are, therefore, necessary to ensure that international trade of agricultural commodities is promoted and farmers around the world supported for their key role in providing food security and in preparing for climate change. Trade policies need to take in consideration **the adaptive role of trade**, while supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 2.

¹FAO State of Agricultural Commodity Markets, 2018 Foreword <http://www.fao.org/3/I9542EN/i9542en.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/en/>

Such policy action should be about empowering Codex to perform its role more effectively and efficiently by:

- Addressing current capacity challenges,
- Embracing new scientific and administrative methods of evaluation, and
- Ensuring adequate resources are available.

MRLs play a key role in allowing the trade of agricultural commodities

When agricultural commodity shipments either do not comply with MRLs set in the importing country or when there are missing MRLs, rejections at import can occur for many reasons due to missing MRLs and misaligned MRLs between country of export and importing countries. Delays in the establishment of MRLs at the international level and the resulting lack of harmonisation have important consequences for market access, productivity and farmer livelihoods.

Having CODEX MRLs in place is fundamental. Having an MRL set at the limit of detection can impact any country be it from the Global North or Global South and the trade cannot work to zero tolerance policies. It also underlines the importance of the WTO notification process involving key stakeholders and giving them the ability to provide comments. Industry and farmer associations spend significant resources tracking MRLs and working with producers to ensure compliance. Having a robust set of international standards within a global database in place, such as a more populated list of Codex MRLs, alleviates the variances between countries and reduces the risk when growing and selling crops to various markets.

We need a global harmonized process for MRL setting and enhancements to Codex Alimentarius to have more efficient and timely MRL-setting processes to achieve greater food safety, facilitate global trade, and improve farmers' livelihoods; in particular, those of smallholder farmers around the world.³

Elevating the trade perspective at Codex

Greater attention and increased awareness of the trade facilitation role played by CCPR is required. Incorporating a trade perspective into a deliberation does not reduce its scientific validity or food safety and security mandate.

MRLs established by national authorities should also be considered for their role in avoiding unnecessary trade impediments that have no impact on food safety.

Both safety and trade aspects should be taken into account. National CCPR delegations should be encouraged to take decisions in agreement with their relevant trade experts and to include delegation members that are trade and risk management experts (in addition to food safety experts). Analyses of trade flows, data on the number of countries that rely on Codex MRLs, and/or case studies regarding how countries use Codex MRLs could be produced.

³ For more information on the impact of missing MRLs: <https://agrifood.net/documents/codex/275-case-studies-on-missing-mrls>



For more information see: www.agrifood.net