Overview of the Work of the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (CCFAC)

The Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (CCFAC) was established in 1964 and since then has been hosted by the government of the Netherlands. This Committee works according to the following terms of reference:

a. To establish or endorse permitted maximum or guideline levels for individual food additives, for contaminants (including environmental contaminants) and for naturally occurring toxicants in foodstuffs and animal feeds;
b. To prepare priority lists of food additives and contaminants for toxicological evaluation by the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA) *(see: 'Overview of JECFA and its role in establishing international standards and guidelines on contaminants in foods and feed' [.pdf], found in the Support Documentation area of this Section)*;
c. To recommend specifications of identity and purity for food additives for adoption by the Commission;
d. To consider methods of analysis for their determination in food; and
e. Consider and elaborate standards or codes for related subjects such as the labelling of food additives when sold as such, and food irradiation.

Work of CCFAC in relation to mycotoxin contamination:

This is the Committee that is responsible for elaborating maximum limits for contaminants once the CAC has accepted to initiate such work. The Committee seeks scientific advice *(see: 'Statements of principle concerning the role of science in the Codex decision-making process' [.pdf], found in the Support Documentation area of this Section)* from JECFA on which they base their recommendations. The Committee is also responsible for elaborating codes of practice aimed at the prevention of mycotoxin contamination.

Work specifically related to coffee:

At the 37th Session of CCFAC, the Delegation of the European Community proposed to start new work on a Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Ochratoxin A (OTA) Contamination in Coffee and Cocoa. However, several delegations pointed out that it was necessary to have a discussion paper first.

The Committee agreed to establish an electronic Working Group led by Ghana to prepare a Discussion Paper on Ochratoxin A contamination in coffee and cocoa, which takes into account the JECFA evaluation, the outputs of the FAO implemented Project 'Enhancement of Coffee Quality through the Prevention of Mould Formation', and other relevant information for consideration at its next session in 2006.

Risk analysis in CCFAC / risk-based working procedures:

CCFAC has drafted 'Risk Analysis Principles Applied by the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants' *(see: 'Draft risk analysis principles applied by the Codex Committee on Food Additives and Contaminants (CCFAC)' [.pdf], found in the Support Documentation area of this Section)* for inclusion in the Codex Procedural Manual. These principles address the application of risk analysis principles by CCFAC and by JECFA which is the main provider of scientific advice guiding the work of the Committee, in relation to the development of Codex standards on additives or contaminants.

These principles emphasise, among other things:

- The need for a risk assessment before endorsing any maximum limits for contaminants;
- The need for CCFAC to prioritise substances submitted to JECFA for evaluation taking into consideration availability of data and potential impact on trade; and
- The fact that CCFAC's risk management recommendations to CAC with respect to contaminants shall be guided by the preamble and annexes of the General Standard on Contaminants and Toxins in Foods.

General Standard on Contaminants and Toxins in Foods (GSCTF):

In 1990, CCFAC agreed to the need for a general philosophy and procedure to facilitate its deliberations on the establishment of guideline levels for contaminants. The Committee actually started work on the development of the proposed draft general standard on contaminants *(see: 'Codex general standard for contaminants and toxins in food' [.pdf], found in the Support Documentation area of this Section)* after the 20th Session of CAC in 1993. The preamble of this general standard was adopted by the Commission in 1995, some annexes were added in 1997, and others are still to be completed.

The preamble of the GSCTF outlines general principles regarding contaminants in foods which emphasise, *inter alia*:

- The need to keep contamination levels as low as reasonably achievable;
- The need to elaborate codes of practice to ensure that adequate actions are taken to reduce contamination through source related measures and good manufacturing and good agricultural practices; and
- That monitoring, surveillance and more specialised research programmes should be carried out to assess the degree of contamination of foods and the effect of actions aimed at reducing contamination.

The remainder of the preamble outlines principles for establishing maximum limits for contaminants, Codex procedures for establishing standards on contaminants, and the format of Codex standards for contaminants in foods.

Annex I of the GSCTF provides criteria for the establishment of maximum levels of contaminants, Annex II outlines procedures for risk management decisions, and Annex III contains the format for contaminant standards. Annex IV should contain an annotated list of contaminants and toxins, but this is still under development.