

Non-transparent and undemocratic

PAN Germany's suggestions for a Codex Alimentarius Commission reform



An international Commission sacrificed food security for free world trade

A new position paper from PAN Germany comments on the Codex Alimentarius Commission and makes suggestions for a reform of the hardly known but influential international commission for food standards.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission

Already in 1962, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) was founded by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in order to implement the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. Today there are 165 member states. The standards, guidelines and codes of practice established by CAC were originally intended as voluntary agreements with a minimum character.

Since the founding of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, the CAC-regulations have been given greater political weight. They constitute the point of reference when the Dispute Settlement Body of the WTO has to settle a dispute on trade issues amongst WTO members. The Codex standards are virtually binding for WTO members even if they are not integrated into national law. Member states that have tighter regulations than set down by CAC have to loosen or to particularly justify them.

The CAC maintains 29 subsidiary bodies including regional, commodity and general committees, of which 24 are currently active. The work of the Commission is supported by small secretariat housed in FAO.

Experiences with and critics towards the Codex Alimentarius Commission

The Pesticide Action Network Germany has participated as a member of the German CAC delegation in the meetings of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues from 1997 to 2000. Conclusions drawn from its own experiences with CAC are now presented in a brochure titled "Towards pesticide-free food: PAN Germany's suggestions for a Codex Alimentarius Commission reform". Prevailing reason for this position paper is an evaluation on CAC currently conducted. Main critical points identified by PAN Germany are:

Biased and non-transparent decision-making process

The Codex Alimentarius Commission follows a biased, unbalanced and non-transparent decision-making process. Non-profit NGOs are hardly involved in the decision making, the interested general public even not at all. Also developing countries are underrepresented in Codex meetings because they lack financial resources and scientific expertise for participation.

Free trade outcompetes consumer protection

The CAC does not acknowledge governments that want to protect their consumers' health with voluntary higher standards. In general, the Precautionary Principle is not considered for decision-making.

Pesticide Residues: agricultural reality instead of consumer safety

Maximum residue limits are calculated in a way that they rather reflect actual agricultural realities than really prioritise consumer protection.

PAN Germany's suggestions for a Codex Alimentarius Commission reform

Today the Codex Alimentarius Commission is the most important international organisation for establishing food quality. Therefore PAN Germany ascertained an urgent need for the CAC to ensure that its standards protect consumer health and that all stakeholders, including developing countries and public interest groups, can participate equally in its decision-making processes. With regards to its pesticides policies, the CAC must implement a more holistic and sustainable approach that recognises pesticide-free food as an ultimate goal.

PAN Germany proposes several concrete measures, which should be taken into account for the reform of the Codex Alimentarius Commission. They concern the following areas:

- How to ensure the protection of consumers' health
- How to achieve pesticide-free food
- How to achieve a balanced participation of all stakeholders in the decision-making process

The brochure

«Towards pesticide-free food: PAN Germany's suggestions for a Codex Alimentarius reform» can be ordered for 4 EURO plus mailing expenses. It also can be downloaded as PDF-file from PAN Germany homepage at www.pan-germany.org/download.htm

PAN Germany and the Codex Alimentarius Commission

One field of activity of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany is to monitor national and international agreements on pesticide residues in and on food and to insist on measures that guarantee the – preferably total – reduction of those residues. Where pesticide residues are concerned the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is the most important standard setting body on an inter-

national level. The CAC aims to protect the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in food trade.

Little opportunity for influence

Already for many years the CAC has been criticised for its structures and procedures. At the beginning of the 1990s the British organisation "National Food Alliance" published the brochure „Cracking the Codex“, which claimed that the decision of the CAC are taken in closed sessions and under strong influence of industrial interests. In Germany, this brochure stimulated discussions between the German Ministry of Health, which was in charge of Codex matters in Germany at this time, and public interest groups from the environmental and consumer section. As a result, the Pesticide Action Network Germany joined the German CAC delegation in 1997 and could thus take part in the meetings of the Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues. In 1999, PAN Germany launched its successful campaign for a maximum residue limit for toxaphene in fish in close cooperation with the German Ministry of Health.

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany

Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany was formed in 1984, two years after the founding of the international PAN.

The Pesticide Action Network strives to prevent the hazards and damage caused to people and the environment by pesticides and supports sustainable alternatives for the control of pests both in agriculture and indoor.

PAN International was founded in 1982 in Malaysia. Today there are more than 600 organisations in over 60 countries. Projects and campaigns are co-ordinated by five autonomous Regional Centres in Africa, Asia & Pacific, Latin America, North America and Europe, where the Regional Centre is facilitated by PAN Germany and PAN UK.

Further information on the position paper:

Pestizid Aktions-Netzwerk e.V. (PAN Germany)

Nernstweg 32

D-22765 Hamburg

Tel.: ++49(0)40 – 399 19 10-0 /-24

Fax: ++49(0)40-390 75 20

Email: info@pan-germany.org

Homepage: www.pan-germany.org

Many thanks to

Freudenberg Stiftung for their financial support of the Codex Alimentarius project.

Help support our work:

Donations for PAN Germany

Account 470 588 307

Postbank Hannover

BLZ 250 100 30

