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World Health
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Agenda item 6

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JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME CODEx COMMITTEE ON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

21st Session

PROPOSED DRAFT STANDARD FOR FRESH DATES

Prepared by the Electronic Working Group chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia

Codex members and observers wishing to submit comments at Step 3 on this draft should do so as instructed in CL 2019/64-FFV available on the Codex webpage/Circular letters 2019:

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

BACKGROUND

1. At the 19th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) held in Ixtapa Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, Mexico, from 5 to 9 October 2015, India introduced a new work proposal on a Codex standard for fresh date¹. The Committee agreed to establish an EWG on fresh dates led by India and the same was endorsed by CAC39².

2. The draft was revised in the light of comments received and was presented in CCFFV20(2017) for consideration. CCFFV20 noted that the proposed draft standard still required further review in order to address the concerns raised and agreed to establish an EWG, chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia³.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. CCFFV20 agreed to establish an EWG, chaired by India and co-chaired by Saudi Arabia and working in English to consider the replies to the request for comments at Step 3; and revise the proposed draft Standard for further consideration by the next session of the Committee.

PARTICIPATION AND METHODOLOGY

4. Total twenty four participants (both via EWG online platform and e-mails) were registered for participation in the EWG. The list of participants is provided at Appendix II. Two rounds of consultations were done to prepare the proposed revised draft. The EWG began its work by circulating the first draft to EWG members for inviting comments as attached to CCFFV20 report.

5. In response, two member countries provided their comments (Morocco and Algeria) and the same were analyzed and accordingly the draft was modified as appropriate.

6. During second round of consultation, EWG members were requested to provide comments on the 2nd revised draft standards along with the following major issues that were raised by member in 1st round of consultation:

- i. Inclusion of criteria relating to its biochemical composition, namely: acidity, total sugar and sucrose contents under quality requirements. If yes, please propose the limits?
- ii. Inclusion of date weight/seed weight ratio. If yes, please propose the limits and appropriate place for its insertion in the draft?
- iii. Inclusion of provision of color range by cultivar. If yes, please propose the limits and appropriate place for its insertion in the draft?
- iv. Inclusion criteria or descriptors used for the variety and / or the commercial type verification? If yes, please propose the text and appropriate place for its insertion in the draft?

¹ REP16/FFV para 96

² REP16/CAC para 97

³ REP18/FFV paras 68(ii) and (iii)

7. The comments were received from four member countries (Algeria, Iran, Mexico, Morocco, and), which were considered by the EWG. The final revised draft has been prepared after incorporating changes, as appropriate, and the same is attached.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

8. Based on the comments/ suggestions received from EWG members, the amendments pertaining to minimum requirements, classification and quality tolerances have been made to the draft presented to CCFFV20. The major modification and discussion points and consequent modifications to the draft standard include the following:

9. One member stated that the document does not include MEDJOOOL VARIETY and proposed to incorporate it also.

10. There are hundreds of cultivars of the date palm exist around the world. Therefore, it will be unpractical to include all the cultivar by name in this standard and it is to mention that this standard cover all commercial varieties of date palm.

11. One member suggested that the biochemical components of the dates i.e water content, acidity, total sugar and sucrose are inter-correlated and affect directly the transportation of dates. It also should be addressed.

12. The concept of inter-correlating moisture, sugar content and acidity and their effect on the quality of dates is well noted and the same has been addressed by specifying the moisture content for each stage of date palm considering the fact that moisture content is the main factor.

13. One member responded that the issue regarding inclusion of date weight/seed weight ratio could be discussed in some particular cases of dry dates, which are not addressed in this document. However, this characteristic may be added by the exporter/ holder/seller of product in the documents accompanying the shipment for verification if needed

14. Fruit weight/seed weight ratio may not be appropriate to be addressed in this standard, as pitted dates are not covered under this standard as per the definition of produce. However, as proposed, some dates and seeds characteristics could be added by the exporter/ holder/seller of product in the documents accompanying the shipment for verification if needed. Hence, EWG proposed to include it as an optional requirement under section 7.2.4 relating "Commercial identification".

15. One member proposed that the colour, which is one of the most important quality criteria, is a varietal characteristic but also depending upon the environment, and the changes that occur over time depend on the parameters cited above and essentially on the moisture content. These changes can be somehow predictable. In view of the above, it was suggested that a range of dates colour could be specified, according to the cultivar, in the documents accompanying the shipment

16. There are more than 2000 cultivars ranging from dark red to shiney yellow in rutab stage and black to golden colour in tamar stage which will make it so complicated and difficult to specify range of colors for each stage. However, it may be left as optional information to define a range of the product color in the documents accompanying the shipment under section 7.2.4 relating Commercial identification.

Section 1: SCOPE

17. One member proposed to rename the title of the standard as "soft dates or juicy dates" and informed that fresh dates are considered as the stage of processing the dates. In date trade in the world, soft date or juicy date are used. Therefore, it is suggested that these two applied terms be used.

18. Generally, the terms soft dates and juicy dates refer to physical status of the fruit tissues present in fresh dates. Further, dates are classified as fresh dates and dry dates which also supported by many references, experts and authors. Furthermore, within the fresh dates the fruits can be characterized as soft, semisoft and dry fresh dates. To orient descriptively with the well-known global classifications, it is appropriate to use the term fresh dates in the proposed draft. Therefore, it is proposed not to change the name of the commodity.

Section 2: DEFINITION OF PRODUCE

19. One member proposed that dates have different and many varieties that overlap with their qualitative degrees. It should be written varieties and the list of varieties should be added to the standard until the standard to find meaning. It was suggested to add the most important commercial type which is used in trade.

20. This standard is proposed to cover all commercial varieties irrespective of their importance in the current trade. So, it would not be appropriate to mention only most important commercial varieties in the proposed standards.

Section 3.1: MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

21. One member proposed to delete sub bullet “fresh in appearance; dates affected by leaving the pit visible so that the appearance of the fruit is noticeably affected is excluded” under the Minimum Requirement, as it is not aligned with the standard.

22. The sub bullet “fresh in appearance; dates affected by leaving the pit visible so that the appearance of the fruit is noticeably affected is excluded” under Section 3.1- Minimum Requirement is deleted as suggested.

23. One member proposed to delete ‘practically free from the pest damage’ and ‘free from fungal growth’ as that there is no fruit on which microorganisms will not affect.

24. This directly affects the quality of the fruit, hence, it would be appropriate to retain these requirements under the minimum requirement. Further to limit its allowance, tolerances are given under provision relating Quality Tolerances.

25. One member suggested deleting following sub bullets:

- free of unripe fruit, i.e. fruit light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture;
- free of undeveloped and deformed fruits, as indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and naturally absence of pit.

26. Unripe, undeveloped and deformed are the conditions which directly affect the quality of fresh date fruit. Therefore, it would be appropriate to retain these in the draft.

Section 3.1.1: Minimum maturity requirements

27. One member suggested that moisture content of dates mentioned as not exceeding 65%, is a water activity which is changed under the influence of environmental conditions and time. The percentage of moisture should be written 18% -23%. Further, draft have to consider the rutab stage only and proposed following values:

- 45-46% % (partially ripe);
- 30-45% (fully ripe) and;
- 25-30% (semi-dry).

28. As per FAO document on Date Palm Cultivation, Chapter IX, FAO Plant Production and Protection Paper, 156, Rev. 1, the whole dates are harvested and marketed at three stages of their development (Khalal, Rutab and Tamar) depending on variety, climatic conditions and market demand. Therefore, this draft has considered all these three development stages and proposed following moisture content for each development stage:

- 50 -85% for khalal stage
- 30 -45% for rutab stage
- 10% -25% for tamar stage

29. One Member proposed to delete the foot notes 2, 3 and 4 (defining khalal, rutab and tamar stages). While other proposed to add basser under khalal stage.

30. It may be good to define the fresh date stages as required by other countries; therefore, basser is added to fulfil other names of khalal. Further, rutab and tamar are deined as follows:

- Rutab: Means soft or moist fully ripe stage, color changes to light brown and starts to lose weight and accumulate more sugars (mainly reducing sugars)(water content 30-45%).
- Tamer: Full ripe stage of development, more water loss and gains more sugars and depending on variety attains a high sugar-to-water ratio (low moisture content 10-25%).

31. Accordingly, appropriate changes have been made in the draft.

Section 4: PROVISION CONCERNING SIZING

Table A: When sized by count, size is determined by the number of individual cultivar per package

32. One member suggested rewriting the table(A) based on rutab stage and use only letters as description of sizes.

33. Table A is considered for all consumed stages of fresh dates and not only the rutab stage. Few members during first round of discussions also informed that dates produced in their country are of very small sizes which also need to be covered under this standard. Accordingly, description of sizes as Extra Large (A), Large

(B), Medium (C) and Small (D) is more reflective and self-explanatory than using only letters as proposed in the draft.

Table B: When sized in accordance with existing trade practice, the package must be labelled with the count or size and method used. The tables (A or B) may be used on an optional basis.

34. One member suggested that the table (B) needs to be clarified.

35. The table considers the weight as one of the logical parameters that can be used. It facilitates consumers' proper selection to his/her needs. However, as it is on optional basis, further discussion is required on the issue. Therefore, it is proposed to keep the provision in square brackets.

Section 5: PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES

36. One member proposed to align the total tolerances under Class II with the current layout i.e. 10 %

37. The proposed limit is acceptable. However, it is also proposed to revise the limit of Damaged by Pest in Class II as 8 %, as the limit of defect should not be more than the total tolerances.

38. One member proposed to increase the allowances for undeveloped dates in class I (3%) and II (6%).

39. The draft is revised as proposed. The proposed values are also in alignment with the *Standard for Dates* (CXS 143-1985).

40. One member proposed to increase tolerances for Sour/decayed/moldy dates as 3%, 5% and 7% for Extra Class, Class I and Class II respectively.

41. The limit of tolerances for Sour/decayed/moldy dates are aligned with CXS 143-1985, which allows a total of 1% by count of dates with defects of scouring, mould and decay. The draft is revised accordingly.

Section 6.1: UNIFORMITY

"Separated in individual fruit, arranged in layers, or loose in the package"

42. One member proposed that soft dates or juicy dates are issued or exported with cluster and stem. It was suggested rewriting this section for clarity. Hence, this bullet is kept in square brackets for further discussion at committee level. The consequential changes will be incorporated with respect to tolerances to loose dates given under Provision Concerning Tolerances.

"Stems presented in clusters or separated from the rachis must be at least 10 cm in length and carry an average of four–six fruits per 10 cm of length"

43. One member mentioned that this concept is ambiguous and does not create advantage and suggested deletion.

44. The point specifically clarifies the condition in which the fresh dates are marketed. It is quite reasonable to characterize stem conditions to facilitate packing conditions and avoid fruit damage that often occur with protruding stem parts. Therefore, it would be appropriate to retain this provision in the draft.

Section 7.2.5: Official inspection mark (optional)

45. One member proposed deletion of optional as in their country this requirement is mandatory.

46. This condition is not mandatory to all countries and therefore it is suggested leaving it on the discretion of the country as per their national legislation.

RECOMMENDATION

47. CCFFV21 is invited to consider:

- the proposed draft for fresh dates at Appendix I; and
- forwarding the proposed draft for fresh dates to CAC43 for adoption at step 5.

DRAFT CODEX STANDARD FOR FRESH DATES

1. SCOPE

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements for fresh at the export-control stage after preparation and packaging. However, if applied at stages following packaging, products may show in relation to the requirements of the standard:

- a slight lack of freshness and turgidity;
- for fresh dates graded in classes other than the “Extra” Class, a slight deterioration due to their development and their tendency to perish.

The holder/seller of products may not display such products or offer them for sale, or deliver or market them in any manner other than in conformity with this standard. The holder/seller shall be responsible for observing such conformity.

2. DEFINITION OF PRODUCE

This Standard applies to commercial varieties of Dates (*Phoenix dactylifera* L. from Arecaceae family), to be supplied fresh and whole to the consumer in unpitted form after preparation and packaging. Dates intended for industrial purposes are excluded.

3. PROVISIONS CONCERNING QUALITY

3.1 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, the dates must be:

- intact;
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration, which makes it unfit for consumption is excluded;
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter;
- free from living pests⁴, insect and mites eggs including the presence of dead insects and mites, their debris or excreta;
- Practically free from pest damage;
- free from fungal growth;
- free of unripe fruit, i.e. fruit light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture
- free of undeveloped and deformed fruits, as indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and naturally absence of pit;
- free of blemished fruit; i.e. fruit scarred, discolored or sunburnt, or having blacknose (noticeable darkening of the head, generally accompanied by severe checking or cracking of the flesh) or side-spot (a very dark patch extending into the flesh) or similar abnormalities affecting an area of not more than 7 mm of total surface area of the fruit;
- free of abnormal external moisture excluding condensation following removal from cold storage; and
- free of foreign smell and/or taste.

The development and condition of the dates must be such as to enable them to:

- withstand transportation and handling; and
- arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

3.1.1 Minimum maturity requirements

Dates fruits must be sufficiently developed and have reached an appropriate degree of development and ripeness according to the species.

Dates shall have a moisture content not exceeding 85%, in accordance with criteria to the variety and stage of harvest/or commercial type and the area in which they are grown. Moisture content should not exceed:

⁴ Provisions for pests and damage caused by pests apply without prejudice to the applicable plant protection rules applied by governments in line with the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

- 50-85% for khalal⁵ stage;
- 30-45 % for rutab⁶ stage; and
- 10-25% and less for tamar⁷ stage.

3.2 CLASSIFICATION

Dates are classified in three classes defined below:

3.2.1 “Extra” Class

Dates in this class must be of superior quality and they must be characteristics of the variety and/or commercial type. They must be free from defects, with the exception of very slight superficial defects, provided these do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package.

3.2.2 Class I

Dates in this class must be of good quality and characteristics of the variety and/or commercial type.

The following slight defects, however, may be allowed, provided that they do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package:

- slight defects in shape and colour; and
- slight skin defects such as scratches, and blemishes not exceeding 5% of the total surface area of an individual fruit for maximum 5% of the fruits.

The defects must not, in any case, affect the flesh of the produce.

3.2.3 Class II

Dates in this class must be of good quality and satisfying the minimum requirements as specified in Section 3.1. The following defects, may be allowed, provided the dates retain their essential characteristics as regards the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package:

- defects in shape and colour; and
- skin defects such as scratches, scars, scrapes, bruises and blemishes shall not exceed 10% of the total surface area of an individual fruit for maximum 10% of the fruits.

The defects must not, in any case, affect the flesh of the produce.

4. PROVISIONS CONCERNING SIZING

Dates may be sized by count or weight of the fruit or in accordance with existing trading practices. When sized in accordance with existing trade practice, the package must be labelled with the count or size and method used. The following table may be used on an optional basis.

A. When sized by count, size is determined by the number of individual cultivar per package.

Size	Number of dates per 500gm	
	Khalal and Rutab	Tamar
A (Extra Large)	≤45	≤55
B (Large)	46-70	56-83
C (Medium)	71-100	84-125
D (Small)	>100	>125

⁵ khalal or basser (partially ripe) stage of date fruits at turning stage, but consumed fresh

⁶ Rutab: Means soft or moist fully ripe stage, color changes to light brown and starts to lose weight and accumulate more sugars (mainly reducing sugars)(water content 30-45%).

⁷ Tamer: Full ripe stage of development, more water loss and gains more sugars and depending on variety attains a high sugar-to-water ratio (low moisture content 10-25%).

B.When sized by weight, size is determined based on the individual weight of the fruit as mentioned below.

Grade	Weight of individual fruit in the package(gm)	
	Khalal and Rutab	Tamar
A (Extra Large)	>11	>9
B (Large)	>7-11	>6-9
C(Medium)	>5-7	>4- 6
D (Small)	≤5	≤4

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5. PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES

5.1 QUALITY TOLERANCES

At all marketing stages, tolerances in respect of quality shall be allowed in each lot for produce not satisfying the requirements of the class indicated. Produce that fail conformity assessment, may be allowed to be resorted and brought into conformity in accordance with the relevant provisions in the *Guidelines for Food Import Control System (CXG 47-2003)*.

S.No.	Quality Tolerance	Tolerances allowed percentage of defective produce by count or weight		
		Extra Class	Class I	Class II
1.	Total Tolerance not satisfying the quality requirement of which no more than:	5	10	10
	- undeveloped	1	3	6
	- Damage by pest	3	8	8
	- Blemished/discolored	3	5	7
	- Sour/decayed/moldy	1	1	1
	- living pest	0	0	0
2.	Additional tolerances			
	(a) Size Tolerances-off size from what is indicated/marked	5	10	10
	(b) Produce belonging to other similar varieties than marked	0	0	0
	[(C) Loose dates among stems or clusters	10	10	10]
	(D) Mineral impurities g/kg	1	1	1

6. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PRESENTATION

6.1 UNIFORMITY

The contents of each package must be uniform and contain only dates of the same origin, variety or commercial type, quality and size (if sized). The visible part of the contents of the package must be representative of the entire contents.

Dates may be presented:

- in clusters (consisting mainly of the rachis and the stems to which the fruit is attached naturally);
- in stems (stems which are separated from the rachis and to which the fruit is attached naturally); and
- [Separated in individual fruit, arranged in layers, or loose in the package].

Stems presented in clusters or separated from the rachis must be at least 10 cm in length and carry an average of four–six fruits per 10 cm of length.

6.2 PACKAGING

Dates must be packed in such a way so as to protect the produce properly. The materials used inside the package must be of food grade quality, clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or stamps bearing trade specifications is allowed, provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Dates shall be packed in each package in compliance with the appropriate sections of the *Code of Practice for Packaging and Transport of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CXC 44-1995).

6.2.1 Description of containers

The containers shall meet the quality, hygiene, ventilations and resistance characteristics to ensure suitable handling, shipping and preserving of the dates. Packages must be free of all foreign matter and smell.

7. PROVISIONS CONCERNING MARKING OR LABELLING

7.1 CONSUMER PACKAGES

In addition to the requirements of the *General Standard for the Labelling of Pre-packaged Foods* (CXS 1-1985), the following specific provisions apply:

7.1.1 Name of produce

Each package shall be labelled as to the name of the produce and may be labelled as to the name of the variety and/or commercial type.

7.1.2 Origin of Produce

Country of origin⁸ and, optionally, district where grown or national, regional or local place name.

7.2 NON-RETAIL CONTAINERS

Each package must bear the following particulars, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside, either printed on the package itself or on a label (if the labels are placed inside the packages), this should be done in such a way that the indications concerning marking are readable from the outside); or in the documents accompanying the shipment and attached in a visible position inside the transport vehicle.

7.2.1 Identification

Name and address of exporter, packer and/or dispatcher. Identification code (optional)⁹.

7.2.2 Nature of produce

- Name of the produce “Dates”.
- Name of the variety and/or commercial type.
- Presentation such as clusters, in stems or individual (optional).

7.2.3 Origin of Produce

Country of origin⁸ and, optionally, district where grown or national, regional or local place name.

7.2.4 Commercial Specifications

- Class;
- Size (if sized);
- Crop year; and
- Fruit and seed length and width, pulp weight /fruit weight ratio, fruit shape (oval, round, elongated), Epicarp (goffered, smooth, wrinkled) and color of the fruit (optional).

⁸ The full or a commonly used name should be indicated

⁹ The national legislation of a number of countries requires an explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/ or dispatcher (or corresponding acronyms) should be recorded very accurately.

7.2.5 Official Inspection Mark (optional)

8. FOOD ADDITIVES

Food additives used in accordance with Tables 1 and 2 of the *General Standard for Food Additives* (CXS 192-2017) in food categories 04.1.1.1 (Untreated fresh fruit) and 04.1.1.2 (Surface-treated fresh fruit) are acceptable for use in foods conforming to this standard.

9. CONTAMINANTS

9.1 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum levels of the *General Standard for Contaminants and Toxins in Food and Feed* (CXS 193-1995).

9.2 The produce covered by this Standard shall comply with the maximum residue limits for pesticides established by the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

10 HYGIENE

10.1 It is recommended that the produce covered by the provisions of this Standard be prepared and handled in accordance with the appropriate sections of the *General Principles of Food Hygiene* (CXC 1-1969), *Code of Hygienic Practice for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables* (CXC 53-2003), and other relevant Codex texts such as Codes of Hygienic Practice and Codes of Practice.

10.2 The produce should comply with any microbiological criteria established in accordance with the *Principles and Guidelines for the Establishment and Application of Microbiological Criteria related to Foods* (CXG 21-1997).

Appendix II

List of Participants

S.no.	Members registered for EWG on Fresh Dates (2018)
1	Chair: India (Dr Suresh Kumar Malhotra, Agriculture Commissioner, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare)
2	Co-chair: Saudi Arabia a) Prof Suliman Ali AlKhateeb, Ministry of environment ,water and agriculture Saudi Arabia b) Mohammed Abdulaziz Alkhamis, Saudi Food & Drug Authority c) Mohammed Saad Alhusaini, Date palm center, Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture d) Ali Mohamed Aljabr, Date palm center, Ministry of Environment ,Water and Agriculture
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