



Codex Alimentarius Commission meeting in Geneva adopts three Codex standards for spices

Member-countries unanimously approve Codex standards for pepper, cumin and thyme

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In a major recognition of India's efforts to benchmark global spices trade, the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) has adopted three Codex standards for black, white and green pepper, cumin and thyme, paving the way for universal agreement on identifying quality spices in various countries.

The member-countries of CAC, the international food standards-setting body which met in Geneva for its 40th session during July 17-22, unanimously approved the adoption of Codex standards for the three spices, which would facilitate evolving a common standardization process for their global trade and availability.

The Codex standards were adopted in the wake of India conducting three sessions of Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs (CCSCH) at Kochi (2014), Goa (2015) and Chennai (2017). The Chennai session succeeded in achieving this consensus. Subsequently, these drafts were placed before the CAC, and it was adopted by consensus with an overwhelming support from the member-countries.

With the adoption of the Codex standards on pepper, cumin and thyme, spices have been included for the first time as commodities that will have such universal standards.

Commerce and Industry Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman said the adoption of the Codex standards would imply that there are now reference points and benchmarks for the member-countries to align their national standards for spices with Codex.

Smt. Sitharaman said It will bring harmony to the global spice trade and ensure availability of high quality, clean and safe spices to the world. She said It will also benefit the trade from universal agreement to identify good quality spices.

.The Minister said It may be a small beginning considering the number of commodities waiting in the ranks for the standardization process. But what is really heartening is that spices have made a definitive entry into the league of commodities having Codex standards, and India played a key role in achieving this objective.

This triumph of CCSCH is the harbinger of a lot of hard work ahead. The number of spices and culinary herbs is very large – although only 109 spices are notified in the ISO list, their actual number, as used in various countries, would be much higher.

It was in 2013 that the need for Codex standards for spices and herbs became a matter of concern, owing to the increased level of issues in spice trade. At that time, there was no Codex committee exclusively for spices and culinary herbs. Thus, the first step in development of Codex standards was the establishment of a dedicated Codex committee for spices and herbs.

With the approval of the Central government, Spices Board India submitted to CAC a proposal for such an exclusive committee for spices and culinary herbs. After completing the background work, it sent delegates to a series of Codex committee meetings all over the world, making a forceful plea for the need for a committee on spices and herbs.

The 36th session of CAC, which met in Rome from July 1-5, 2013, deliberated on this proposal from India, and later approved it with unanimous support of the member-countries. It heralded the creation of CSCH, with India as the host country and Spices Board as the Secretariat. This was the first new Codex commodity committee to be approved in the past 25 years.

Historically, the developed countries, being the major importers of spices, have always insisted on unreasonably strict standards, which have had adverse effects on spice trade. This is an issue that the Codex, jointly formed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), seeks to address.

Spices Board India, the flagship organization of the Central Government for export and promotion of spices from the country, has always been concerned about this aspect, and hence has taken keen interest in harmonizing the disparate standards for spices which exist all over the world.

