

## Reports of advisory bodies

### Expert committees and study groups<sup>1</sup>

#### Report by the Secretariat

#### EVALUATION OF CERTAIN FOOD ADDITIVES

#### Eighty-second report of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives Geneva, 7–16 June 2016<sup>2</sup>

#### Main recommendations

1. The report contains the Expert Committee's evaluations of technical, toxicological and dietary exposure data for 10 food additives (Allura Red AC; carob bean gum; lutein esters from *Tagetes erecta*; octenylsuccinic acid-modified gum arabic; pectin; Quinoline Yellow; rosemary extract; steviol glycosides; tartrazine; and xanthan gum) and five groups of flavouring agents (alicyclic, alicyclic-fused and aromatic-fused ring lactones; aliphatic and aromatic amines and amides; aliphatic secondary alcohols, ketones and related esters; cinnamyl alcohol and related substances; and tetrahydrofuran and furanone derivatives).
2. Specifications for the following food additives were revised: aspartame; cassia gum; citric and fatty acid esters of glycerol; modified starches; octanoic acid; starch sodium octenylsuccinate; and total colouring matters.
3. The report presents general considerations and guidance on the principles governing the toxicological evaluation of and assessment of dietary exposure to food additives, including flavouring agents.
4. The assessments, recommendations and comments by the Expert Committee will be discussed by the Codex Committee on Food Additives in order to provide recommendations to national

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<sup>1</sup> The Regulations for Expert Advisory Panels and Committees provide that the Director-General shall submit to the Executive Board a report on meetings of expert committees containing observations on the implications of the expert committee reports and recommendations on the follow-up action to be taken.

<sup>2</sup> WHO Technical Report Series, No. 1000, 2016 (in print).

authorities on the safe use of these food additives and to identify and recommend appropriate risk management and risk-mitigation measures to reduce human exposure, where necessary.

5. WHO will publish detailed monographs in the WHO Food Additives Series of the toxicological and other related information upon which the safety assessments of the compounds were based.<sup>1</sup> FAO publishes summaries of the identity and purity of food additives.

### **Significance for public health policies**

6. The Committee identifies and, if possible, quantifies the public health significance of exposure to chemicals in food – in these cases, food additives including flavouring agents – through scientific risk assessment based on international consensus. When a health concern is identified, clear recommendations are issued for action by national governments or through the FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its subsidiary bodies).

7. All Member States face the problem of assessing potential risks of chemicals in food; however, only a few scientific institutions systematically assess, on a national or regional basis, all relevant toxicological, epidemiological and related data. It is therefore important that the reports of the Committee provide Member States with valid information on both the general aspects of risk assessment and the specific evaluations of the veterinary drugs, food additives and food contaminants mentioned. The Committee's work, in its complexity and in reaching an international consensus on the evaluation of these compounds, is unique in its importance for and impact on global public health decisions related to food safety.

8. The Committee's recommendations are used by the Codex Alimentarius Commission in the development of international food safety standards and other guidance and recommendations. Such standards are science-based and are established only for substances that have been evaluated by the Expert Committee. This ensures that food commodities that are traded internationally meet strict safety standards, to protect the health of the consumer and ensure fair practices in food trade.

9. The advice provided by the Committee is also considered by Member States directly when national or regional food safety standards are being established.

### **Implications for the Organization's programmes**

10. The evaluation of chemicals in food by the Committee is an ongoing activity. Three meetings of the Expert Committee were held or are planned in the biennium 2016–2017: one in June 2016 (reported here) and the others to be held in November 2016 and June 2017.

11. WHO is a partner in the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, whose principal organ is the Codex Alimentarius Commission. In its capacity to assure the sound scientific basis for international standards and recommendations on food additives and contaminants in food, the work of the Expert Committee is crucial to the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

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<sup>1</sup> Safety evaluation of certain food additives. WHO Food Additives Series, No. 73. Toxicological monographs of the eighty-second meeting (in preparation).

12. The Committee's evaluations are also used by Heads of WHO offices in countries, territories and areas and by regional offices when advice is provided to Member States on food safety issues.

**ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

13. The Board is invited to note the report.

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