

Codex: global harmonization of food and its impact on natural healthcare

By Dr Robert Verkerk, Executive & Scientific Director, Alliance for Natural Health (ANH). BioCeuticals is a member of the ANH's Innovators Club because it wants to help ensure that therapeutic foods and food-based products are not legislated out of existence by more and more onerous regulation, both within and outside Australia.

Much has been said and written about Codex Alimentarius (Latin for 'food code' or 'food law') in recent years – some of it is factually correct, a fair amount is not. However, most of the independent information on Codex tells us, correctly, there is something ominous about it. Codex is essentially about the globalization and multi-national control of our food supply. It is about the largest food, chemical, pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies in the world coming together to create rules that suit them, and few others. The rules they create will invariably be to the detriment of smaller food and supplement companies, organic foods – and of course the consumer.

The Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) was established in 1963 by two major organs of the United Nations, the Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Its origins, however, go back much further, to the 1940s.¹ The stated purpose of Codex Alimentarius is: "protecting health of the consumers and ensuring fair trade practices in the food trade, and promoting coordination of all food standards work undertaken by international governmental and non-governmental organizations."²

The primary driver for the establishment of Codex was the rapidly expanding Rockefeller/Rothchild chemical empire of the post-WWII era, which wanted to eliminate national barriers to trade and develop its interests globally. The dual objectives of 'consumer protection' and 'global industrial expansion' have always conflicted somewhat. It has become increasingly clear that the 'consumer protection' tag is more about lip service as a means of providing a political justification for the globalization agenda of some of the world's most powerful transnational corporations, which are using Codex as their instrument.

You will have heard that the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) continues to hold firm on its view that Codex will not significantly impact the Australian natural products industry. In my article in September 2006 (*Who says Codex isn't a risk to nutritional therapy in*

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization website; "Codex Alimentarius: how it all began": <http://www.fao.org/docrep/V7700T/v7700t09.htm>

² Codex Alimentarius website: <http://www.codexalimentarius.net>

Australia?, I showed why this complacency was almost certainly poorly founded. I stressed in particular that risk assessment methods which are presently being developed by international panels of scientists working on behalf of Codex to determine maximum safe levels of vitamin and mineral food supplements will be very likely to have significant influence on the Australian regulator. Bear in mind that Australia actually heads up the risk assessment Electronic Working Group (to which I input personally) in the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, the main Codex Committee dealing with natural health supplements. Although in principle, this might seem acceptable, it gives rise to huge problems owing to the flaws inherent in the majority of risk assessment methods being contemplated. Fortunately, owing to ANH's work, we are beginning to help other scientists to appreciate the limitations of existing methods. But creating the paradigm shift is an uphill battle that is somewhat akin to trying to get a supertanker to turn around in Darling Harbour!

The vast majority of countries are either controlling the Codex agenda in the first place or they will want to comply for fear of being subject to sanctions, which are capable of crippling the economies of smaller countries, even Australia. The policeman in such matters is the World Trade Organization (WTO), which uses so-called "science-based" Codex guidelines, standards or recommendations as the benchmark in resolving trade disputes. The fact that the WTO, since its inception in 1994, has never penalized any country that adopts standards *less* protective than those offered by Codex, provides overwhelming evidence that the primary purpose of Codex is international trade, and not consumer safety.

And do you believe that Australia and the TGA would be willing to face sanctions on, for instance, key agricultural exports just to protect Australia's regulatory approach to food, functional foods and natural health products? This is one reason why the pressure on Trans-Tasman harmonization, between New Zealand and Australia, is so unrelenting. Even the USA is having to accept increasingly stringent laws as it buys into harmonization of the Americas, most recently seen with the instigation of the Trilateral Cooperation Charter between the USA, Canada and Mexico. Codex is about bringing all these trading blocs together under the same roof, where dumbed-down, non-therapeutic foods that are considered 'safe' to all, rule the day.

Please support the ANH – and help us to promote and protect natural healthcare, worldwide. As the stewards of therapeutic natural healthcare, practitioners of clinical nutrition are more in the firing line than any other single group. For more information, see www.anhcampaign.org.