

Global Vitamin Guidelines One Step Closer to Restricting Consumer Health Freedom

For immediate release

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Today sees the end of three days of meetings of delegations from some 70 countries and numerous non-governmental organizations, at the 27th Session of the Codex Committee on Nutrition & Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) in Bonn, Germany.

The Committee, which started developing a global guideline on vitamin-and-mineral food supplements more than 10 years ago, was attempting at this year's meeting to address a number of additional contentious issues. Amongst others, these included the amounts of vitamins and minerals required for good health, the application of risk assessment to establish safe maximum dosages, the scientific basis of health claims, and the implementation of the World Health Organization's Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.

The National Health Federation (NHF), a US-based, international health-freedom organisation of more than 50-years standing, was the only non-governmental delegation representing the interests of vitamin consumers at this meeting.

The NHF sent three delegate members to this year's meeting. Scott Tips, Legal Counsel for the NHF and its Codex delegation head, said: *"The bad news is that these guidelines could stop millions of people around the world from using food supplements containing nutrients in sufficient amounts to benefit their health. The good news is that there is recognition by an increasing number of delegates that there are serious flaws in some of the scientific methods being used by some health authorities that are now under consideration by the Committee. Fortunately, however, we believe it's not too late to rectify these problems."*

Scientific Advisor to the NHF and its newest delegation member, **Dr Robert Verkerk**, who is also Executive & Scientific Director of the pan-European Alliance for Natural Health, continued:

"There is increasing scientific consensus that a sea change in the nature of the science being contemplated for both risk assessment and the setting of nutritional reference values is needed. We are working closely with scientists around the world to help facilitate this change and the NHF will be making submissions directly to the Committee's Electronic Working Groups that are dealing with these issues. If governments are going to address nutritional health seriously, they cannot any longer afford to ignore the role of high-quality food supplements in health promotion."

The NHF's Vice Chairman and veteran Codex delegate for the organization, **Paul Anthony Taylor**, added: *“Codex guidelines are, in part, supposedly designed to protect consumers, when in fact, they could actually cause harm by preventing people from accessing beneficial vitamin dosages and forms. Millions of consumers are already using dietary supplements in ways that we could not have imagined when vitamins were first discovered. For example, when the U.S. National Institutes of Health announced recently that vitamin C selectively kills cancer cells, this information was trumpeted around the world by the media as if it were a new discovery. In reality, of course, enlightened consumers have known about this property of vitamin C for many years now and have been safely using this information as a means of improving their health and prolonging their lives. Codex guidelines should be assisting, not inhibiting, the spread of existing knowledge.”*

Unfortunately, due to a lack of time and last-minute shuffling of its schedule that relegated some of the most important issues for consumers to the end of the meeting, the Committee did not adequately discuss the agenda items on health claims and risk analysis. The NHF, along with other consumer and health-freedom groups around the world, is concerned that if excessively restrictive global guidelines for vitamins and minerals are established through Codex, consumer access to food supplements with a long history of safe use will be blocked. This would particularly be the case if countries adopt the guidelines into their own national laws, but could also occur as a result of socio-political pressures caused by the existence of internationally-recognised guidelines backed by World Trade Organization enforcement sanctions.

The NHF shall therefore continue to work with other delegations in pursuing specific and realistic pro-active strategies that will maximize consumer choice and optimize human health.

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Editor's Notes:

- 1. Codex Committee on Nutrition and Food for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU):** one of 27 committees of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, established under the auspices of the Food & Agricultural Organization and World Health Organization. For further information: www.codexalimentarius.net.
- 2. National Health Federation:** established in 1955, the National Health Federation is a consumer-education, health-freedom organization working to protect individuals' rights to choose to consume healthy food, take supplements and use alternative therapies without government restrictions. The NHF is the only such organization with recognized observer status at Codex meetings. For further information: www.thenhf.com.
- 3. Alliance for Natural Health:** The Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) is a UK-based, pan-European and international not-for-profit campaign organisation working to protect and promote natural health care through the use of 'good science and good law.' For further information: www.alliance-natural-health.org.
- 4. Summary of progress of the 27th Session of CCNFSDU, Bonn, Germany, 21-25 November 2005**

WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health

A discussion paper prepared by WHO/FAO regarding the Implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health had originally been scheduled to be included under agenda item 2. However, this discussion was moved to agenda item 10, under 'Other Business and Future Work.' As a result there was only a very limited amount of time available to discuss the proposed implementation strategy. During the short discussions that did take place, WHO presented a new two-page proposal document to the Committee. Unfortunately, however, the vast majority of delegations had not seen this document because its presence had not been previously announced and the WHO had apparently run out of copies. The Codex Secretariat eventually admitted that there was not enough time to address this difficult and complex issue, and stated that the Committee should report to the Codex Alimentarius Commission that there had not been enough time to address the proposal; adding that it could perhaps be considered instead by the Codex regional coordinating committees.

FAO/WHO Nutrient Risk Assessment Project

It was also announced during this week's meeting that the final report from the Joint FAO/WHO project to develop scientific principles on nutrient risk assessment is currently being prepared and that it should be available during or before early 2006. The report will then be discussed at the next meeting of the CCNFSDU in Thailand.

Nutrient Reference Values (NRVs)

A discussion paper on Nutrient Reference Values was introduced by Antoinette Booyzen on behalf of South Africa. After some discussion it was decided that South Africa should be given the mandate to further revise this document, as a means of establishing some fundamental principles.

It was also announced that an FAO/WHO meeting will be taking place in December in Florence, Italy, with the goal of reaching agreement on principles and guidelines that will lead to evidence-based dietary standards. As a part of this work FAO/WHO will be discussing the possibility of setting up an expert consultation to establish new NRVs.

Proposed Draft Recommendations on the Scientific Basis of Health Claims

Once again, and for the second year running, there was only a very limited opportunity to discuss this agenda item. Issues that came up during the short debate that did take place concerned the substantiation of health claims and disease risk reduction claims. There was no in-depth examination of these topics however. It was agreed that this work would be continued by the electronic working group chaired by France.

Discussion Paper on the Application of Risk Analysis to the Work

A Discussion Paper on the Application of Risk Analysis to the Work of the CCNFSDU had been prepared by Australia, with the assistance of Canada, the European Community, Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, the United States, the International Alliance for Dietary Supplement Associations (IADSA), and the International Union of Food Science & Technology (IUFoST). Australia introduced the paper and proposed that the work of the Electronic Working Group (EWG) should continue. In response, the Committee's Chairman, Dr. Rolf Grossklaus, stated that this work was of enormous importance, and that it should be given the highest priority. It was therefore agreed that the work of the EWG would continue under the chairmanship of Australia.

2006 Session of CCNFSDU

Next year's meeting in October/November will take place in Thailand. The Thai government will co-host the session along with the German Secretariat.