

China Trip Report 2016 Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues

On Saturday April 21, 2016, I traveled to Chongqing, China, to attend the Codex meeting on pesticide residues and returned to California on Sunday, May 1.

Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues

The Codex Committee on Pesticide Residues is a joint collaboration between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to set maximum residue levels (MRLs) on pesticides to facilitate the trade of agriculture and food commodities. CCQC attends as a delegate from the International Society of Citriculture to advocate for the establishment of MRLs for citrus fruits. Over fifty member countries attended the meeting.

The Committee discussed a range of technical issues that determine policies for risk assessment, management of priorities and process improvements. The Committee discussed the following issues:

- The Australian delegation reported on a guideline document developed by APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) to establish and harmonize MRLs in the Asia region.
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) representatives reported that they sponsored a meeting last fall that was organized by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to discuss the methodology used to estimate dietary exposure when conducting pesticide risk assessments. The EU delegation proposed using MRL values instead of the highest residue value from field trials in the International Estimate of Short Term Intake (IESTI) equation when conducting risk assessments to evaluate dietary risk.

The EU delegation suggested that not using the MRL value in risk assessment would undermine the credibility of regulatory authorities and that European NGOs say the current method is not protective. An EU analysis estimated that 88 citrus MRLs would be lost as a result of the change. The EU presentation can be found at <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?Ink=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-718-48%252FCCPR48%2Bside-event1%2Bsupport%2Bdocument.pdf>.

Crop Life International opposed the change saying that such a change would be overly conservative and result in the loss of many MRLs. The Crop Life presentation can be found at <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/sh-proxy/en/?Ink=1&url=https%253A%252F%252Fworkspace.fao.org%252Fsites%252Fcodex%252FMeetings%252FCX-718-48%252FCLI%2BPerspectives%2Bon%2BProposed%2BChanges%2Bto%2BIESTIt.pdf>.

The Committee agreed to establish an electronic working group co-chaired by Netherlands and Australia. The terms of reference for the working group are:

“To identify advantages and challenges that might arise from the possible revision of the current IESTI equations and the impact on risk management, risk communication, consumer protection goals, and trade. The recommendations of the international EFSA/RIVM workshop cosponsored by FAO and WHO and the discussion in CCPR48 should be taken into account.”

- The New Zealand delegation proposed that there should be an internationally harmonized approach to assessing residues from chemicals of very low public health concern. These chemicals could include cleaning agents, fertilizers or growth regulators or other “exempt from tolerance” chemicals. New Zealand will present the proposal to the Codex Alimentarius Commission and Executive Committee for future direction. Such a policy could help clarify how to handle chemicals that are exempt from tolerance in the United States. There is presently inconsistency internationally on whether an MRL is required or if the chemical should be unregulated. This proposal could be helpful in resolving conflicts regarding potassium phosphite.
- One issue that continues to beleaguer the Codex process is how to allocate available resources in such a way that periodic reviews are conducted within a reasonable period of time while establishing new MRLs in a timely manner. Periodic reviews for some chemicals have lagged for such a long time that that member delegations are raising concerns that Codex’s reputation and integrity may be in jeopardy. However, if more resources are dedicated to review older chemicals, it will take longer to establish MRLs for new pesticides. While at the Codex meeting, several of the attendees met to discuss options for addressing this issue. Comments during the discussion included:
 - JMPR needs more resources.
 - Pulse Canada plans to organize farm organizations globally to try to address MRL issues.
 - Could add an extra JMPR meeting to work on backlog reviews.
 - The best approach is to provide FAO more resources to conduct reviews.
 - The Codex database is obsolete. Try to get someone to work at FAO to improve the database.
 - Reviews are sent to registrants too late. Reviews could be screened.
 - Need to define backlogs. Can MRLs be prioritized?
 - Should work with Congress to provide more resources to EPA.
 - Can PRIA earmark funds for international work?
 - WHO charges fees for pharmaceutical programs. Could JMPR charge similar fees?
 - Could process improvements be linked to fees?
 - Need to better define the scope of the problem.
 - JMPR reviewers should tell registrants why MRLs are not provided. Reviewers provide little or no justification when MRLs are not established.
 - Need a JMPR review model.

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