

Codex Alimentarius - A Threat to your Vitamin Supplements?

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So far so good, but what dangers exactly are we talking about? When statistical evidence indicates that food supplements are by far the safest category of products in existence, why do we need regulations?

Could it be that pharmaceutical drugs, recently shown to be a leading cause of death in the Western world, are losing ground, that the pharmaceutical business is on its way out? If so, might it just be that the proponents of pharmaceutical drug "treatment" of disease could be leaning on legislators to eliminate what they perceive to be the cause of their woes - the natural way to health by proper nutrition?

However that may be, Paul Taylor has examined the question of Codex Alimentarius and the threat this international legislative body's deliberations may pose to our health by "regulating" supplements of vital nutrients in a most restrictive way.

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Have you ever wondered what would happen if a group of legislators from 48 different countries got together to talk about nutrition and food? Probably not, as most of us have more important things to think about. Presumably though, they would sit down and discuss the importance of diet, nutrition and the prevention of chronic diseases, and then try to figure out ways to help us all to live longer, healthier lives. Right?

Wrong, unfortunately. Welcome to the world of the 'Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses', where the committee chairman talks about pharmaceutical drugs preventing diseases and the EU representative states that food and the prevention of diseases do not go together. If you're the type of person who prefers processed food and who wouldn't be seen dead in a health food shop, then you can relax and stop reading now, because Codex is definitely not a threat to your life style. But if you're the sort who prefers natural healthcare to pharmaceutical drugs, and who supplements his or her diet with high doses of multi-vitamins and minerals then you could soon have a great deal to worry about, because Codex is a direct threat to your way of life.

So what is Codex?

The Codex Alimentarius Commission is the international body charged with setting global food standards, and is jointly sponsored by the United Nations Food and

Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Codex Alimentarius literally means "food code", and the Commission was set up in 1963 to protect the health of consumers, ensure fair practices in international food trade and to co-ordinate all international food standards work. The legal basis for the enforcement of the guidelines and standards created by Codex dates back to the mid-1990s, when Codex Alimentarius signed agreements with the World Trade Organization (WTO) by which Codex creates trade standards that the WTO uses to resolve international trade disputes.

That all sounds fine, you are probably thinking. But how on earth could Codex possibly affect me when I want to buy vitamins, minerals and other nutrients?

Good question.

In fact, with the exception of coordinating international food standards work Codex doesn't do any of the things that it was set up to do. The health of consumers is not being protected by the work of Codex, and the international trade in food is anything but fair. Nowhere is this more apparent than in what Codex is trying to do to the international availability of vitamins and minerals (which come under the definition of food at Codex), where it is attempting to pass a variation on the extraordinarily restrictive EU Food Supplements Directive as the blueprint for the global regulation of food supplements.

The EU Food Supplements Directive, for those who are unaware of it, was passed by the EU Parliament in March 2002, and will be fully implemented on 1st August 2005. An extremely controversial piece of legislation, it will ban, on grounds of safety, almost 300 forms of vitamins and minerals from being sold within the EU - many of which have been sold for decades and are the same forms of nutrients that are found in food itself. So contentious, in fact, is this legislation that two cases challenging the legality of the ban have recently been referred to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg by the UK High Court.

Nevertheless, the EU is the single most important influence upon the Codex discussions, and Basil Mathioudakis, who was responsible for drafting the text of the EU Food Supplements Directive, is the head of the European Commission delegation at meetings of the 'Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses'. Once the 10 new candidate countries join the EU in May 2004 Mr Mathioudakis will be representing a total of 25 EU Member States at Codex, and whenever he exercises his right to vote the 25 Member States will not be entitled to exercise theirs. As such it is very likely that the EU will be able to wield a block vote at the next Codex meeting consisting of almost one half of all of the countries attending.

Worse still, of the 48 countries who attended the previous meeting of the 'Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses' in November 2003, only one of them, South Africa, is actively opposing these restrictive proposals for the world-wide availability of vitamins and mineral supplements. Democratically of course, since the EU, with its soon-to-be population of 450 million people, is allowed 25 votes at

Codex, then large countries such as the United States, with its population of over 280 million people, should proportionately be given at least 15 votes. Under the Codex voting system however the United States is only allowed one vote, which means that the EU is now in an extremely powerful position.

As a result, the Codex vitamin and mineral restrictions could possibly be finalized this coming November in Bonn, Germany. If this happens the effect upon the aforementioned legal challenges to the EU Food Supplements Directive could be grave to say the least, because if the Codex restrictions were agreed before the legal challenge was completed the UK lawyers would in essence be arguing for the European Court of Justice to overturn legislation that was fully in line with a newly agreed global standard. Moreover, even if the legal challenges to the EU Food Supplements Directive are successful the Codex proposals could still be implemented as the global standard, thus effectively overruling any short-term victory for health freedom in the EU. As such, a finalized Codex text would have the ability to override the dietary supplement laws of all countries, including the United States.

Long-term, it would not be unreasonable to expect that other EU health-related legislation, such as restrictive regulations on nutrition and health claims, will become the blueprints for still further standards to be enacted by Codex on a globally harmonized basis. Ironic isn't it, that far from being the protectors of our health, our governments and legislators now appear to be one of the biggest risks to it?

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