

MayDay as Observer of Codex Alimentarius

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In the field of food and applied nutrition, World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) launched the Codex Alimentarius Commission in 1962. The task of the Commission is to establish global standards, guidelines, and recommendations for food, and now their biannual meetings are increased to annual meetings, due to the many issues on the agenda.

After many petitions to the Danish Ministry of Food, MayDay was granted permission to observe the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CA). At CA's 22nd convention on the topic of nutrition and diet foods, Rachel Santini from the Danish Institute for Common Health (DIFF) participated on behalf of MayDay, and I participated in the beginning of July 2000.

The meeting took place at the German Directory of Foods in Germany and covered four days. 230 people were present, with an equal representation of both sexes. The majority of the delegates were non-elected governmental representatives, more than a fourth represented industrial interests, and only about ten were delegates from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), thus representing consumer groups independent of governments. At least one government delegate from each country had the right to speak, together with a few industrial representatives, while nearly no consumers held the same privilege.

The agenda contained 14 items, such as labelling regulations, gluten free products, breast milk substitutes, children's foods, enriched ('functional') foods, as well as the notorious vitamins and minerals guidelines which threatened slowly to stifle access to applied nutrition on a global basis.

It deserves mention that around 1500 protesters gathered before the meeting for a whole day in Berlin to demonstrate for free access to food supplements. The first day of

the CA meeting saw a gathering of 1,000 protesters – predominantly former patients who had benefited from applied nutrition – and speeches were made by Dr Matthias Rath, leader of the demonstration, Norwegian writer and supporter of food supplements Dag Viljen Poleszynski, and the New Zealand heal-practitioner Gene Sylvester Eagle-Oden who spoke on behalf of 5,000 heal-practitioners from New Zealand.

That same evening, a German newsflash accused Matthias Rath of “seducing his poor patients in his fight against Codex which he only fought because he himself made a living of selling applied nutrition and using them in his treatments.” It was significant that the Codex Alimentarius meeting was not mentioned at all in the ten minute long news item, which was so detailed that it must have taken more than half a day of preparation, and, consequently, must have been made in advance.

In fact, CA’s fundamental and expressed aim is allegedly:

- To provide food safety
- To secure trade and avoid trade barriers

After scrutinizing the list of participants and being present at the meeting we must conclude that items one and two have changed place so that profit seems to go before health. To be sure, critics of the CA maintain that trade makes up 95% of their interests whereas only 5% is left for health.

The heated debate about global guidelines for breast milk substitutes divided the delegates in two groups consisting of representatives from the poor developing countries versus those from the western (mostly European) industrial countries, as these naturally have interests that differ widely as far as nutrition, politics and economics are concerned.

The Western breast-milk substitute industry is interested in entering the vast market of the developing countries, whereas, for reasons pertaining health and economics, developing countries such as India and quite a few African states strive to enable their populations to breastfeed their children for as long as possible.

Poor people seldom have access to pure water, they are often unable to read informative labelings, and can rarely afford the expensive breast-milk substitutes. Milk powders that must be mixed with a proper measure of water – clean water, that is - are not as practical to a mother in a poor mountain village in Africa as they are to a mother in the West with access to cleaner water and with a financial status and schooling that make her better equipped to mix the breast milk substitution.

Research showing beyond a doubt that breastfeeding is the healthiest choice for children under the age of six months was totally disregarded in WHO’s contribution at the meeting. On the whole, the discussion about breast-milk substitutes exemplified the difficulties concerning the setting of standards, guidelines and recommendations valid on a global basis and to peoples with widely different conditions, needs and interests, and setting these standards means addressing a huge clash of interests.

Moreover, CA repeatedly points out that the CA standards are only recommendations which the individual governments may choose to follow. It is quite common, however, that governments adhere to the CA guidelines, for which reason the guidelines agreed upon in this forum are of paramount importance.

Consequently, it is also noticeable that larger biotech and pharmaceutical industries are richly represented whereas representatives of actual consumer interests are few and far between and have very little say in the matter.

When, during the debate on functional foods, we hear the very same arguments brought forth in favor of these that were shortly before produced in evidence against vitamins and minerals when such were the issue, it is only natural to suspect that hidden agendas were at large.

To be sure, critics of the CA do feel that the organization has aimed for some time at two underhand issues:

1. That transnational medical industries agree on trade regions in order to monopolize the applied nutrition market – an arrangement that does not create healthy products, but rather the opposite.

2. That these global industries introduce functional foods and genetically modified organisms in food and applied nutrition at the expense of the quality of applied nutrition.

The latter is particularly problematic in the eyes of health-conscious, supplement consumers, since both governments and consumer organizations become marionettes in a large-scale game about the ‘safety’ of consumers and monopolies that are difficult to see through for the individual consumer.

Through MayDay’s GMO campaign I fight for the right to choose for myself what I consume. I wish to be able to avoid genetically modified organisms (GMO) in my food and applied nutrition, while at the same time I campaign to retain access to dietary supplements in the high doses necessary to maintain my life quality and health.

However, dietary supplements in high doses predominantly comes from the USA where a majority of food production is based on genetic engineering, so if I wish to retain my (fundamental) right to choose, I must also look out for GMO in certain types of supplements (No GE on the labels).

Unfortunately, at the meeting it was agreed to regulate vitamins and minerals according to so-called ‘maximum levels,’ which, to consumers used to optimal and therapeutic doses, in fact look more like ‘minimum levels.’

There was talk about a positive list of vitamins and minerals and about introducing a rule that manufacturers in the future must inform about the percentage of 'recommended daily allowances' (ADT/RDA) on their labels which, according to MayDay, will only delude consumers into believing that they receive more nutritional value than is actually the case. This is what is normally referred to as 'consumer misguidance' if conducted by private companies, but in this case the perpetrators are the official governments.

The excuse is 'consumer safety' because we – the poor stupid, ignorant consumers – cannot be allowed to take too much (read: optimal doses) of the so-called 'dangerous' vitamins and minerals – for what would happen if we became too healthy?

It was at this point at the meeting that we could easily have been led to believe that the issue was the protection of citizens against the thousands of deadly chemicals running rampant on the market today, but it turned out that the real issue was actually the micro and macro nutrition products vital to the growth, balance, energy and very existence of our bodies.

According to the many Codex bureaucrats it must now be made more difficult to obtain access to the beneficial and completely harmless nutrition products such as the vitamins and minerals which many people consume in order to maintain their health, and we must ask ourselves who benefits from this, other than the large medical companies that will become future distributors to the population.

The meeting contained a reference to a recently published survey conducted by the National Academy of Sciences, USA / Canada, which concluded that 'there is insufficient research to support the theory that larger doses of antioxidants such as Selenium, Vitamin C and E, carotene and beta-carotene can prevent chronic diseases.'

Since no Danish delegates to the CA have read this survey as yet we must wait to deal with it in depth until a later MayDay newsletter, in which we hope also to be able further to elaborate upon the issues concerning the globally damaging influence of Codex Alimentarius on nutrition and public health.

Nothing is what it seems to be when it comes to Codex Alimentarius, and its increase of power will undoubtedly lead to a world-wide decrease of self-determination in regard to what and how much people wish to consume, which is a very bad sign, if you like freedom to choose and it does not make any sense if you remember that the Codex was supposed to ensure free trade and avoid trade barriers.

Important issues like the freedom to choose your own food and nutrients and your health are now in the hands of a few hundred food bureaucrats who frequently and quite unrestrainedly convene in Germany, the stronghold of large-scale pharmaceutical industry, because they are convinced they know what is 'best' for us.