

VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS AND THE CODEX ALIMENTARIUS COMMISSION

Background

The primary mandate of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC) is to develop food standards for the protection of the health of consumers and to ensure fair practices in food trade. The CAC currently consists of 171 Member Countries including Canada. The standards, guidelines and related texts developed by the CAC are intended for voluntary use by governments and there is no categorical obligation for governments to adopt the standards, either as a member of the CAC or as a signatory to the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization.

Standards, guidelines and related texts adopted by the CAC are elaborated by technical subsidiary bodies. Issues related to vitamin and mineral supplements are addressed by the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU).

The CCNFSDU has undertaken work on the development of Proposed Draft Guidelines (the Guidelines) for Vitamin and Mineral Food Supplements. The Guidelines are intended to provide guidance on composition, including levels, packaging and labelling, so that vitamin and mineral supplements will be safe, efficacious and labelled in a clear and non-misleading manner. The Guidelines also deal only with vitamins and minerals and are not relevant to other natural health products nor to alternative medicines. At its 25th session (November 2003), the Committee also agreed that the establishment of upper levels of vitamins and minerals in supplements would be by scientific risk assessment based on generally accepted scientific data and taking into consideration the concerns raised by stakeholders (including consumer groups) as well as the vitamin and mineral intakes from other dietary sources.

The 26th Session (November 2004) finalized the Guidelines and have forwarded them for adoption by the 28th (July 2005) Session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

Canadian Position

At previous sessions of the CCNFSDU, Canada objected to the development of the Guidelines as it was considered that, given the differences in diets, food supplies, attitudes, and consumption patterns around the world, such guidelines were best left to national governments. A large majority of Committee members, however, supported the development of the Guidelines.

The Guidelines specifically state that they will only apply in countries that regulate such products as foods. As vitamin and mineral supplements are regulated as natural health products in Canada, the Guidelines will not be applicable in this country. Nevertheless, Canada has participated in the development process to ensure that the Guidelines have a scientific basis and that the health of consumers is protected.

*Received from Allan McCarville, Senior Advisor, Codex
Health Canada, Food Directorate*

February 18, 2005