

Discussion on the identity of wine within the Codex Alimentarius

OIV – 02/04/2015 - The Codex Committee on Food Additives (CCFA) held its Forty-seventh Session in Xi'an, China from 23 to 27 March 2015, at the kind invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China.

Among the various points of the agenda, a particular point concerned the additives and their provisions for the food category 14.2.3 "Grape wines and its sub-categories".

Grape wine is part of Annex 3 for which the additives that are recognised for use in the grape wine category and subcategories should be evaluated case by case.

In 2014, during the 46th Session of the CCFA, the Working Group had agreed to the recommendation of the EWG that food additives with "acidity regulator" and "emulsifier, stabilizer and thickener" function should be considered on a case-by-case basis in food category 14.2.3 "Grape wines and its sub-categories" and, therefore, had considered each provision in these food categories on an individual basis

In addition, the 46th Session of the CCFA endorsed the recommendation regarding the discard of the proposed new provisions with the understanding that substances used as processing aids could be nominated in processing aids database.

Furthermore, the Committee agreed to establish an electronic working group, led by France, to collect information on the functional classes, on the appropriateness of setting good manufacturing practice (GMP) or a numerical maximum use level as well as the actual levels of use in the following provisions: Ascorbic acid, L-, Calcium ascorbate, Calcium carbonate, Carbon dioxide, Citric acid, Erythorbic acid (isoascorbic acid), Fumaric acid, Gum arabic, Lactic Acid, L-, D- And DL-, Malic Acid, DL-, Sodium Ascorbate, Sodium Carboxymethyl Cellulose (Cellulose Gum), Sodium Erythorbate (Sodium Isoascorbate), Tartrates and calcium sulfates dans les vins spéciaux

General and specific comments on the justification of GMP limit or Numerical ML have been submitted by a working group including the OIV

Some members of the working group expressed controversial opinions about which of the numerical maximum limit or GMP level, must be applied to food additives used in winemaking.

A significant number of respondents were of the opinion that it is appropriate to set numerical maximum use level for the additives used for wine-making. They pointed out:

- the absence of Codex committee and Codex commodity standard for grape wines,
- the specificities of grape wine for stakeholders of the wine industry and consumers on the international market of wine,
- the specific legal status of grape wine in producing and non-producing countries,
- the expertise of the intergovernmental organization named International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) that established and published the International Code of Oenological Practices that is widely taken into account for the establishment of national and supra-national rules, with respect to harmonized ML.

Moreover, they consider that an appropriate numerical ML:

- should guarantee the correct use of the additives without adverse effect on the quality,
- would not mislead the consumer as regards the nature of grapes and the oenological processes used in wine making, and his well-established perception of wine,
- would preserve the intrinsic characteristics, avoid lowering the identity or changing substantially the composition of grape wine,

- should be in line with OIV limit, avoiding discrepancy to facilitate international trade.

It was also highlighted that GMP level may differ from one country to another one. Moreover, it was noted that GMP is not a maximum use level considering that the preamble of the GSFA provides that all additives, with or without a numerical maximum level, shall be used under conditions of good manufacturing practice.

Some participants supported a GMP limit and had concerns that numerical limits may be applied where there is no Admissible Daily Intake (ADI) specified by JECFA¹. Some of them are of the opinion that a food additive with no ADI specified by JECFA should be considered safe at GMP, unless it has been established that it is technologically justified to restrict the use of this additive for a specific commodity. Other arguments consider that GMP level:

- grants a more flexible approach than numerical ML that could need to be adjusted frequently,
- is usually more restrictive for use level than numerical ML due to the self-limiting effect of use from an economic and quality perspective,
- is more adapted to globally-produced and minimally processed food such as wine in relation with natural producing factors and geographic variances in consumer taste preferences,
- is preferable to minimize barriers to trade that hence impede the proper functioning of the international wine market.

During this 47th session, the Committee endorsed the recommendation to adopt at Step 8 the draft provision for carbon dioxide (INS 290) in food category 14.2.3 "Grape wines" with a maximum use level at "GMP" and to revise the Note 60, associated in order to limit CO₂ content in finished still wine at 4000 mg/kg at 20 °C";

The Committee also endorsed the recommendation to establish an EWG to develop a discussion paper, for the next session, which would assist to analyse the specific provisions of food category 14.2.3 and its sub-categories case-by-case.

It was noted that the concern was not about the safety but about the technological justification of the provisions.

The Committee agreed that the electronic working group works with the following Term of References: "In the context of the general use of (i) emulsifiers; (ii) stabilisers; (iii) thickeners; (iv) acidity regulators; and (v) antioxidants in the production of wine to:

- a) Provide clarity and specificity on the general concerns of (i) wine identity; (ii) wine stability; (iii) global applicability of limitations for the use of food additives in wine; and (iv) innovation in wine production.
- b) Based on the outcome of point "a" above, perform an examination on the effect of expressing a maximum use of additives in wine: (i) on a Numerical Basis; and (ii) as GMP.

The EWG will not examine specific provisions."

¹ Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA)