

March 17, 2021

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

The undersigned participants in the Food Industry Codex Coalition (FICC)<sup>1</sup> wish to congratulate you on your recent confirmation as Secretary of Agriculture. We write to express our strong support for continued U.S. leadership of and engagement with the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex). To build on important momentum that the U.S. Codex program has generated over the last several years, we urge that Codex remain a core strategic focus for the Department, and we respectfully offer a series of recommendations below to support this.

Codex directly benefits the health and safety of American consumers at a time of an increasingly globalized food system. By creating and maintaining a science-based, level playing field through the development of international standards, it also enhances economic opportunities for American farmers, food producers, manufacturers, transporters, suppliers, retailers, and the millions of other American livelihoods tied to the food and agricultural value chains. For these reasons, effective U.S. engagement with Codex is strategically beneficial both to safeguard American citizens and to facilitate trade, supporting continued economic growth and recovery in rural communities.

It is Codex's commitment to science-based decision making, risk assessment, transparency and participation by all relevant stakeholders that makes it exceptional and critical to U.S. food and agricultural producers. Yet, these commitments are increasingly being challenged by certain international stakeholders that seek to advance their national or regional trade agendas, try to push Codex beyond its scope and mandate, and/or undermine other foundational Codex values. United States leadership and resolute engagement with Codex is needed now more than ever.

As you consider your priorities for the U.S. Codex program, we support the following actions:

- **Direct development and implementation of a proactive and assertive U.S. Codex strategy:** Enabling the Codex Office, with the interagency input and resources behind them, to develop an assertive Codex strategy that prioritizes U.S. objectives, international outreach, and coalition building is key to long term success. The strategy should include transparent consultation with all relevant stakeholders and build on the existing Codex Office-initiated partnerships with organizations such as the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and programming like the U.S. regional Codex colloquia. To be most effective, relevant U.S. stakeholders need to be aware of and aligned with the strategy to optimize its execution.
- **Effectively harness diplomatic networks to support U.S. Codex strategy:** Several recent examples illustrate how effective the United States can be when its embassies, consulates and diplomatic missions are mobilized on Codex strategic priorities. This starts by leveraging the U.S. Missions in Rome and Geneva to better manage Codex issues that flow from the Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Health Organization or are associated with the administration of Codex. In addition to leveraging our Foreign Agricultural Service posts, we encourage establishing early in your term stronger, closer relationships with the Department of State on Codex and other multilateral issues impacting U.S. food

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<sup>1</sup> FICC is composed of U.S. based food and agricultural companies and trade associations representing the entire food chain from inputs to production to retail. FICC recognizes and supports the critical role Codex serves to protect public health and ensure fair trade practices through the development and adoption of science- and risk-based food safety standards.

and agricultural producers to also leverage State's global network to maximize the U.S. footprint and impact on these important matters.

- **Ensure sufficient staff and resources are provided for U.S. Codex engagement:** It is critical that the U.S. Codex Office is adequately staffed and resourced. As the office is asked to do more and the strategic significance of Codex continues to grow, it will need to expand to meet growing demands. Yet, many of the personnel involved in preparing U.S. positions and staffing U.S. Codex delegations come from multiple agencies. Their scientific and/or trade expertise is essential to the effective functioning of the U.S. Codex program. It is, thus, also critical to ensure your Cabinet counterparts recognize that delegates from all U.S. agencies must be resourced to effectively participate in Codex and recognized for their contributions.
- **Encourage robust interagency engagement and support:** It is vital that the interagency process continues to actively contribute to U.S. strategy, positioning and execution in Codex. The Codex Office must lead, but the expertise, perspective and networks of interagency stakeholders are invaluable in managing the increasing manipulation of Codex by some to advance trade and other geopolitical agendas. The robust participation by all interagency partners, including the Food and Drug Administration and the Office of the United States Trade Representative, is essential to be successful. This coordination is best accomplished through frequent staff communication and engagement, but also by establishing a strong culture of collaboration on Codex at the highest levels within the administration.
- **Maintain the autonomy of the U.S. Codex Office:** The U.S. Codex program has directly benefited from its move to the jurisdiction of the Undersecretary of Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs without undermining in any way the commitment of the United States to science-based decision making driving Codex outcomes. This organizational arrangement provides the Codex Office with a level of independence necessary to manage the dynamics and complexities of a multilateral organization that touches multiple federal agency jurisdictions. It also provides the office with a stalwart Undersecretary champion, which has proven essential in driving strategic outreach to foreign counterparts and in elevating the importance of Codex among competing interagency priorities. This progress would be jeopardized if the Codex Office were moved back to the Food Safety and Inspection Service or subsumed by another agency within the Department.

The tireless efforts of the U.S. Codex Office, supported by a robust interagency process, transparency with stakeholders, coordinated international outreach, and steadfast support by Department leadership, have helped to secure several recent achievements. These outcomes have protected the institution of Codex, enhanced food safety, and benefited U.S. producers and consumers. Yet, many important and unresolved issues remain before Codex, making this a critical time for the United States to redouble its commitment. We count on your leadership and appreciate your attention to Codex as a priority for the Department going forward. We ask that you seek to extend this beyond the Department and champion these priorities with other Cabinet members to ensure Codex remains a priority for all agencies involved in the U.S. Codex program.

A group of FICC participants would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience to discuss these issues further. We request that your staff contact Tony Rice ([trice@usdec.org](mailto:trice@usdec.org)) to arrange a meeting. Thank you again for your continued attention to Codex and its impact on the ability of the United States to supply global markets with safe food and agricultural products.

Respectfully,

American Bakers Association  
American Beverage Association  
American Feed Industry Association  
American Frozen Food Institute  
American Oil Chemists' Society  
American Peanut Council

American Soybean Association  
American Spice Trade Association  
Animal Health Institute  
Biotechnology Innovation Organization  
Calorie Control Council  
Consumer Brands Association  
Corn Refiners Association  
CropLife America  
Distilled Spirits Council of the United States  
Flavor & Extract Manufacturers Association of the U.S.  
Food & Agriculture Export Alliance  
Infant Nutrition Council of America  
Institute of Shortening and Edible Oils  
International Association of Color Manufacturers  
International Council of Beverages Association  
International Dairy Foods Association  
International Food Additive Council  
Juice Products Association  
National Cattlemen's Beef Association  
National Confectioners Association  
National Corn Growers Association  
National Fisheries Institute  
National Grain and Feed Association  
National Milk Producers Federation  
National Pork Producers Council  
National Turkey Federation  
North American Meat Institute  
North American Millers' Association  
Pet Food Institute  
Produce Marketing Association  
SNAC International  
The Association for Dressings & Sauces  
The Sugar Association  
The Vinegar Institute  
U.S. Dairy Export Council  
U.S. Grains Council  
U.S. Meat Export Federation  
U.S. Soybean Export Council  
USA Poultry & Egg Export Council  
USA Rice  
Wine Institute

Cc:

Mr. Anthony Blinken, Secretary of State  
Ms. Gina Raimondo, Secretary of Commerce  
Mr. Norris Cochran, Acting Secretary of Health and Human Services  
Ms. Maria Pagan, Acting United States Trade Representative  
Mr. Michael Regan, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency  
Ms. Gloria Steele, Acting Administrator United States Agency for International Development  
Dr. Janet Woodcock, Acting Commissioner of Food and Drugs