On the Codex Standard for Natural Mineral Waters

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Summary
Codex Alimentarius is the only world wide food standard. The Codex Alimentarius Commission is the implementing agency of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standard Programme and its purpose is protecting the health of the consumers and ensuring fair practices in the food trade. In 1994 the WTO agreement and the SPS agreement became an integral part of the WTO agreement, binding all members, and was officially published. Article 3 of the SPS agreement provides that members shall base their sanitary or phytosanitary measures on international standards etc. By this provision Codex Standards are of extreme importance, though the Procedural Manual provides that standards are on a voluntary basis through acceptance by Member Countries. The amount of components in ground water, in particular total dissolved solids (TDS) and bicarbonates, affects the concept of mineral waters in those areas. Natural Mineral Water in Europe, which has a high level of TDS and bicarbonates, started as a curative water at a spa. In the 1950s French regulation provided that the first requirement of natural mineral water is to be therapeutic. Council Directive 80/777/EEC established in 1980 prohibited all indications relating to the prevention, treatment or cure of human illness. In Japan ground water has been used as one of the ingredients of foods for a long time because the ground water having a low amount of TDS and negligible amounts of bicarbonates remains stable when heated. Meanwhile, a keyword to bottled water in United States is "safety". The majority of sales volume of bottled water in the US is treated purified water. The situations described above brought difficulties to the elaborate Codex Standard for Natural Mineral Waters. Discussion in sessions of the Codex Committee and the Commission get complicated. The EU was absolutely opposed to changing its principles provided in the Council Directive. Finally in the session of the Commission in 1997 the standard was adopted as step 8 not in consensus but by result of a vote, 33 affirmative votes, 31 dissentions and 10 abstentions. The current Codex Standard for natural mineral waters may have an impact on our standards on points of differences between our standard and the Codex Standard.