A substantial part of the worldwide trade in food depends upon the use of inspection and certification systems. The confidence of consumers in the safety and the quality of their food supply depends, in part, on their perception as to the effectiveness of official and officially recognized inspection and certification systems. These systems are fundamentally important and very widely used as a means of ensuring that the food we consume is safe and wholesome.

The Codex Committee on Food Import & Export Inspection & Certification Systems (CCFICS) was established in 1991 after the FAO/WHO Conference on Food Standards and Chemicals in Food and Food Trade. The conference identified the need for an international framework for inspection and certification covering a wide range of technical matters, general concepts of inspection and certification procedures and methods of exchanging information. Complying with food safety demands and satisfying certification requirements of importing countries were two important factors that were identified as impediments to food trade.

The principles and guidelines developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, commonly referred to as Codex, in this area set out to harmonize methods and procedures for inspection and certification for food in international trade. Codex has also developed guidance in relation to the development of systems for the design, operation, assessment and accreditation of food import and export inspection and certification systems; guidelines for the development of and judgment of equivalence of sanitary measures; principles and guidelines for the exchange of information in food safety emergencies and on exchange of information in relation to rejections of imported food; principles for traceability and, more recently, principles and guidelines for national food control systems.

Together, the suite of texts developed by Codex in this area provides guidance to both developed and developing countries to facilitate trade in safe food.