



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
11 May 2017

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Sixty-fifth session

Geneva, 2-5 May 2017

Report of the sixty-fifth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

I. Introduction

1. Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany) chaired the meeting. The session was opened by Ms. Lorenza Jachia of the UNECE Market Access Section who welcomed the delegates. She expressed appreciation for the continued active engagement and valuable work of the Specialized Section.

2. She recalled the United Nations increased attention to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their relevance to the work of this group and noted that since they had been adopted, UNECE had mapped its work against the most relevant SDGs. She also mentioned that the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes had undertaken such an exercise and developed a promotional poster to be used by the United Nations and at national level. Last year's conference on food loss organized by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7), she said, had particularly highlighted the link between quality standards and SDG 12 on sustainable production and consumption systems. The aim to fight food loss with better quality had been stressed and had become a guiding principle in WP.7's work and messages. She also stressed that greater knowledge sharing, the exchange of best practices and the capacity-development at national level - including in transition and developing countries and wherever else needed - contributed to the SDGs. The demand for this had increased sharply in the past months and the secretariat will organize and contribute in 2017 to 8 workshops in Europe, Central Asia and Asia. Further requests for assistance and advice had been received from African countries. While standard development was the core work of WP.7, she noted, accompanying measures and support linked to the group's mandate received continuous increased attention.

II. Attendance

3. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Albania, Austria, Brazil, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

4. The following specialized programme participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

5. The European Commission was also represented.

6. A representative of the following intergovernmental organization participated in the session: the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables.

7. At the invitation of the secretariat, professors and students from the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva, Switzerland) attended the session as observers.

III. Adoption of the agenda

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with amendments.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

(a) UN, UNECE and subsidiary bodies

9. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section that the UNECE had taken budget cuts in this and next biennium (2018-2019) including posts, consultancy, printing and travel funds. For the moment, the secretariat of the Working Party availed of project funds which covered some of the losses. Fund-raising will continue also in the future.

10. The secretariat also reported on the November 2016 session of the Working Party and the Conference on Food Loss and Food Waste which was organized jointly with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) Geneva office and took place during the WP.7 session. Speakers from governments, inspection services, retail chains and civil society, as well as producers, had discussed the interplay between quality standards, including private standards and technical requirements, and food loss. It had been largely agreed that quality standards contributed to better quality production, thus reducing food loss further up the supply chain. The secretariat also noted that discussions on traceability were advancing and recommendations had been made.

11. The secretariat announced that the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards had held its annual session on 12-13 April 2017 and the work of WP.7 had been very well received with several delegations expressing their interest in getting more involved with the work. Moreover, delegates expressed interest in linking WP.7's work with the work of other bodies such as Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies (WP.6), as well as the Environment and the Transport Divisions.

12. The April 2017 70th anniversary session of the Economic Commission for Europe had featured an agricultural side event on the activities of WP.7, a farmer's market that had attracted a large international audience.

(b) Other organizations

13. The representative of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the delegates of the agenda items of the 20th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV20), which will be held from 2 to 6 October 2017 in Kampala, Uganda. She emphasized that some items discussed at this Specialized Section meeting would also be considered at CCFFV20 and welcomed the delegates' participation and contributions to CCFFV20.

14. The representative of the OECD reported that the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme was currently working on 5 brochures: leeks (Rapporteur - Germany), passion fruit (Rapporteur - Kenya), root vegetables (Rapporteur - Slovakia), berry fruit (Rapporteur - Slovakia) and tomatoes (Rapporteur - Netherlands). The OECD Scheme is also addressing new challenges such as internet sales of fruit and vegetables, traceability, tolerances and food waste. Three countries applied officially to join the Scheme: Albania, Brazil and Croatia with evaluation missions, if feasible, taking place this year. Israel had volunteered to undergo a peer review, becoming the ninth country to participate in the Peer Review Programme. The report would be presented for approval at the next Plenary Meeting (December 2017). Germany had translated 5 OECD brochures into German (chicory, pears, plums, apples and table grapes). The brochures will be available at the OECD webpage. The OECD is working together with UNECE to organize a joint workshop in Asia to promote standards and the interpretation brochures. The OECD will provide experts and material.

V. Revision of UNECE standards**(a) Tomatoes***Cherry and cocktail tomatoes*

15. At its November 2016 session, the Working Party had decided to return the standard for tomatoes to the Specialized Section for further discussions and the review of the sizing requirement, i.e. the maximum size for cherry and cocktail tomatoes. After in-depth discussions, no consensus could be found and it was decided not to introduce a maximum size. However, the Specialized Section amended the following sections: Definition of produce (to add the commercial types: cherry and cocktail tomatoes); and Provisions concerning marking (nature of produce and commercial specifications).

Green immature tomatoes

16. The Specialized Section discussed the proposal by the Netherlands to introduce into the standard provisions on hard green tomatoes. It was explained that there was a growing trade in this kind of produce which required regulation. Several delegations expressed their concern to include them in the standard; other delegations noted that they remained within the colour requirements/gauge and could already be marketed. It was therefore decided to include a new section on Maturity requirements in II. Provisions concerning quality which reads: "The development and state of maturity of the tomatoes must be such as to enable them to continue their ripening process and to reach a satisfactory degree of ripeness. However, the marketing of green immature tomatoes (that have reached step 1 of OECD colour gauge) is allowed provided they are presented uniform as to maturity and labelled accordingly." It was also decided to add in B. Nature of produce "Green immature tomatoes, where appropriate" and to delete the following paragraph under Extra class: "Their colouring, according to their state of ripeness, must be such as to satisfy the

requirements set out in the last sub-paragraph of section A. above.” This last deletion is open for consultation until the end of June 2017.

Ribbed tomatoes

17. The Specialized Section agreed to the proposal by the German delegation to make the sizing provision for ribbed tomatoes of irregular shape optional and amended III. Provisions concerning sizing accordingly.

18. The Specialized Section decided to submit the amended standard for tomatoes to the Working Party in November 2017 for adoption as the revised UNECE Standard for Tomatoes. The paragraph in Extra class which is open for consultation until the end of June 2017 will only be included if agreed. All agreed amendments are highlighted in the post-session document.

(b) Citrus fruit

List of citrus fruit varieties

19. Delegates discussed the usefulness of the compiled informal list of citrus fruit varieties noting that it helped clarify the labelling provisions included in the standard, particularly in consuming countries. Countries opposing the list indicated that inspectors were not qualified to certify varieties but to undertake conformity assessment based on the standard. It was clarified that the list did not describe the characteristics of the varieties nor was it meant to identify or certify varieties. Its sole purpose was to help check that the labelling requirements were met. It was agreed to add “For information only” to the heading of the list. The list was reviewed by a working group but some open issues remained to be solved. The secretariat will publish the list as a post-session document open for amendment until the end of June 2017. Delegations were invited to review the list and inform the secretariat of any missing varieties. A request was made that delegations check prior to submission whether their proposed addition was indeed a variety and that the variety was not already included in the list. Designating delegations to be responsible for the occasional maintenance and updating of variety lists, as had been done in other Specialized Sections, was suggested. South Africa volunteered to be the “custodian” of the citrus fruit list and the table grapes list.

Splitting the citrus fruit standard

20. The Specialized Section discussed the usefulness of splitting the citrus fruit standard based on species in light of the complexity of the current standard. Many delegations felt that the current standard had worked well for many years and should not be split; however, certain areas, particularly the labelling part, required clarification. It was therefore decided to retain the current citrus fruit standard format but to initiate a full review of the standard at the 2018 session of the Specialized Section. All comments received in 2017 including the documents as well as the relevant Codex provisions would be considered. The Rapporteur (South Africa) would prepare a working document for the 2018 session with the aim of finalizing the revision of the standard in 2019.

(d) Headed cabbage

21. During the 2016 consultation process on changes proposed to the UNECE Standard for Headed Cabbage, the amendment of the current wording on the length of the floral stem had been postponed to the current session for further discussion. The proposed new wording for sizing presented by the German delegation was not adopted. Several

delegations felt that it left too much room for interpretation. The many different types of headed cabbages that have been produced and traded in recent years, however, would require an improved descriptive text as the length of the floral stem did not necessarily describe correctly the condition of the cabbage. An informal working group (Germany, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom, United States) will propose new wording and circulate it to the Specialized Section at the end of May 2017.

(e) Apples

List of varieties

22. At the Working Party session in 2016, it was agreed to ask the Specialized Section to discuss the colour group classification of the mutants of the varieties Elstar and Jonagold. While some delegations voiced concern over not differentiating the colour group of mutants from their variety (this being often the most visible distinction between them), it was agreed to grant an exception to these two varieties and their mutants. It was also agreed to correct the colour group for Starking to Group C and leave the “watercore” indication V for Reine des Reinettes in the list of varieties. In reply to a query by New Zealand, it was explained that the variety “Oliver” (trademark Tiddly Pomme TM) had been removed from the list in 2016 as all requests for varietal protection had been withdrawn. New Zealand would provide updates on the varietal protection status of “Oliver” in due course. The delegation from Germany offered to become the “custodian” of the list of apple varieties which would be revised in three years at the earliest, unless an urgent matter required a different schedule.

23. The Specialized Section decided to submit the correction to the colour group for Starking for adoption by the Working Party in November 2017.

Standard for apples and standard for pears

24. The Specialized Section amended the minimum requirements in the standard for apples to read “– free from serious watercore except for varieties marked with a V in the list of varieties” and deleted the mention of Fuji and its mutants.

25. The Specialized Section discussed the proposal by the Netherlands to delete the marking of the smallest and the largest fruit in a box for produce not subject to uniformity rules. While some delegations agreed, others noted that this marking requirement provided important information to the consumer, particularly if the produce was not visible from the outside. It was therefore decided to retain the currently included provision under D. Commercial specifications “(b)” but to make it optional.

26. The same change was adopted for the standard for pears.

27. The Specialized Section decided to provide delegations with a consultation period on the amendment to the standards for apples and for pears until the end of June 2017. Should no objections be voiced, the proposed change would be submitted to the Working Party at its November 2017 session for adoption as the revised standards for apples and for pears.

(f) Fresh figs

28. The delegation from Brazil, Rapporteur of the working group (Brazil, India, Italy, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom and United States) presented the findings of the groups’ discussions on white coating of fresh figs and its compatibility with the minimum requirement “clean”.

29. Recalling previous discussions and the background of the work, he noted that several UNECE standards (e.g. carrots, mushrooms) granted exemptions to this provision. He also noted that food safety issues and aspects linked to consumer preferences had not been discussed by the working group and fell outside their scope and the technical focus of this matter.

30. He highlighted that currently the standard's cleanliness provision did not offer a clear interpretation with regard to white coating on figs. In addition, he also noted that figs had a natural bloom as well. The delegate of the United States mentioned in this regard the dark fig varieties which had a natural light bloom. The delegation of the United States also cited the example of silvering in sweet peppers which in certain classes of that standard was allowed to be extensive. This was not considered a comparable example by other delegations.

31. During the ensuing discussions, it was pointed out that the minimum requirement "clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter" left room for interpretation. One possible solution was therefore to define acceptable limits in the 2015 Fresh Fig OECD brochure through the addition of interpretative text and photos. Currently, the photo in the OECD brochure showed a dust-covered fig but not one with white coating.

32. It was decided to follow the recommendation of the working group to not amend the standard. Brazil was asked to provide photos defining acceptable limits of figs with natural bloom and figs from tropical areas coated white due to the use of carrier material. The photos could show the minimum allowed for the white coating and could depict the progression allowed in the different classes. The Specialized Section would ask the OECD to assist in this work and revisit the 2015 Brochure for Fresh Figs. In addition, Brazil noted that as currently the production of this crop in some parts of the world involved the use of Bordeaux-mixture, production processes and good agricultural practices could and were already in the process of being enhanced and progress was made to reach more acceptable cleanliness levels. Brazil was invited to provide updates on further new developments.

(g) Ware potatoes

33. As discussions in the relevant Codex Committee were on-going, the Specialized Section decided to keep this item for next year's agenda and continue to monitor the work on the development of a new Codex standard for ware potatoes. Delegations were asked to submit their comments on the standard at the next session in May 2018.

(h) Other standards

Kiwifruit

34. The Specialized Section discussed the proposal by the delegation from Germany to make the indication of the name of the variety mandatory. Based on the discussion, the Specialized Section adopted the mandatory labelling of the flesh colour or equivalent, if not green. The amendment will be published in the post-session document and will be submitted to the Working Party for approval at its November 2017 session.

Fennel

35. The Specialized Section adopted the proposal by the delegation from Germany to make the indication of the sizing provisions (expressed by minimum and maximum size) optional. The amendment will be published in the post-session document and will be submitted to the Working Party for approval at its November 2017 session.

Size tolerances in the UNECE standards for apples, cherries, citrus fruit, fresh figs, kiwifruit, pears, plums and rhubarb

36. The Specialized Section adopted the alignment of the size tolerance in the standard for kiwifruit with the Standard Layout. The alignment of the other listed standards (apples, cherries, citrus fruit, fresh figs, pears, plums and rhubarb) was adopted on a provisional basis awaiting the approval by the delegation from Spain by the end of June 2017. The agreed amendments will be published in the post-session document(s) and will be submitted to the Working Party for approval at its November 2017 session. The written comment submitted by the delegation from Belgium (INF.14) on the minimum size for cherries will be addressed at the 2018 session.

Courgettes

37. The Specialized Section agreed to adopt the proposal by the delegation from France to add a provision on sizing by count to include round courgettes. The changes will be indicated in the post-session document and submitted to the Working Party for approval at its November 2017 session. The delegation from France will provide clarifications on uniformity requirements for round courgettes by June 2017.

Rhubarb

38. The delegation from Germany outlined their proposal to amend the Minimum Requirements and delete the sizing provisions. The Specialized Section, after discussions, decided to amend the Minimum Requirements but to retain the current provisions concerning sizing in the Standard. All changes will be indicated in the post-session document and submitted to the Working Party for approval at its November 2017 session.

VI. Revision of the Standard Layout for UNECE standards on fresh fruit and vegetables

39. The Specialized Section adopted the following amendments to the Standard Layout: removed the reference to “export-control” stage in the Provisions concerning quality; added an optional section on maturity requirements for non-climacteric and climacteric fruit; added the term “exporter” to the Provisions concerning marking A. Identification and revised the labelling provisions referring to code marks (with a mention of a UNECE data base listing countries issuing officially recognized code marks); amended the Uniformity section and added the clarification that the uniformity in size was not required for mixtures; amended footnote 3 in the section on marking; and added a provision to the section on packaging stating that lasered information on single produce should not lead to flesh or skin defects. It was decided to propose the changes to the Working Party for adoption in November 2017 and to ask the Working Party to allow the amendment of all Fresh Fruit and Vegetables standards accordingly.

Discussion on tolerances for decay

40. At its 2016 session, the Specialized Section had decided to continue the discussion on quality tolerances for decay in UNECE marketing standards within the context of the revision of the Standard Layout. While the proposed increase to 3 per cent in Class I and II was not accepted, discussions took place on the possible increase to 2 per cent as a compromise solution. During the discussions, it became clear that in practice, higher tolerances were already applied, particularly in Europe’s large entry ports. Therefore, an increase to 2 per cent would reflect current practice. It was pointed out by New Zealand (agreeing to the 2 per cent tolerance increase) that a lot of imports were repackaged once they arrived in the importing country. The often applied private standards, it was noted, were part of contractual agreements and not much influenced by the tolerance set in

UNECE standards. Kenya, as well, favoured the 2 per cent increase and noted that strict requirements caused more waste and loss, particularly, when producers and operators had to meet the requirements of the premium international markets. It was also clarified that while the UNECE standard provided a framework, private specifications and tolerances were often much stricter.

41. The delegate of the United States highlighted that fruit irrespective of the class was perishable by nature. As current consumer preferences required, for example, better eating quality, less use of chemicals etc. these additional factors influenced shelf life and perishability of the produce even more. The Standard Layout is considered an important guideline for marketing standards which should not only focus on quality promotion and adequately reflect consumer expectations and changes, but also should take into consideration the characteristics of fresh fruit and vegetables being standardized.

42. Other delegations stressed that increasing the tolerances could lead to more rejections and an increased use of private standards. In addition, no complaint on concrete and produce-specific problems which required urgent action had been brought to the attention of the Specialized Section. It was also suggested that in the future the problem could be addressed if necessary on a product-by-product basis and not as part of the Standards Layout. Standards should provide practical guidance and, as some delegations stressed, it was the experience and the common sense of inspectors that should guide them in their daily work and, particularly, when dealing with situations of decay. The delegation of the United States explained that in the United States, every fresh produce standard included particular tolerances for decay and provided specific guidance. In reply to a query by the delegate from the FAO, it was explained that in UNECE standards, decay for Extra Class had been set at 0 per cent. Similar to discussions in the Codex Committee, tolerances for decay had also been discussed in depth at UNECE but, at the moment, there was no indication for a consensus to increase the tolerance for Extra Class. While some delegations seemed to opine that food loss was reduced by an increase of the tolerance, others had noted that food loss might actually increase as a result. The delegation from the United States noted that the lack of a tolerance in Extra Class would lead to downgrading of produce and thus a decrease of revenue.

43. As no consensus was found, the tolerances for decay for Classes I and II were not changed and discussions were postponed to future sessions.

Simplification of the section on tolerances

44. The delegation from the United States presented its proposal to simplify the section on Tolerances and place tolerances into a table format following the example of the Dry and Dried Produce Standards with, for example, in Extra Class a total tolerance of 5 per cent for all defects excluding decay (within certain defined limits for each individual defect, e.g. serious, progressive, non-progressive). Some delegations noted that this was also how they applied the tolerances contained in the standards and that there might be a need to adapt the standards to current inspection practice. Sweden pointed out that the purpose of the standard was the facilitation of trade and communication between buyers and seller and not the inspection practice. Brazil noted that the standards should be more transparent for industry as well. The current provisions were not practical for the inspection service at the national level. If industry should receive guidance on how not to mix severe and other defects, it might be necessary to revise and adjust the wording.

45. Other delegations opined that the current standards provided guidance. The Chair pointed to the OECD inspection guidelines which contained a section on how to determine the tolerances which would be explained through photos. The review of these photos could clarify better what the various delegations were applying at the moment and this could lead to a proposal to amend the standards.

46. A further simplification could lead to allowing produce with more severe defects to enter the market, and thus increase the use of private standards by trade. As no consensus could be reached, it was decided to postpone further discussions to the 2018 session of the Specialized Section. The delegation of the United States offered to prepare a detailed presentation on this issue for that session.

VII. Food loss/waste related to the use of standards

47. The Rapporteur (Sweden) reviewed the proposals on food loss and waste related to the use of standards prepared in 2016 with input from other delegations. She noted that the initial review had indicated that only limited losses could be attributed to quality standards on high price markets and that more losses were the result of technical specifications in private standards as well as marketing practices often driven by consumer preferences. Class II, she stressed, allowed already for a lot of defects but was not used adequately. Standards, she said, provided a baseline and the ground for price differentiation. “Ugly” fruits often specifically selected and grouped were in fact Class II produce and a concentration of non-conformity products for Class I. Some options proposed in the review to reduce food waste were: no standardization; higher tolerances in Class II; the introduction of a new Class III; and, additionally, the development of baseline quality requirements for produce fit for consumption but not fulfilling the requirements of Classes I or II.

48. The delegation from Kenya presented a UNECE study on pre-shipment food loss related to standards (private and UNECE) in Kenya. The topic of the study and the empirical research had been to examine the role of standards in food loss, to quantify the losses and determine where they occurred in the pre-shipment process of two selected products (avocados and green beans). Kenya had a national quality standards system based on UNECE and Codex standards and conformity certificates were issued for export. He stressed that standards by themselves were not an answer to solve all problems in developing countries’ markets but they served as a guide and provided a valuable baseline.

49. The preliminary findings suggested that food loss occurred at various stages including during harvesting, transport, at the pack house, during processing and preparation and mainly at the production stage. He also listed the limited preventive measures already in place such as capacity-building and training; contractual arrangements for the large exporters with retail chains but not for small-scale farmers and the very basic training for the small-scale growers. He concluded that there were indications that market standard (private and public) played a role in food loss but that particularly retail specifications constituted the higher percentage in food loss. In addition, certain market practices such as last-minute cancellation of orders or the post-delivery rejection based on quality were another factor that led to food loss. He also suggested to further the study and to develop preventive and mitigating measures in a multi-sectoral approach.

50. In ensuing discussions, it was highlighted that there was scope for developing mitigating measures and a local market/demand as both avocados and green beans were an export-oriented production and not part of the traditional Kenyan diet. In addition, produce not exported could be used for processing or by other industries. Kenya also explained that most of the requirements used for the export of green beans were from large retailers. Several delegations stressed that the manner of handling fruit was not only a problem in Kenya. In Europe too, where, as the OECD representative noted, studies indicated that the majority of losses occurred at the consumer and retail stage and were not linked to standards, the handling of perishable produce by employees as well as the consumers was a sizeable problem. More information on good practice could therefore help avoid losses.

51. It was also stressed that one of the aims of the standards in this context was fighting food loss with quality. This meant working with all partners in the supply chain to quantify the effects of the food loss and educate all parties from producers to consumers on ways to avoid losses. Marketing standards were necessary, a good reference and should guarantee the fair supply of the market. However, it was equally important to ensure adequate training to improve their application at all stages. Accountability and extension programmes were very important in this respect as well. Studies in other countries and quantifying the issue through empirical research could help benchmarking the problem to find adequate mitigating and preventive measures. Moreover, if a market was developed enough to export, there was also a need to develop a domestic market able to absorb additional volumes of produce or reuse un-exportable produce in other ways. In order to develop a domestic market, it was necessary to ensure a certain baseline quality.

52. The discussions on the proposals by the working group showed that none of the delegations favoured the option of abandoning standards; only a few delegations opted for a more open Class II and none of the delegations was in favour of the development of a Class III. The Specialized Section therefore decided to examine, on a case-by case basis and upon request by countries, the individual standards and the need to lower requirements in Class II (e.g. remove or lower sizing requirements when produce was still perfectly edible). In addition, several delegations also favoured the promotion of Class II to producers, traders and retailers and informing consumers that the “ugly” fruit category was in fact Class II produce.

Baseline quality requirements

53. In addition, the Specialized Section recognized that for certain markets, there appeared to be a need to develop baseline quality requirements that ensured the supply to the consumer of produce whose edibility was guaranteed; i.e. of a reasonable quality (without classifications) at a reasonable price. This could help develop markets and drive sustainability in newly developing markets as well as developed markets that chose such an option. It was therefore decided to present the first draft baseline requirements for discussion at the next session of the Specialized Section.

Code of Good Practice to reduce food loss and information notices

54. The Specialized Section also decided to draft a Code of Good Practice to help guide and ensure quality along the marketing and supply chain. A working group (France, Kenya, Slovakia, Sweden, United Kingdom) led by Sweden would develop a first draft to initiate discussions. The working group would be linked up with the members of the food loss discussion group including their private-sector participants for input, dissemination, and widespread use. To better explain the purpose and role of standards in fighting food loss or the role of private standards, it was decided to draft a series of 1-page information notes for distribution to the public and the media.

VIII. Electronic quality certificates for fresh fruit and vegetables

55. The secretariat provided the background for a proposal by the Working Party to discuss the development of an electronic quality conformity certificate for fresh fruit and vegetables which was used in pre- and cross-border operations. She stressed that work was already under way on electronic certificates in the phytosanitary area. The Netherlands had electronic systems in place but electronic conformity certificates for quality had not been developed yet. The United Kingdom explained that they used electronic documents at import. In Kenya, the government was actively looking into e-certification and was involved in the development of e-SPS certificates. New Zealand stressed the need for

coordination with other bodies such as the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) to build on results already achieved. France suggested that work on an electronic quality certificate needed to be coordinated with Codex (CCFICS) where the Netherlands and Australia are working on the development of guidance material. Brazil and other delegations pointed to the closely related problems such as the development and recognition of e-signatures which required clarification.

56. As there was interest and support to pursue this matter, the Specialized Section agreed to contact the relevant group of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) for advice on next steps.

IX. Traceability

57. At its 2016 session, the Working Party suggested the possible establishment of a central repository of all countries issuing code marks, possibly at the UNECE. The traceability discussion group together with the UNECE secretariat had reviewed possible options and presented their recommendations which also included the establishment of a UNECE registry.

58. The Specialized Section supported the establishment of such a database which would include the name of the country applying official code marks; the physical and email address of the issuing organization in case of questions as well as information on the structure of the code mark issued by this country (i.e. example). The registry would take a simple format, would be administered by the UNECE secretariat and would be available on the UNECE website to all interested parties. The secretariat invited delegations to provide their own information and, if possible, information on inspection services from around the world for the secretariat to contact. The UNECE secretariat was neither responsible nor liable for the content, accuracy and legal implications that could be linked to the content of the entries.

59. It was also proposed to hold at the November 2018 Working Party session a follow-up traceability conference focused on code marks as well as traceability in general.

X. Promotion and capacity-building

60. The delegation from Germany informed delegates that a successful capacity-building workshop (thirty-first International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables) with a participation of over 200 people had been organized in March 2017 in Bonn, Germany. The UNECE secretariat presented capacity-building activities under the Working Party noting the large demand for training on international best practice developed by the groups under Working Party 7 and related implementing and support measures. The following trainings to which delegations were invited had taken place or will take place in 2017. They are organized or supported by UNECE:

- Sustainable cross-border trade Balkans and Greece, Thessaloniki, 22-24 March 2017
- Cross border cooperation, Fergana Valley, Tajikistan, 16-19 May 2017
- Cross border trade nuts and dried fruit – Sampling and inspection guidelines, Turin, Italy (to be confirmed), 4-7 July 2017
- Cross border trade fresh fruit Central Asia, Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 10-14 July 2017
- Cross border trade meat: 10-11 August 2017, Dublin, Ireland

- Cross border agriculture trade (meat and e-certificates) – UNECE-ESCAP international workshop — Nanjing and Tianjin, China, 18-22 September 2017
- Sustainable Agro Food Business Platform Asia-Europe, Bangkok, Thailand – 27 September 2017

61. The delegate of Brazil reported on the successful completion of the EU-Brazil Sectoral Dialogues Support Facility project financed by the European Union. He thanked DG Santé and DG Agri as well the UNECE secretariat and the members of the Specialized Section involved in the project for their support. He stressed that this project had involved not only a standard-setting component but also implementation measures and had resulted in concrete actions and changes.

XI. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the work of the Specialized Section

62. The Specialized Section reviewed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) closely related to its work, with an emphasis on SDG2 (Zero hunger) and SDG12 (Sustainable production and consumption patterns) as well as SDG 17 (Global partnerships) and mapped its activities and impact against the relevant SDGs. The Specialized Section also discussed and drafted text explaining how their activities matched the SDGs. The proposed text will be made available in a post-session document for review and comments until September 2017 and presented to the Working Party in November 2017 for information.

XII. Other business

63. The next session of the Specialized Section will take place from 30 April to 2 May 2018.

XIII. Future work

64. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for 2018:

- Ware potatoes – comparison and possible alignment between Codex draft and UNECE standard
- Citrus fruit standard (possible new structure)
- Items that impact on UNECE work as a result of decisions taken by the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
- Standard Layout: quality tolerances, applications and amendments; general amendments related to food waste; indication of the importer or seller as an alternative; items that impact on UNECE work as a result of decisions taken by the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables
- Review of list of varieties of table grapes (Rapporteur South Africa)
- Other standards
- Baseline quality requirements
- Code of good practice

- Traceability – update on registry
- Update on SDG poster

65. Any further proposals for future work should be sent to the secretariat by mid-January 2018.

XIV. Election of officers

66. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany) as Chair and Ms. Kristina Mattsson (Sweden) as Vice-Chair.

XV. Adoption of the report

67. The Specialized Section adopted the report of the session.
