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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Committee on Trade

### Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

### Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

#### Forty-first session

Geneva, 11-13 March 2013

## Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

### I. Introduction

1. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy). The Director of the Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division opened the meeting. She said that over the past several years the Specialized Section had made very good progress on developing the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes. This international recommendation on the commercial quality of seed potatoes was meant to prevent technical barriers to trade in this very important product. The Standard provided a useful framework for the international movement of clean planting material, which ensured high yields and prevented soil from contamination. That, in turn, contributed to food security and higher income for farmers.
2. Many countries used the Standard as a basis for their national standards. For example, in the Russian Federation the national standards were based on that of UNECE. In addition, the UNECE Standard had also been introduced as the reference for use within the Russian voluntary system of seed potato certification.
3. The Director also stressed the importance of the Specialized Section's work on the draft guide for seed potato inspectors. This illustrated brochure, for which there was strong demand worldwide, would support a harmonized application of the Standard in practice.

### II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Italy, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
5. The European Union was also represented.

### III. Adoption of the agenda

*Documentation:* ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2013/1

6. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with proposed changes.

### IV. Matters of interest since the last session

*Documentation:* Report of the Working Party ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/2  
WP.7 Working procedures  
Geneva Agreement (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2011/3)  
  
Legal office opinion on the legal status of the Geneva Protocol (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/3)

7. During 2012, an important review of the 2005 reform of the UNECE took place. The secretariat provided an overview of that process and highlighted specific proposals contained in the final document (E/ECE/1468) which related to the work of the Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division and, in particular, the Specialised Section on Seed Potatoes. The secretariat also informed the meeting that it was assessing the potential impact on programme delivery of the outcome of the review and of the cuts to the 2014-2015 UNECE budget requested by the General Assembly of the United Nations and assured delegates that they would be informed about any further developments that might affect their work.

8. The secretariat informed the participants about the decision by the Working Party taken at its November 2012 session to include the following provision in its working procedures:

“The standards should not be revised earlier than three years after the latest revision unless there is an urgent and well-substantiated need to do so. Between the revisions, proposals that were submitted to the secretariat by countries would be considered by the specialized sections as work in progress.”

9. The Specialized Section took note of the information contained in the UNOG Senior Legal Adviser’s memorandum on the legal status of the Geneva protocol and on the legal standing of UNECE standards. The delegations made no proposals to amend the draft Geneva Agreement, which would be reconsidered by the Working Party at its 2013 session.

### V. Information on the results of the meetings of the Bureau

*Documentation:* The Standard with proposed changes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2011/23)  
Changes to the Standard (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2013/3)  
Meeting of the Bureau in Prague (GE.6/BUR/2011/16)  
Meeting of the Bureau in Edinburgh (GE.6/BUR/2012/7 (Scotland))  
Changins Bureau meeting report (INF.1, Informal document)

10. The Chair informed the participants about the results of the Extended Bureau meetings held in Prague in October 2011, in Edinburgh in May/June 2012 and in Changins, Switzerland, in January 2013. The Specialized Section thanked the authorities of the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom and Switzerland for having hosted those meetings.

11. The Specialized Section approved the changes to the Standard, recommended in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2013/3, related to: (a) definitions of clonal selection,

clonal stock, micropropagative multiplication, parent material, wet and dry rots; (b) tolerances for dry and wet rot for Basic and Certified seed in section A.2. of annex III.

12. The Specialized Section agreed on the following definition of “external defects” for inclusion in annex VII:

“Any tuber defect that can be detected externally. Countable tubers are those which may have a negative impact on yielding capacity or storability, or which are likely to lead to secondary infection.”

13. It also decided to revisit the list of external defects in annex III at the Extended Bureau meeting in Fargo, North Dakota, United States, from 30 September to 2 October 2013. The Working Group composed of Belgium, France, the Netherlands (rapporteur), the United Kingdom and the United States volunteered to prepare a discussion paper on this issue. The Specialized Section asked the Working Group to propose photographs of shrivelled and misshapen tubers, severe cracks, pressure bruises and glassiness for inclusion in the List of diseases, pests and disorders, and, if possible, recommend photographs showing the limits allowed for the above defects for inclusion in annex VIII.

14. The Specialized Section decided to delete the definition of “seed potatoes” from annex VII and to change the provisions in section “I. Definition of produce” to read:

“Produce is seed potatoes. Seed potatoes are tubers (including minitubers) and potato micropropagative material of cultivated tuber-forming *Solanum* spp. for planting (reference to ISPM 33, 2010) and which are certified by the DA as meeting the specified requirements of this Standard.

This Standard does not apply to potatoes intended for planting for:

- Trials or scientific purposes
- Selection work.

These, however, shall always be covered by documentary confirmation of quality by the DA.”

15. The Specialized Section decided to amend the first paragraph in section “II. Provisions concerning the variety” to read:

“Varieties shall be accepted for certification under the Standard if an official description and a reference sample can be made available to the DA.”

16. The Specialized Section decided to include at the end of section B.2 (Level and timing of inspection) of annex II the following paragraph:

“During each crop inspection the inspector should verify the purity and identity of the variety. The first generation derived from Pre-basic TC class seed potatoes should be inspected at a more intensive rate to identify off-types.”

17. The Specialized Section approved the following text of a new section “C. Tuber inspection procedures” of annex III:

#### “C. Tuber inspection procedures

##### 1. Scope of inspection

All seed potato lots to be certified under the Standard must be inspected before marketing.

##### 2. Inspection method

A randomly collected sample representative of the seed potato tubers from the lot to be inspected should be gathered and set aside for tuber size, grade and quality

inspection. The tubers need to be sufficiently clean to allow for a visual inspection, i.e. no caked dirt.

During the inspection process some tubers of the sample may be cut to establish the presence or absence of internal defects. If tuber samples are to be assessed for internal defects and diseases, they should be cut along the longitudinal axis, drawn through the widest part of the tuber (i.e. from the stem end to the bud end), and examined.

### **3. Calculation of results**

During the inspection process a tuber should only be counted once for a defect or damage. Calculate total counts and percentages for each disease, defect, or condition and compare with the tuber standard tolerance to determine if the lot meets the tuber standard.

### **4. Additional measures**

If the sample exceeds the tolerance for any of the categories, an inspector may proceed to either increase the sample size and/or re-grade the lot as required to make sure it complies with the specified standard.

### **5. Second opinion inspections**

In the case of a disputed inspection, growers will be entitled to ask for a confirmatory inspection to be conducted by another inspector.”

18. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised Standard to the Working Party for approval.

## **VI. List of diseases and pests**

*Documentation:* 2010 List of diseases and pests as on the website (Word document)  
Text of the Guide (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2013/4)  
Text of both the Guide and the List for comparison (INF.11, Informal document)  
Photographs for the Guide (PowerPoint presentation)  
Proposed format of the Guide (pdf file)

19. In July 2012 the delegations of the Russian Federation, Switzerland and the United Kingdom asked the secretariat if work on a Guide for seed potato inspectors and growers could be started, in view of the strong demand for an illustrated explanatory brochure on how to apply the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes. The secretariat used the inter-sessional procedure to obtain approval from the Bureau of the Specialized Section to initiate work on developing the Guide. At its November 2012 session, the Working Party approved that initiative.

20. The delegation of the United Kingdom presented the first draft of the Guide. The draft was based on the List of diseases and pests and had been amended with more detailed descriptions of pests, as well as with additional photographs.

21. The delegations reviewed the photographs and decided on those which would best illustrate each of the diseases, pests and disorders to be covered in the Guide. The PowerPoint presentation containing the selected photographs together with accompanying comments would be posted on the UNECE website.

22. The Specialized Section asked the delegations of France, the Netherlands, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom (rapporteur) and the United States and the secretariat to continue work on the Guide in order to prepare it for further consideration by

the Extended Bureau at its meeting in Fargo. Depending on when the work was completed, the Extended Bureau would decide whether to submit it to the November 2013 Working Party session for adoption or to continue working on it at the 2014 session of the Specialized Section. It was provisionally decided to call it “UNECE Guide on Seed Potato Diseases, Pests and Disorders”.

## VII. Cooperation between UNECE and IPPC

23. UNECE develops its commercial quality standards in compliance with the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. The specificity of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes, as compared with other UNECE agricultural quality standards, is that it touches upon phytosanitary issues. The WTO Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement identifies the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) as the organization providing international standards on phytosanitary measures to protect plant health. It is managed by the IPPC secretariat in the FAO Plant Protection Service.

24. The Specialized Section stressed that the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes does not decide on the status of plant diseases. It focuses on commercial quality aspects. The Standard considers different types of potato diseases and pests only from the certification point of view.

25. The delegations took note of the concerns expressed by the IPPC secretariat with regard to references to IPPC in the Standard. They agreed that whenever the WTO-SPS Agreement or the IPPC were mentioned in the Standard, it would be appropriate to discuss the corresponding text with the IPPC secretariat in order to find mutually acceptable wording. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation of New Zealand for volunteering to put together proposals, in consultation with the IPPC secretariat and other interested parties, on how to improve the IPPC-related text in the UNECE Standard. The Specialized Section said that it would appreciate it if these proposals could be ready for consideration at the Extended Bureau meeting in Fargo.

## VIII. Demonstration trials and guidelines on training inspectors

*Documentation:* Crop-inspection training field, revised (INF.12, Informal document)

26. The delegation of the United Kingdom presented a revised version of the “Crop-inspection training field” paper. It had been amended to include common terminology for field activities and a list of plots. The Specialized Section agreed that it would be useful to develop that paper into guidelines on how to prepare a training field, as well as on a protocol for training inspectors. The Specialized Section asked if the delegation of the United Kingdom could prepare the first draft of the guidelines for consideration at the Extended Bureau meeting in Fargo.

## IX. Certification of cut seed tubers

*Documentation:* Proposal on cut seed tubers (INF.3, Informal document)

27. The delegation of the United States made a proposal on how to treat cutting tubers within the certification scheme of the UNECE Standard. The Specialized Section agreed on its common position on this issue:

“Cutting seed potatoes is a common practice in areas or cases where potato varieties with large tubers are in demand. Cutting facilitates the production of varieties with large tubers

and reduces seed costs. However, marketing cut seed is not allowed in some parts of the world, because seed cutting increases the risks of disease spread and seed piece decay. It also may reduce emergence.

In countries where cut seed is accepted into a certification programme, the countries may enforce provisions to minimize the risk of spread of diseases. Cutting seed potatoes is recommended to be done in a closed chain if possible, because cutting by third parties creates a greater risk.

Extreme temperatures and difference in temperature between soil and cut seed tubers generally cause poorer emergence and plant growth. The risks of seed cutting can be mitigated by pre-cutting and allowing the cut surfaces to suberize. It is important to take proper measures to prevent the spread of diseases between seed lots by thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting all equipment.

Cut seed is considered a “defect”. Under the UNECE Standard, however, “defects” are only countable when they are expected to have a negative impact on yielding capacity or storability or if they are likely to lead to secondary infection.

Cut tubers may be acceptable for a designated authority for entrance into their certification programme if the inspection certificate of the seed lot before cutting indicates that the lot meets the designated authority’s requirements and lot identity has been maintained, or the cutting has been done at the farm producing the next generation.

Seed growers accept the risks and responsibilities of using cut seed.”

## **X. Combination of mild and severe virus symptoms into one field tolerance**

*Documentation:* Proposal on combining virus symptoms (INF.4, Informal document)

28. The delegations agreed that it had become difficult to determine, by looking at plant symptoms, whether they were caused by PVY or other types of viruses. Different strains of PVY can manifest themselves as mild symptoms or show no symptoms at all on some varieties. For these reasons some countries apply stricter PVY tolerances to all symptoms. However, that approach may lead to a situation in which some countries where the virus pressure is high would not be able to produce any certified seed. In the Russian Federation, the use of PVY-resistant varieties had given rise to the spread of PVM, for which tolerances were less strict.

29. The Specialized Section asked the delegation of the United States to lead a discussion at the Extended Bureau meeting in Fargo on how mild and severe virus symptoms could be better reflected in the Standard, bearing in mind the above developments. One of the approaches could be to add “any symptoms caused by PVY” when making reference to severe virus disease in annex II and annex IV.

## **XI. Requirements on sprouted tubers**

*Documentation:* Proposal on sprouted tubers (INF.5, Informal document)

30. The Specialized Section agreed in principle with the proposal of the United Kingdom to reflect sprouted tubers under external defects in annex III. At the national level, sprouted tubers, particularly their length, are regulated differently in different countries. The Specialized Section asked the delegation of the United Kingdom and the

secretariat to carry out a survey on national practices in regulating sprouted tubers and report on the results at the Extended Bureau meeting.

## **XII. Field inspection procedures**

*Documentation:* Proposal on field inspection procedures (INF.6, Informal document)  
Proposal on risk-based inspections (INF.7, Informal document)

31. The Specialized Section decided to consider issues related to field inspection procedures as part of the work on the guidelines on training field and inspectors' training protocol.

32. The topic of risk-based inspections, which was introduced in the note by the Netherlands, will be discussed at the Extended Bureau meeting.

## **XIII. Potato tuber moth**

*Documentation:* Proposal on potato tuber moth (INF.8, Informal document)

33. The Specialized Section agreed that zero tolerance for *Phthorimaea operculella* should not be removed from section B of annex III. To give the possibility to inspectors to determine whether there are the first instar larvae (which are smaller than 1mm) in the tuber galleries, a special provision could be added to section "C.4 Additional measures" of annex III. It was also suggested that the title of section A.9 of annex III be changed to read: "Pest damage: Tubers affected by damage covering more than 20% of the cut surface" to extend its coverage to damage caused by wireworms, slugs, rodents, etc. The delegation of Belgium volunteered to prepare specific proposals for the Extended Bureau meeting.

## **XIV. Potato flea beetle**

*Documentation:* Note on potato flea beetles (INF.9, Informal document)

34. The delegations thought that a zero tolerance for flea beetles (*Epitrix*) could be introduced in the Standard, while tolerances for symptoms could be established under "Pest damage" in section A.9 of annex III.

## **XV. Promotion of the Standard**

*Documentation:* Promotional leaflet (INF.10, Informal document)

35. The representative of the Russian Federation informed the delegations about the use of the UNECE Standard in his country and thanked the Specialized Section's experts for the provided technical assistance. He invited the delegations to the Workshop on healthy source seed potato production to be held in Vladikavkaz, Northern Ossetia on 23 and 24 July 2013.

36. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section about the funding available from the Russian Voluntary Contribution Fund to promote the Standard in the CIS region.

## **XVI. Other topics of interest**

37. The delegation of the United States updated the Specialized Section on the zebra chip disease and its implications for seed potato certification.

38. The delegation of Switzerland made a presentation on the results of the work of different research groups on PVY and *Dickeya*.

39. The representative of the European Commission informed the Specialized Section about the state of the revision of the annexes to Council Directive 2002/56/EC on the marketing of seed potatoes. There was a broad agreement among the EU Member States to adopt harmonized quality classes. Discussions were under way concerning tolerances, especially for Basic class S and the category of certified seed. Further work was needed to integrate into the revision the existing system of territories that were authorised to restrict the marketing of seed potatoes to the classes determined by Directive 93/17/EEC. An expert working group would meet in Brussels on 18 April to resolve the remaining issues.

## **XVII. Future work**

40. A meeting of the Extended Bureau will be held from 30 September to 2 October in the United States. It will be hosted by the North Dakota State Seed Department in Fargo. The host country suggested that delegations arrive on Saturday, 28 September so that a technical tour could be organized the following day. The delegations were asked to inform the host country (wschrage@ndseed.ndsu.edu) about their intention to come to Fargo.

41. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items in its programme of work:

- UNECE Guide on Seed Potato Diseases, Pests and Disorders (United Kingdom)
- External defects including sprouted tubers (Belgium)
- Tuber moth and flea beetle (Belgium)
- Tolerances for mild and severe virus symptoms (United States)
- Cooperation between UNECE and IPPC (New Zealand)
- Revision of the Specialized Section's position on PVY, blackleg, silver scurf, vigour and cut seed tubers
- Definition of tolerances by weight or by number (Sweden)
- Impact of the revision of the Council Directive 2002/56/EC on the UNECE Standard
- Update on PVY, *Dickeya*, Zebra chip and other topics of interest

## **XVIII. Election of officers**

42. The Specialized Section re-elected Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy) as its Chair and Mr. Willem Schrage (United States) and Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom) as its vice-chairs.

## **XIX. Adoption of the report**

43. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its session.

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