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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes

31 January -3 February 2000, Geneva

REPORT ON ITS THIRTIETH SESSION

Executive summary

National phytosanitary provisions: A new provision for Part II, Subpart E on national phytosanitary provisions was adopted provisionally. (see paras. 12-18)

Powdery scab: A compromise for introduction of tolerances for powdery scab was adopted. (see paras 20-26).

Classification system: The possibility for an introduction of subdivisions to categories was discussed. A proposal will be prepared by the rapporteurs. (see paras. 27-33)

Tolerances for virus diseases: Stricter tolerances for severe virus diseases were adopted for pre-basic. (see paras. 34-38)

Concerns of seed buyers : An inventory of concerns of seed buyers will be discussed by the rapporteurs. (see paras. 39-40)

Questionnaire on national certification schemes: The questionnaire on national certification schemes was discussed in a working group. The result will be published in an addendum to this report. The questionnaire will be sent out to countries by the secretariat and the results compiled for the next meeting of rapporteurs. (see paras. 41-43)

Genetically modified organisms: It was discussed how GMOs were dealt with in different countries/organizations. It was agreed that the rapporteurs should discuss the implications of GMOs in general for the standard. (see paras. 44-51)

Sampling: A new annex giving information on sampling will be finalized by the rapporteurs based on a proposal by the Netherlands and France. (see paras. 52-54)

Opening of the session

1. The session was held in Geneva from 31 January to 3 February 2000. It was chaired by Mr. Ben Borrel (Canada). The session was opened by the Deputy Director of the UN/ECE Trade Division, Mr. Hans Hansell.
2. Mr. Hansell informed delegations about the events that had taken place in UN/ECE since the last session of the Specialized Section. Following the restructuring of UN/ECE, the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7) now reports to the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development. This Committee has accorded the highest priority to the work of WP.7 and its specialized sections. The Chairman of WP.7, Mr. Miguel Vilchez-Barros, serves also as Chairman of the Committee. The vacant post in the secretariat has been filled.
3. Several activities to promote the work of the UN/ECE Agricultural Standards Unit have been undertaken by the Chairman of WP.7 and the secretariat:
 - participation in an Expert Group Meeting in Beirut hosted by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UN/ESCWA);
 - translation of several UN/ECE standards into Spanish and Arabic;
 - participation in training courses in Slovakia;
 - creation of a homepage containing all standards and relevant information concerning the work of the unit.
4. Mr. Hansell informed delegations that following a request from the European Commission a study had been prepared by the secretariat concerning the possible move of activities related to preparing explanatory brochures on UN/ECE standards from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to UN/ECE. The goal of this move is to better organize the division of labour between the different organizations dealing with standardization. The result of the study was that the secretariat believes that the work could be done in UN/ECE but it cannot be financed out of the regular budget. Similar to the present situation at OECD, contributions from countries would be necessary. A working group was created to consider this matter further.
5. Mr. Hansell wished the delegations all the best in resolving the different items on the agenda in order to further define commercial quality for seed potatoes. He recognized the unique nature of the group among the specialized sections, dealing with a product that is used as a seed for further production. He thanked the countries that had hosted meetings of rapporteurs (Italy and the United States) for their hospitality.
6. He informed delegations that Mr. Ben Borrel who had chaired the meeting for a number of years had informed the secretariat that he would not run for another two-year term. He thanked the outgoing chairman for the support he had given to this group over the years and his initiatives to widen participation and find new directions for the UN/ECE standard.

Participation

7. The session was attended by delegations from the following countries: Belgium; Canada; France; Germany; Greece; Italy; Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Russian Federation; Switzerland; United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and the United States of America.

8. The European Community was also represented.

Adoption of the agenda

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/1

9. The provisional agenda was adopted with the following additions and changes:

- agenda item 4 (a): TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.5 (Canada)
- agenda item 4 (b)/(c): TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.4 (Belgium)
- agenda item 4 (d): TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.6 (Russian Federation)
- agenda item 6: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.1 (Secretariat)
- agenda item 7: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.2/3 (Switzerland)

Matters of interest arising since the twenty-ninth session

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/2

10. The delegations took note of this document which sums up the relevant outcome of the second and third sessions of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development.

Reports of Meetings of Rapporteurs on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Documents: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1999/3 (Report Seattle)

TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1999/4 (Report Milan)

11. Delegations took note of these documents which will be taken into account under the appropriate agenda items.

Review of the UN/ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes

Document: TRADE/WP.7/1998/9/Add.12 (Text of the standard in force)

Review of Part II, Subpart E

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.5 (Canada)

12. Following the discussions at the meeting of rapporteurs in Milan (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1999/4, para 7) where it was mentioned that the drafting of Subpart E was not clear, the delegation of Canada proposed a revised text as follows:

13. “National Phytosanitary Provisions: The provisions of this standard relative to the pests mentioned in annexes II, III, IV and V are without prejudice to a country’s national phytosanitary and seed potato certification requirements for regulated pests (quarantine and regulated non-quarantine pests), taken under provisions of the WTO-SPS agreement and the relevant international standards thereunder.”

14. The delegation of Canada explained that this text clarifies in the UN/ECE standard that the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) (which is explicitly mentioned in the WTO-SPS agreement as a standard-setting organization) has included provisions for regulated non-quarantine pests in addition to those for quarantine pests. This means that each country has the right to impose stricter measures for these pests for imports provided they are also applied for its own national production.

15. Some delegations felt that the adoption of the Canadian proposal could decrease the value of the UN/ECE standard because a large part of the standard dealt with regulated non-quarantine pests. They felt that progress in harmonization could be limited if countries had the possibility of applying stricter rules for many of the provisions.

16. Other delegations said that it was still important and useful to discuss a minimum standard like the UN/ECE standard in order to come to harmonized levels of acceptance and to cut down the number of disputes in trade. They also stressed that UN/ECE was the only forum worldwide where the harmonization of certification programmes was discussed.

17. It was generally felt that it would be necessary to start a discussion with the European Plant Protection Organization (EPPO), the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO) and IPPC on these matters to get recognition for this kind of work. It was mentioned that the EPPO certification scheme already refers to the UN/ECE standard.

18. After a lengthy discussion it was decided to provisionally adopt the text proposed by Canada. Delegations will inform the secretariat by 28 August 2000 if they do not agree to accept the text. The delegate of the European Commission reserved his position on the proposed text and said that he would be in favour of maintaining the existing text. The secretariat will get in touch with the legal counsel of the United Nations to enquire whether the introduction of a text with the explicit mention of WTO-SPS could create legal problems.

19. The delegation of Romania proposed to take the new WTO-SPS concept of "precautionary measures" into account. The other delegations felt that they needed more information about this concept before discussing it.

Tolerances for powdery scab

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.4 (Belgium)

20. The rapporteurs discussed this question at length in their meetings and proposed as a compromise: to include a new paragraph in annex IV, A. (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1999/4, paras. 20-22)

21. "Powdery scab: Tubers affected over a specified per cent of their surface
 - pre-basic (> 10% surface cover) 1 per cent by weight
 - basic and certified (> 10% surface cover) 3 per cent by weight"

22. It was mentioned that in the group of rapporteurs there had been countries in favour of higher tolerances and others in favour of lower tolerances but that in the end the proposal had been accepted by all as a compromise.

23. The Specialized Section discussed the question at length. It was not possible to reach a consensus on the text proposed by the rapporteurs because some countries preferred lower tolerances (Belgium, France, Greece, Romania) and others higher tolerances (Germany, Poland).

24. It was fully decided to adopt the following new compromise on the understanding that the countries that do not agree to it mention their reservation in the report and can come back to this question at a later time:

25. "Powdery scab: Tubers affected over a specified per cent of their surface
 - pre-basic TC 0 per cent;
 - pre-basic (> 10% surface cover) 1 per cent by weight;
 - basic and certified(> 10% surface cover) 3 per cent by weight"

26. Reservations: Belgium, in favour of 0 per cent for pre-basic.
Germany and Poland in favour of 5 per cent for certified.
Belgium, Greece and Romania need further consultations with the trade on tolerances for basic and certified.

Introduction of sub-divisions in the categories

27. In the discussion on virus tolerances at the meeting of rapporteurs there was considerable difference of opinion between importing and exporting countries as to what is meant by having a "minimum standard". (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/4, paras. 28 and 29). It was suggested to study the problem by developing harmonized classes to be used in international trade for marketing purposes.

28. The delegation from the United States said that in his country the certification systems for export purposes of 17 states had been harmonized using a system of 5 generations (e.g. G-1 the first field generation produced from nuclear seed). He said that through such a system sub-classes could be generated without making terminology and application more complicated.

29. Other delegates asked what would happen if a G-2 seed lot was of equivalent quality to a G-5 lot. The delegation of the United States said that in this case the G-2 lot would be downgraded to G-5 with a field designation generation showing the actual generation. In this sense the generation system is in practice a mixed system of generation designation and tolerances.

30. The delegation of Russia, which had provided information about classes in their certification programme (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.6) said that they had previously used a generation system but had now adopted a class system similar to that of UN/ECE. They said that a problem with the creation of that system had been that the pre-basic class did not fit in well, a problem that could be solved by making pre-basic TC a separate class.

31. It was agreed by other delegations that pre-basic TC was distinct from pre-basic and that this distinction was clear in the EPPO certification scheme but not in the UN/ECE standard. A draft text how to integrate pre-basic TC into the annexes of the UN/ECE standard was prepared (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.7). It will be studied by the rapporteurs at their next session with the objective of also modifying the present tolerances for pre-basic to allow countries to remove present reservations.

32. It was decided that the rapporteurs should discuss this matter and prepare a proposal on how to subdivide the present categories into classes by defining different levels of tolerances. They should take into account the answers to the questionnaire on national certification schemes.

33. It was said that it was preferable to have a document prepared before the rapporteurs meeting. The delegations of Canada, France and Switzerland offered to prepare such a paper.

Virus tolerances in direct progeny of basic and certified potatoes

34. The rapporteurs proposed amendments to annex V 2. (b) and 3. (b). (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/4, paras. 23 and 30).

35. In the discussion it was stated by many delegations that these questions were linked to a definition of subdivisions to the categories. This would allow stricter tolerances to be applied and offer a greater choice to the end user of the seed but also leave room for the marketing of lower quality stock. It was agreed that to achieve this marriage of strictness and flexibility in a transparent way it would be necessary to review the scheme in its entirety.

36. It was said by other delegations that it was necessary to send a signal to the trade that the group was looking at the virus tolerances which were perceived as too high by the importers. After a long discussion it was decided to adopt the proposal of the rapporteurs for basic seed:

37. Amend annex V 2. (b) to read as follows:

“(b) The proportion, in direct progeny, of plants showing symptoms of mild or severe virus disease should not exceed 4 per cent with not more than 2 % showing severe virus disease”.

38. The delegate of Belgium entered a reservation regarding annex V 1. (b) (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.4) because he considered the tolerance as too strict, not consistent with other provisions of the standard and difficult to implement because of the large sample size needed.

39. He said further that for the future development of the standard it might be useful to find out from the seed buyers which are their main concerns. This could help to answer the question how to improve quality through standards. He said that an inventory had been produced in the Netherlands with the result that the main concerns of the buyers are seed vigour, blackleg and tuber quality and not virus diseases.

40. It was agreed that such an inventory would be useful internationally. The delegation of the Netherlands offered to translate the document and provide it to the rapporteurs.

Questionnaire on certification schemes

Discussion at the last session: see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/9 para. 17

Documents for this session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/7 (Israel)
TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.1 (Secretariat)

41. The rapporteurs had agreed in Milan (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/4, para. 31) that the UN/ECE publication National Certification Schemes for Seed Potatoes should be updated, expanded and upgraded. The document should be updated every two years and like other publications also be published on the Internet. The publication was seen as a useful tool to promote the UN/ECE standard and the work of the group as well as giving an indication of items which could benefit from further standardization. A first draft for a questionnaire had been prepared by the rapporteur from Israel for the last session. On the basis of this document and comments received from France and Italy the secretariat had prepared -/2000/INF.1, which served as a basis for the discussion.

42. It was decided not to discuss the questionnaire in detail in the plenary. Ideas and questions were collected and passed on to a small informal working group that prepared a draft which is reproduced in addendum 1 to this report.

43. Among the suggestions made were the following:

- There should be an introduction/ cover letter pointing out the purpose of the questionnaire clarifying that this is a general survey independent of the existing UN/ECE standard.

- The question of varietal identity and purity are vital concepts for the UN/ECE scheme and should be maintained.
- Countries that are in the process of changing their legislation (e.g. countries aligning their legislation to EU law) should answer the questionnaire according to the legislation in force. They could indicate that their legislation will change.

Discussion on genetically modified organisms

Documents: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.2 (Switzerland)
TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/INF.3 (Switzerland)

44. The question was discussed at the meeting of rapporteurs in Milan (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/4, paras. 40 to 42). The delegation of Switzerland presented two information documents concerning the activities of the OECD Seed Scheme in cooperation with AOSA, ISTA and FIS.
45. He informed delegations that the organizations in question had created a draft for an International Seed Network Initiative on the Transboundary Movement of Seed and Biotechnology. He said that the organizations concerned had for the first time, as a result of public pressure, agreed that GMOs should be labelled as such. He also said that they were working more generally on accreditation issues and the creation of a harmonized control certificate for all certification operations was envisaged. He said that this item should also be of interest to the UN/ECE group.
46. The chairman asked the group how many GMO varieties were certified in the countries present at the session.
47. The delegation from Russia said that GMO varieties were in the final stages of certification for ware potatoes and will be marketed as of next year. The first national patent for a virus resistant GMO variety had been issued last year and more were in preparation. He said that GMOs would become more and more important in the future and would not be treated differently from non-GMO varieties in certification.
48. The delegation from the USA said that in his country GMO varieties were not treated differently to other products after having been cleared by the FDA (Food and Drugs Agency) and EPA (Environmental Protection Agency). They are then certified as other non-GMO varieties and the labels indicate any resistance that they might have.
49. The delegate from the European Union said that at the meeting of rapporteurs in Milan several countries had said that GMOs were not a certification issue. He said that in his opinion certain aspects of GMOs should be treated in the standard:
- identity of the GMO variety
 - labelling
 - tolerance of GMO in non-GMO variety
 - environmental safety
 - food concern
50. Other delegations said that environmental safety and food concern did not fall within the scope of the standard.

51. It was agreed that the rapporteurs should discuss the implications of GMOs in general for the standard.

Routine procedures for sampling

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/7 (France, Netherlands)

52. The rapporteurs from the Netherlands and France presented the document they had handed out at the rapporteurs meeting in Seattle with an additional explanation. They said that the document did not attempt to prescribe the way sampling is done but to give statistical information to assist authorities to choose their sampling method. It was intended to be annexed to the UN/ECE standard.

53. The group felt that the document was useful but in need of some redrafting especially for the introduction and the reference in the main text of the standard.

54. It was decided that delegations should send comments to the rapporteurs from France and the Netherlands and that the rapporteurs should finalize the text at their next session.

Matters of interest related to the activities of other organizations

European Union

55. On 14 December 1998 an amendment to the Community legislation on the marketing of seed and propagating material, including seed potatoes, was adopted. This amendment was introduced specifically to avoid adverse effects on human health and the environment, in the case of marketing of seed and propagating material of a genetically modified variety.

World Trade Organization

56. The secretariat will get in touch with WTO representatives in order to invite them to the next session and to get more information regarding how a TBT dispute involving seed potatoes would be settled by WTO.

European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO)

57. The EPPO potato certification scheme (which makes reference to the UN/ECE standard) has been adopted by the EPPO council.

North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO)

58. The NAPPO potato certification scheme can be accessed on the internet under: www.nappo.org It is currently being revised to correspond with the official regulated pest lists of the member countries.

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

59. The IPPC has approved standards for "pest free places of production". A standard for "regulated non-quarantine pests" is under discussion.

Preparation of the meetings of rapporteurs and the next session of the Specialized Section

Date and place of the next meeting of rapporteurs and the Specialized Section

60. The next meeting of rapporteurs is tentatively scheduled to take place from 11- 12 September 2000 in Geneva. The next session of the Specialized Section will be scheduled for Spring 2001.

Preparation of a meeting of the rapporteurs with EPPO, NAPPO and IPPC

61. It was suggested that the UN/ECE Specialized Section enter into discussions with IPPC to determine responsibilities for the standardization of international seed potato certification programmes. It was agreed that the rapporteurs should meet with EPPO, NAPPO and IPPC to discuss these questions (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/4, paras. 15 to 18). The Chairman and the secretariat will get in touch with representatives of these groups to invite them to participate at the meeting of rapporteurs in Geneva in September. The secretariat will also request official information on the work of these groups.

62. It was mentioned by the secretariat that non-UN/ECE countries could participate in the work of the Specialized Section with the same rights as member countries.

Election of officers

63. The Specialized Section elected Mr. P. G. Bianchi (Italy) as its new Chairman and Mr. P. Miauton (Switzerland) as new Vice-Chairman. The Specialized Section confirmed Mr. U. Kimmel (Israel) as Vice-Chairman.

64. The Specialized Section elected Mr. C. Duff (Canada) as a new member to the group of rapporteurs.

65. The Specialized Section thanked the outgoing Chairman, Mr. B. Borrel (Canada), for his support over the years and wished him all the best for the future.

Adoption of the report

66. The Working Party adopted the report of its thirtieth session on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat.

Annex**Action list**

Action	Responsible	Date
Ask the legal counsel of the United Nations whether the introduction of a text with the explicit mention of WTO-SPS could lead to legal problems.	Secretariat	asap
Get in touch with the WTO secretariat	Secretariat	asap
Distribute the questionnaire on national certification schemes	Secretariat	March 2000
Prepare a meeting of rapporteurs with representatives of IPPC, EPPO and NAPPO	Bureau, Secretariat	July 2000
Inform the secretariat if they do not agree with the draft new text for Part II, Subpart E as contained in para. 13 of this report	All delegations	28 August 2000
Compile results of the questionnaire on national certification schemes	Secretariat	August 2000
Send comments on the annex on sampling to France or the Netherlands	All delegations	August 2000
Prepare a paper on concerns of seed buyers	Netherlands	August 2000
Prepare a proposal on subdivisions of categories for rapporteurs meeting	Canada, France, Switzerland	August 2000
Discuss integration of provisions for pre-basic TC into the annexes of the standard	Rapporteurs	September 2000
Discuss a list of varieties that can be certified by the UN/ECE standard could be annexed to it.	Specialized Section	2001
Investigate whether a UN/ECE label could be created indicating the acceptance of the standard.	Specialized Section	2001
Discuss the WTO-SPS concept on precautionary measures	Specialized Section	2001
Discuss the legal status of the international potato centre	Specialized Section	2001
Annex 6 of the UN/ECE standard on labelling	Specialized Section	2001