

Proposal for a new introduction to the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes:

I. Replace the present introduction with the following text:

“1 About UNECE

UNECE was set up in 1947 by ECOSOC. It is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations.

Its primary *goal* is to encourage greater economic cooperation among its member States.

It *focuses* on economic analysis, environment and human settlements, statistics, sustainable energy, trade, industry and enterprise development, timber and transport.

UNECE *activities* include policy analysis, development of conventions, regulations and standards, and technical assistance.

UNECE has *55 member States*. However, all interested UN member States may participate in its work. Over 70 international professional organizations and other non-governmental organizations take part in UNECE activities.

2 History and goals of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development

2.1 History

In October 1949, the Economic Commission for Europe's Committee on Agricultural Problems established the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Foodstuffs to determine “common standards for perishable foodstuffs” and to study “steps to be taken on the international level in order to secure the general adoption of standards and control systems”. Later, the responsibility of the Working Party was extended to cover non-edible horticultural produce and quality development which is reflected in its present name.

The activities have led to the elaboration of a wide range of UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat (porcine, bovine and poultry) and cut flowers. Standards for fruit juices and quick frozen foods have been elaborated in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts and are now further developed in the relevant Codex bodies.

2.2 Goals

UNECE standards harmonize existing national commercial quality standards for perishable produce to:

- Facilitate fair international trade and prevent technical barriers to trade:
- Improve producers' profitability and encourage production of high quality produce:
- Protect consumers' interest:

With the Working Party and five Specialized Sections UNECE groups provide a forum where countries can discuss all issues of commercial quality that may arise from their domestic markets and which have an implication on international trade. The groups aim at filling the gap between food safety regulations and marketing. They also offer assistance to countries in transition by organizing workshops on the harmonization of national standards with international commercial standards.

3 History, goals and scope of the UNECE standard for seed potatoes

3.1 History

Work on the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes began in 1958.

At the 9th session of the Working Party:

“Some disagreements were raised concerning the nomenclature of the different categories of seed potatoes. The Group of Experts (from the Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands and United Kingdom) was charged of preparing an analysis of existing national regulations and drafting recommendations for international standardization.”

Provisional recommendations were adopted 1960 at the 10th session of the Working Party in order to try them out and revise them according to the experience..

The first version of the text was adopted by the Working Party in 1963 at its 16th session. The standard has been regularly updated since then.

3.2 Goals

The main goals of the standard is to facilitate fair international trade through:

- creating a harmonised certification system and promoting its use and
- defining quality requirements for seed potatoes including tolerances for certain quality pests.

To reach these goals the standard covers the following parameters:

- identity and purity of the variety;
- plant health aspects controlled by certification schemes;
- physiology and external quality;
- sizing and labelling requirements; rules concerning traceability.

3.3 Scope

The UNECE standard establishes minimum commercial quality requirements and falls under the WTO-TBT Agreement. As mentioned above, in the discussion of these requirements, certain phytosanitary matters (which are the domain of the International Plant protection Convention (IPPC) under the WTO/SPS agreement) come up because the presence/absence of diseases is a major quality criteria.

The standard recognizes beyond this that other parameters not covered by it are also relevant to international trade such as:

- plant health aspects as long as they are not controlled by a certification scheme (dealt with by quarantine authorities under the IPPC, WTO-SPS agreement);
- provisions justified by reasons of the protection of the health of people and animals or crops or industrial or commercial property (not harmonized internationally);
- provisions concerning agronomical and technological value of the variety (not harmonized internationally);
- provisions concerning environmental and food safety concern (not harmonized internationally);

4 Application of the standard

The text of the standard adopted by the working party is recommended to countries for application as defined below. Countries are invited to notify the UNECE secretariat if they are applying the UNECE Standard.

Application implies use of the UNECE Standard for export and import which means for

Import: All seed potatoes exported from the country meet at least the requirements of the standard.

Export: Seed potatoes certified and labelled according to the UNECE Standard are accepted for parameters covered by the standard.

5 Advantages of using the UNECE standard

Administrative procedures in international trade of seed potatoes are simplified. Example: Switzerland-EU

Importing countries can be confident that the imported seed lots have been controlled through an equivalent procedure.

There is transparency concerning the control procedures applied.

Lots of seed potatoes are traceable at international level.

6 Development of the standard

The Specialized Section on standardization of Seed Potatoes meets once a year, usually in Geneva. *All UNECE and UN member states* can participate at the meetings of the Specialized Section with the same rights. The European Community also participates.

Other intergovernmental organizations are welcome to attend the meetings.

Non-governmental organisations with an international membership and an interest in the work on commercial standardization of seed potatoes should inform the secretariat of their wish to attend the meetings which will be granted by the bureau of the group and confirmed by the next Specialized Section according to the information received.

The rule for decision taking is the *unanimous consensus* among the participants present at the session.

Unanimous consensus does not prevent the possibility of any delegations disagreeing with the group.

This disagreement can be reflected:

- either in the report,
- or in the standard by means of reservations which should be restricted to specific technical points.

Reservations mean that the provisions concerning which the reservations have been entered do not apply to the country.

7 Cooperation with other international organisations

7.1 European Union

In July 1966 the Council of the European Union adopted a Council Directive on the marketing of seed potatoes, applicable to the production with a view to marketing, and to the marketing of seed potatoes within the Community (Directive 66/403/EEC-OJ 125, 11.7.1966, p. 2320/66, as last amended by Commission Decision 1999/742/EC-OJ (287, 18.11.1999, p.39).

Within its recitals, it was stated "it is desirable to establish a uniform certification scheme for the Community based on the experience gained in the application of the scheme of the Economic Commission for Europe".

The above Directive envisaged that "provisions should be made for authorizing the marketing within the Community of seed potatoes harvested in third country where they afford the same assurances as seed potatoes officially certified within the Community and complying with the Community rules.

Currently a Council Decision is in force (Council Decision 95/313/EC, OJ L 296, 9.12.1995, p. 31, as last amended by Decision 2000/36/EC, OJ 114, 13.5.2000, p. 30) on the equivalence of seed potatoes produced in third countries.

According to such a Decision in seed potatoes harvested in the countries as specified and officially controlled by the relevant Authorities and which belong to the categories specified therein are equivalent to seed potatoes harvested within the Community. Seed potatoes shall be certified and their containers officially marketed and sealed in accordance with the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes recommended by the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development of the Economic Commission for Europe of the United Nations. the Decision does not affect the requirements which member states establish under Council Directive 2000/29/EC (former 77/93/EEC) on protective measures against the introduction into the Member States organisms harmful to plants or plant products (OJ L 169, 10.7.2000, p.1)

7.2 EPPO

In 1999 the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO/OEPP) published a recommended certification scheme for seed potatoes. This scheme focussed on micropropagation as the recommended method of initial seed production (nuclear stock) and detailed the organisms which should be tested for and the appropriate test procedures. Conditions and tolerances for the production of Pre-basic TC (mini-tubers) were also defined. The requirements for the certification of Pre-basic, Basic and Certified category seed potatoes were aligned, as far as possible, with those of the UN/ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes.

7.3 *NAPPO*

....(to be elaborated)

8 Editorial comments concerning this revision of the standard

The standard contained in this document is a revision of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes adopted by the Working Party at its 57th session (12 to 14 November 2001). The standard introduces provisions for pre-basic TC seed potatoes and a new Annex X on sampling. A publishing history may be found following the text of the standard. “

II. Consequential amendments

As a consequence the following provisions in the standard could be deleted:

“The provisions of this standard do not hinder national legislation provisions justified by reasons of the protection of the health of persons and animals or the protection of crops or industrial or commercial property.

However, each producer country for the marketing of seed potatoes in the whole or any part of its territory, take more vigorous measures than those provided for in annexes III and V against the introduction of certain regulated non- quarantine pests which do not exist there or which seem particularly injurious to the crops in that country or in any part of its territory.”