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## Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Trade

### Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Twenty-first session

Geneva, 10-12 September 2012

## Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat on its Twenty-first session

### I. Introduction

1. Mr. Ian King (Australia), the Chair of the Specialized Section, opened the meeting.

### II. Attendance

2. Representatives of the following United Nations member countries attended the meeting: Argentina, Australia, Poland, Russian Federation, and United States of America. France sent apologies and submitted comments to all agenda items.
3. The European Union (EU) was also represented.
4. A representative from Global Standards 1 (GS1) also attended.

### III. Adoption of the agenda

5. The Specialized Section adopted the provisional agenda.

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

#### UNECE and subsidiary bodies

6. Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, the new Chief of the Trade Policy and Governmental Cooperation Section, welcomed delegates and thanked them for their continuous support. He also expressed his gratitude to the delegations of the United States and Argentina for organizing the recent Rapporteurs meetings. He stressed that outreach was important to

UNECE and links to the UNECE site or media articles were very important ways to increase the standards' visibility. He also mentioned that note had been taken of the delegates' wish to increase capacity-building activities and informed delegates that the Trade Division was looking into fund-raising possibilities. He welcomed GS1's presence at the meeting and noted the links between codification in the area of agricultural standards and trade facilitation in general.

7. He also briefly told delegates about the on-going review of all UNECE activities. In June 2012, he explained, the activities under the Committee on Trade had been assessed. The activities of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) had been highly appreciated and had received a lot of support. The outcome of the review would be communicated to WP.7 in November this year.

8. The Chief of the Agricultural Standards Unit, Mr. Serguei Malanitchev, reported on the request by WP.7 to clarify the legal status of the Geneva Protocol. The document containing the United Nations Legal Counsel's opinion on the subject can be found in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/3, which is available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=29214>.

9. The Chair emphasized the importance of the continued promotion of the standards and the need to increase participation in the meetings. He was also pleased to hear that UNECE would address the issue of delayed publications. Furthermore, he stressed the need to organize rapporteurs and expert meetings with the presence of the UNECE secretariat.

## **V. Information on Rapporteurs and Expert meetings held in 2012**

10. Delegates took note of the report by the secretariat on the recent Rapporteurs meetings. They stressed that both meetings had attracted good participation and achieved very good results. The Rapporteur from the United States briefly reviewed the outcome of the April 2012 meeting in Atlanta. The delegate from Argentina mentioned that many South American countries had attended the meeting in Buenos Aires and significant progress on two major UNECE Standards had been made. The Chair thanked the organizers for their valuable contributions to the success of these meetings.

## **VI. Revision of UNECE Standards**

### **(a) Chicken meat - carcasses and parts**

11. The delegation of the United States reviewed in detail the revised draft standard pointing out changes and amendments made at the Rapporteurs Meeting in Atlanta. Russia noted difficulties understanding the terminology "Deeply chilled". The delegations agreed to the proposed changes and decided to submit the document for adoption by the Working Party (November 2012) as a revised UNECE standard for chicken meat.

### **(b) Turkey meat - carcasses and parts**

12. The Rapporteur (United States) reviewed the changes and amendments made at the Rapporteurs Meeting in Atlanta. Delegations agreed to the proposed changes and decided to submit the document for adoption by the Working Party (November 2012) as a revised UNECE standard for turkey meat.

**(c) Bovine meat - carcasses and cuts**

13. The Chair and the Rapporteur (Argentina) led delegates through the revised document pointing to the changes and amendments made at the Rapporteurs Meeting in Buenos Aires. Several adjustments were made. In the Russian version, the numbers under the cut description 2014 needed to be checked. Delegations agreed to the proposed changes and decided to submit the document for adoption by the Working Party (November 2012) as a revised UNECE standard for bovine meat.

**(d) Ovine meat - carcasses and cuts**

14. The Rapporteur (Australia) reviewed the proposed changes and amendments made at the Rapporteurs Meeting in Buenos Aires. Following a written comment by the French delegation, it was decided to check the French translation of the newly introduced cut description for “rump” had to be checked. A new skeletal diagram for this cut would be supplied by the Australian delegation. The French delegation would also eventually provide the accurate French terminology for the newly introduced cut 5086. Delegations agreed to the proposed changes and decided to submit the document for adoption by the Working Party (November 2012) as a revised UNECE standard for ovine meat.

## **VII. Proposal for new UNECE standards**

**(a) Retail meat cuts**

15. The Rapporteur (United States) gave an overview of the current United States nomenclature approach which is outlined in a comprehensive Institutional Meat Purchase Specifications (IMPS). These specifications are voluntary consensus standards of which the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the gatekeeper. The IMPS provide a common language for the meat industry which has transposed them into meat buyers guides for wholesalers and food service operators. He stressed that every retail item came from an IMPS item. The approach resembled that recommended by UNECE delegates for the UNECE retail cut standard; i.e. start with the primal and sub-primal cuts and describe the related, corresponding retail cuts with a new code.

16. He also briefly reviewed the Uniform Retail Meat Identity Standards (URMIS) which provides a retail meat cut identification system and a standardized nomenclature for retail meat items. This helps ensure that consumers can buy the same meat cut under the same name across the United States. In an effort to overhaul these Standards, he noted that similar to what was proposed at the UNECE meeting; the industry in the United States had decided to focus only on retail cuts for beef and pork. The nomenclature was revised so as to make it more consumer-friendly and the labels easier to understand. In order to facilitate the use of URMIS by the industry a web-based application had been developed which provides users with a systematic way to access the retail cut descriptions (see [www.meattrack.com](http://www.meattrack.com)).

17. The Rapporteur noted that the first UNECE retail meat cut descriptions had been developed in 2008, followed in 2010 by another draft with a new coding system for only beef and pork. It was then decided to change the approach and include simplified definitions, define the characteristics of the retail cuts, focus on the top 25 cuts based on import/export or domestic data, and move to an online system. An online system would allow having several photos of each cut (e.g. from different angles) as well as linking the page to each country's web site.

18. He then moved on to review his new proposals (for pork and beef) which contained descriptions of the 20 most traded cuts in the United States, identified by the primals or sub-primals they were cut from together with their corresponding codes and the new codes for the retail cuts. All codes and cuts, he explained, could be referred back to the UNECE standards. The two documents were considered the beginning of a list that had to be completed by the member countries. The text for the cut descriptions, he explained, could be extracted from the 2008 draft as well as the UNECE Standards. The proposed online system would allow the introduction of multiple common names denominating the same cut. He also informed delegates that USDA had created a web page for this purpose which would shortly be made accessible to member countries

19. The Specialized Section welcomed this approach and agreed to directly enter into the dedicated web page a list with the 5-10 most traded retail cuts derived from primals and sub-primals contained in the bovine and porcine standards. Delegates were asked to discuss this issue with their industry and also include if possible common names and descriptors (e.g. boneless, bone in, thin, thick, cap off, center cut, etc.). Numbers/codes would need to be rechecked and possibly amended.

20. The Chair thanked the Rapporteur for his comprehensive work and his leadership in this project. He asked the secretariat to inform delegations not present at this meeting (e.g. France) and to ask for their input.

## **(b) Processed Poultry Meat**

21. The Rapporteur from the United States reviewed the proposals adopted at the April 2012 meeting in Atlanta. Lengthy discussions took place on the most adequate definition of “ready to cook” and “ready to eat” as well as the related sub-categories.

22. The secretariat presented comments received from France in which allusion was made to EU Regulation 853/2004 (Annex 1). The delegate from the EU explained that this Regulation belonged to the EU’s so-called hygiene package. The EU, she noted, also availed of marketing standards and a harmonized customs nomenclature which contained more adequate definitions for international trade and international standards. Delegates adopted the following draft text:

“Scope

23. This standard recommends an international language for processed poultry meat of the species *Gallus domesticus* (Chicken), *Meleagris gallopavo* (Turkey), *Anas Platyrhynchos* and *Cairina moschata* (Duck) and *Anser* and *Branta* (Goose) ready-to-cook (RTC) or ready-to-eat (RTE) marketed as fit for human consumption. Processed poultry meat is defined in the following categories:

Ready-to-Cook Preparation:

- Uncooked for further processing – to include partial treatments such as marinades, seasonings, batter and breaded, brine solutions, etc.
- Partially Cooked – a product which has gone through minimal processing or partial thermal processing (e.g. flash-fried or flash-frozen)

Ready-to-Eat\* Product:

- Fully Cooked\* – Heat *ad corem*
- Other processes\* (e.g. Smoke, brine, cured, marinated)

\* To meet food safety requirements

24. The standard provides purchasers with a variety of options for meat handling, packing and conformity assessment, which corresponds to good commercial practice for meat and meat products, intended to be sold in international trade.

25. To market processed poultry meat across international borders, the appropriate legislative requirements of food standardization and veterinary control must be met. The standard does not attempt to prescribe those aspects which are covered elsewhere, and throughout the standard, such provisions are left for national or international legislation, or requirements of the importing country.

26. The standard contains references to other international agreements, standards and codes of practice which have the objective of maintaining the quality after dispatch and of providing guidance to Governments on certain aspects of food hygiene, labeling and other matters which fall outside the scope of this Standard. Codex Alimentarius Commission Standards, Guidelines, and Codes of Practice should be consulted as the international reference concerning health and sanitation requirements.”

27. The meeting also reviewed the proposals by the European Union on definitions and decided to adopt the following text instructing the Rapporteur to move the definitions to their appropriate place in the draft standard (e.g. “casing” would be moved to the section on packing).

28. “Definitions:

- casing: a wrapper or involucre in direct contact with the meat preparation/ product, in which the technical production process takes place; .
- binder: agents that are mixed homogeneously in the processing .

29. A poultry meat preparation/ product should meet the following organoleptic requirements:

- In terms of surface appearance and colour, meat preparations and products should not be contaminated on their surface, their wrapping or casing should not be damaged, aside from portioning, the shape should not be deformed, if this shape does not correspond directly with the production process; the surface of a smoked product should be evenly smoked without large contact spots and without contamination by soot;
- When sliced open, the appearance and colour should correspond to the ingredients and process used, should not contain cartilaginous and unprocessed parts and, in case of preparation/products with filler, it should not spontaneously separate from the binder; when the preparation/ product is sliced open, water and fat should not be released;
- Consistency should be characteristic of the ingredients used, sliceable or spreadable;
- The aroma should be characteristic of the ingredient/s used and, in case of smoked products, of the smoking, free of any foreign odours;
- The taste should be characteristic of the ingredient used and, in case of smoked products, of smoking, free of any foreign tastes.

30. Following preparation/production, a meat product should be kept and stored, the quickest possible, in a way that the internal temperature of the product is in accordance with the group classification criteria.”

31. Delegates agreed to add to the word “product”, whenever appropriate, the reference to “preparations” (i.e. preparations/products”). In addition, at the request of the delegation of the European Union the first phrase in Section 3.5.7 - Anti-microbial treatments - was

changed to read: “Save as otherwise established in the importing country, the following treatments may take place before or after chilling.”

32. The Rapporteur was asked to prepare a first draft standard and circulate it for comments and input by delegations. It was decided to continue to work on the document via an electronic working group. Delegates were asked to provide the Rapporteur with lists of products/preparations to be included in the draft. This list should include only few, widely traded items e.g. 8-12 items and, for the moment, only for chicken meat.

**(c) Venison meat**

33. The Specialized Section took note that the Rapporteur on the venison meat standard could not be present at this meeting. Discussions on the proposed text of the Standard were postponed until the next session. However, the group reflected on terminology, production methods, and species, i.e. the possible scope of the Standard. The document was considered as work in progress.

34. The meeting asked the Rapporteur from Russia to review the draft standard for “Venison” meat and consider the suggestions made during the meeting of having an overarching deer meat standard (wild and farmed) with a separate sub-set of provisions pertaining to reindeer and another one to venison. The name of the new draft standard was changed to “Draft Standard for Deer meat “

**(d) Rabbit meat**

35. The secretariat told the Specialized Section that the delegation of China was working on a new draft standard for rabbit meat. The delegate from Poland informed the meeting about rabbit production in her country. The EU delegate noted that the EU’s largest producers were France, Italy, Spain, and Belgium. The breeds imported from China (fur breeds), she stressed, were of a different quality than those bred in the EU (meat breeds). In addition, rabbit meat from China was mostly frozen whereas the meat from the EU was sold as fresh. However, rabbit meat from China was cheaper than meat from European producers. The delegate from Russia agreed to these observations. It was therefore agreed that having an international standard for rabbit meat would be very useful and it was decided to ask the four largest European producers for their input in the elaboration of the standard.

## **VIII. Update on codification systems**

36. The representative from GS1 explained the proposed changes to Annex II of the meat standards (Codification system) which, in its current version, no longer accurately reflected reality. He explained various tagging and bar code technologies and previewed possible future developments. The Specialized Section agreed to adopt the new text and revise the illustrations in Annex II. New illustrations would be supplied by GS1 in the aftermath of the meeting.

37. The representative from GS1 also gave a comprehensive presentation on the GS1 system, traceability and supply chain visibility. The full presentation will be made available on the UNECE web-site at <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.html>. The session on codification systems was also attended by other members of the UNECE Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division.

## **IX. Periodic revision of existing UNECE Standards**

38. The Specialized Section agreed to revise the standards for Porcine meat (with help from Poland) and for Edible meat co-products (with help from the United States). The secretariat was asked to find out from Bolivia if the standard for Llama/Alpaca meat needed revision. It was not considered necessary to revise the standards for Caprine meat or for Duck meat.

## **X. Other business**

39. The delegation from Argentina remarked that it would be important to distinguish between fresh meat and “ready to eat” and “ready to cook” meat. This had become a problem in trade with regard to sanitary inspection. The United States delegate noted that, at the moment, UNECE standards concerned fresh (minimally processed) meat except for the proposed standard on processed poultry meat.

## **XI. Future work**

40. The Specialized Section welcomed the invitation by Poland to host a Rapporteurs meeting in 2013. The meeting would cover the revision of the UNECE standard for Porcine meat. The delegate of Poland offered to explore the possibility of including Rabbit meat. The Chair suggested to hold the Rapporteurs meeting immediately (e.g. 4-5 July 2013) prior to the next meeting of the Specialized Section in Geneva, currently scheduled for 8-10 July 2013. The venue, date and exact programme of the meeting would be communicated at a later stage.

41. The Chinese delegation was asked to report on progress on the draft Standard for rabbit meat within the next weeks. The secretariat will enquire whether France had a rabbit meat standard and if it could be made available.

42. The delegation of Argentina offered to revise the Spanish terms in the bovine meat glossary.

43. Delegates were asked to send to the UNECE secretariat their contact names, e-mail and web page addresses in order to update Annex I of the Standards (Addresses).

## **XII. Election of officers**

44. The Specialized Section re-elected Mr. Ian King (Australia) as Chair and Mr. Craig Morris (United States) as Vice-Chair.

## **XIII. Adoption of the report**

45. The Specialized Section adopted its report.

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