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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-eighth session

Geneva, 5-7 November 2012

Report of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on its sixty-eighth session

I. Introduction

1. The meeting was opened by Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, the Director of the Trade and Sustainable Land Management Division. She said that for more than 60 years, the Working Party had been developing commercial quality standards to facilitate trade. The demand-oriented and productive activities of the Working Party and its four specialized sections were greatly appreciated by many countries. That had been reflected in the strong support that the work had been receiving from member States during the current review of the 2005 UNECE Reform.

2. She pointed out that in 2012 the specialized sections had submitted 30 new and revised standards to the Working Party for approval. To be effectively implemented and applied in practice, a standard's content needed to have a certain level of stability. For that reason, the Working Party might decide to approve the recommendation made by the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to include in its working procedures a provision stipulating that 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.

3. She said that over the past year, good progress had been made on the UNECE explanatory brochures for pineapples, as well as for fresh and dried chilli peppers. During the current session, the Working Party would decide on adopting and publishing them. She thanked the delegations of Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Mexico, Thailand, South Africa and the United Kingdom for contributing to these brochures. She said the secretariat expected the demand for explanatory brochures to remain strong, as these publications helped growers, traders and inspection services to apply standards in a harmonized way.

4. She told the meeting that at its previous session the Working Party had asked the secretariat to provide in writing the opinion of the United Nations legal service on the legal status of the current version of the Geneva Protocol and on the legal standing of UNECE

standards. The reply from Mr. Markus Schmidt, the Senior Legal Adviser at the United Nations Office at Geneva, was part of the documentation for the current session (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/3) and Mr. Schmidt would be present at the session to answer questions that delegations might have.

5. She said that on different occasions, and at different forums, countries had strongly encouraged UNECE, Codex Alimentarius and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – the three organizations working on international standards for fruits and vegetables – to coordinate their work. The Working Party might therefore wish to discuss practical steps to ensure such coordination. She said that, ideally, countries that were members of the three organizations could establish a mechanism for negotiating and agreeing upon priorities, activities and deliverables that would complement each other and, where possible, create synergies, while also avoiding any duplication of work. That would result in a more effective use of resources and would be very much welcomed by the users of those standards all over the world.

6. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom).

II. Attendance

7. Representatives of the following 14 countries attended the meeting: Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

8. The European Commission was also represented.

9. The following specialized agency/programme participated: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

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

11. A representative of the following non-governmental organization participated in the session: International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation.

III. Adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/1

12. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with proposed changes and amendments.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

Documentation: WP.7 Working procedures

13. The secretariat informed the delegations about the review of the 2005 ECE Reform undertaken by the Executive Committee (EXCOM), as well as about the outcome of the fifth session of the Committee on Trade. In this process, all subprogrammes were being reviewed not just with regard to the recommendations made in 2005, but also with regard to

the overall efficiency and impact of each. During the review, all member States stakeholders had been very positive about WP.7 and had supported continuing the work on agricultural quality standards.

14. EXCOM was expected to complete its Review by the end of the year and any recommendations coming out of the EXCOM review would be presented for decision to the Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-fifth session, in April 2013.

15. Pursuant to a request by the Committee on Trade at its fourth session to highlight best practices and the work of its subsidiary bodies on issues and areas of particular interest to the region, a roundtable on traceability in support of efficient, safe and secure global supply chains had been held during the Committee's fifth session in June 2012. The roundtable had included an interesting discussion on traceability which touched upon issues such as ethical traceability, traceability from the point of view of standardizers and regulators and how standardization can be harnessed for improved traceability. The presentations made at the roundtable can be found at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=29210

16. During the discussions that had followed the presentations, Member States had stressed the importance of trade-related standards and the need to enhance the visibility of the standards-setting work undertaken by the Committee's three subsidiary bodies, including WP.7.

17. The secretariat also reported on a new project funded by the United Nations Development Account, which involved all five of the regional commissions of the United Nations, and which could be of potential interest to delegates. This project, to be launched in early 2013, covered activities to enhance supply chains, in particular in agriculture. Support for implementing WP.7 standards would be an important component of the project.

18. Other activities of interest included a presentation on traceability which was made at the September 2012 session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat. This presentation can also be accessed on the UNECE website at: www.unece.org/index.php?id=28939

19. The secretariat said it had received additional funding from the Russian Voluntary Contribution Fund. The funding was for a new project on traceability in the food sector in the Commonwealth of Independent States region. The project would be carried out in cooperation with the experts undertaking e-standards work related to agriculture under UN/CEFACT (United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business).

20. The Working Party approved the recommendation by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetable to establish periodicity in revising the standards. It decided 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.”

(b) Recent developments in other organizations

Documentation: Information on the thirty-fourth session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (INF.6, Informal document)

21. The representative of OECD informed the meeting about the latest activities of the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme. The Scheme was celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2012 and at the invitation of France, the host country of the OECD and a founding member of the Scheme, the Plenary Meeting would be held in Montpellier from 4 to 7 December.

22. During the current year, the OECD had published the explanatory brochure on onions, which was available from the OECD online bookstore and from the official website of the Scheme (www.oecd.org/tad/fv). The explanatory brochure on watermelons would also be available in hard and electronic copies in the coming weeks. The Organisation had also revised the electronic version of the explanatory brochure on broccoli, which would be available on the Scheme's website in mid-November 2012. The development of explanatory brochures on melons, shallots, garlic, fresh figs and pomegranates was continuing.

23. The Scheme had undertaken a peer review of the Fruit and Vegetables Quality Inspection System of the Netherlands in 2011. The report had been published in the first half of 2012 and was available on the Scheme's website.

24. The Scheme made progress in the revision of the OECD Operating Rules for the Conformity Checks of Produce Exported under the Scheme (inspection methods). In parallel, an OECD Guidelines on Quality Inspection was under development. Those documents would be discussed at the next Plenary Meeting in December 2012.

25. A new OECD layout for explanatory brochures was being drawn up and would be discussed at the next Plenary Meeting. The Scheme's Members had already agreed that the new layout would be a combination of the traditional and the "range concept" layouts.

26. The Scheme had organized three international workshops in 2012: in Kenya (April), Montenegro (June) and Slovakia (September).

27. The representative of the secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the meeting about the 17th session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, which had taken place in Mexico City, from 3 to 7 September. The Committee considered a number of matters related to the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables and agreed to the following:

- (a) send the Standard for Avocados for final adoption by the 36th session of the *Codex Alimentarius* Commission, which would take place in July 2013 in Rome (the Standard was based on the latest revision of the UNECE Standard for Avocados);
- (b) send the Standard for Pomegranate for final adoption by the Commission;
- (c) send the Standard for Golden Passion Fruit to the Commission for adoption and subsequent comments and further consideration for finalization at its next session;
- (d) develop an international Standard for Durian and discuss the Standard at the next session of the Committee;
- (e) request the Commission to approve new work on standards for okra and ware potatoes;
- (f) continue to consider a proposed Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, which is based on the latest revision of the UNECE layout in relation to quality provisions;
- (g) continue to examine the possibility of revising its Terms of Reference in relation to the working procedures with the UNECE.

28. The next session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables would take place in early 2014. The exact date and venue would be confirmed in due course by the Mexican and Codex Secretariats and would be posted on the Codex website (www.codexalimentarius.org). The report of the 2013 session had been published as REP13/FFV and was available in English on the Codex website. It would also be available in French and Spanish.

29. The 26th session of the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits Vegetables took place in Montego Bay, Jamaica, from 15 to 19 October 2012. The Committee was re-established to review the individual standards for processed fruits and vegetables to determine the need for revising them and for similar products to merge them into more horizontal standards when possible.

30. Based on the outcome of the ongoing revision of the standards for certain canned fruits and quick frozen vegetables, at its next session that Committee might wish to consider the opportunity to review the Codex standards for dry and dried fruits and vegetables, including the possibility of using UNECE standards for dry and dried produce as the basis for corresponding Codex standards. If so, it might wish to consider other elements, e.g. similar layouts that may facilitate harmonization of Codex and UNECE standards for these products. The report of the session would be published as REP13/PFV and would be available on the Codex website in English, French and Spanish.

31. The representative of the European Commission informed the Working Party that several EU standards, in particular for apples and pears, were currently being aligned with those of UNECE.

V. Revision of the Geneva Protocol

Documentation: Geneva Protocol

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)

32. Following the request made by the 2011 session of the Working Party, the UNOG Senior Legal Adviser presented his opinion on the legal status of the current (1985) version of the Geneva Protocol and on the legal standing of UNECE standards. He also recalled that UNECE developed its commercial quality standards in compliance with the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. He said the Agreement recommended that Member States should use international standards as the basis for technical regulations (article 2.4). It further clarified that “For the purpose of the Agreement standards are defined as voluntary and technical regulations [adopted at the national or regional level to incorporate the standards] as mandatory documents.”

33. The Agreement, he said, did not identify any international body responsible for the development of standards. The UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards was an international body within the United Nations system and drew up internationally agreed standards as mere recommendations to countries. Their legal status and international nature was similar to those developed by the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

34. The representative of the secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme secretariat informed the Working Party that the UNOG Legal Office opinion on the legal status of the Geneva Protocol had been forwarded to the FAO and WHO Legal Departments for information and comment, especially in regard to point 6 and onwards.

35. The Working Party took note of the information provided by the UNOG Senior Legal Adviser. Several countries indicated that they were already evaluating that information. These countries were asked to send the results of the national consultations to the secretariat so that they could be circulated to other members of the Working Party and considered by the specialized sections at their 2013 sessions. The Working Party decided to reconsider the text of the draft Geneva Agreement at its next session.

Agenda items 4-7

36. The chairs of the specialized sections presented the work of the sections since the 2011 meeting of the Working Party, as well as current and future activities. The presentations were available on the website at: www.unece.org/trade/wp-7/meetings.html.

VI. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Documentation: Report of the twenty-first session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.11/2012/2)

Chicken meat - carcasses and parts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/4)

Turkey meat - carcasses and parts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/5)

Ovine meat - carcasses and cuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/6)

Bovine meat - carcasses and cuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/7)

37. The Chair's presentation, made by the secretariat, contained information on the rapporteurs' meetings in the United States and Argentina, during which the Specialized Section had revised four standards. It was mentioned that the Specialized Section was revising the standard for porcine meat (with a rapporteurs' meeting scheduled to be held in Poland in July 2013), and drawing up new standards for processed poultry products, rabbit and deer meat.

38. The Working Party adopted the following revised UNECE Standards, which had been submitted by the Specialized Section: chicken meat, turkey meat, ovine meat and bovine meat.

VII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Documentation: Presentation by the Chair

39. The Chair explained that the Specialized Section continued to work on various parts of the Standard, as well as on promoting its practical application and providing assistance in setting up technical infrastructure for seed-potato certification in the CIS region.

40. In May 2012, the Specialized Section had held a meeting of its Extended Bureau in Edinburgh, back-to-back with the World Potato Congress, to promote the standard among the 600 participants that took part in the Congress.

41. The Working Party approved the initiation of work on a UNECE "Guide for Seed Potato Inspectors".

VIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Documentation: Report of the sixtieth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2012/2)

(a) Texts for adoption as revised/new UNECE standards/recommendations

Documentation: Summary of changes to standards (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/8)

Witloof chicory (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/9)

Witloof chicory – position of France (INF.5, Informal document)
 Witloof chicory – comments by France (INF.6, Informal document)
 Witloof chicory – sizes in Classes (France) (INF.7, Informal document)
 Witloof chicory – “red” type (France) (INF.8, Informal document)
 Pineapples (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/10)
 Lambs lettuce (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/24)

42. The Working Party adopted the revised texts of the standards for leafy vegetables, mangoes, watermelons, cultivated mushrooms, citrus fruit, melons, leeks and lettuces with the amendments listed in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/8.

43. The Working Party approved the revised wording of the second paragraph of Section “III. Provisions concerning sizing” in the Standard for tomatoes to read: “The following provisions shall not apply to trusses of tomatoes and are optional for cherry and cocktail tomatoes below 40 mm in diameter and for Class II.” It was clarified that the provisions for sizing covered cherry and cocktail tomatoes of different shapes.

44. The Working Party approved the amendment to the second indent of Section “VI. Provisions concerning marking, D. Commercial specification” in the Standard for headed cabbages to read: “number of units (optional)”.

45. The delegation of Turkey withdrew its proposal to amend the list of varieties in the Standard for plums.

46. Proposals to amend the standards for apples and pears were withdrawn based on the comments received from Belgium and France.

47. The Working Party returned the Standard for witloof chicory to the Specialized Section for further work.

48. The Working Party submitted to the Specialized Section the comments received from South Africa concerning the marking provisions for citrus fruit.

49. The Working Party approved the Standard for pineapples with the following wording in the second paragraph in the section on maturity: “The total soluble solids content of the fruit flesh should be at least 12° Brix”, and with the following provision on uniformity in sizing:

“To ensure uniformity in size, the range in size between produce in the same package shall not exceed:

- 300 grams for fruit weighing 1 300 g or less
- 680 grams for fruit weighing more than 1 300 g.”

50. The Working Party approved the new Standard for lambs lettuce as a recommendation for one-year trial period.

(b) UNECE explanatory brochures

Documentation: UNECE explanatory brochure for pineapples
 (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/11)

UNECE explanatory brochure for fresh chilli peppers (INF.3, Informal document)

UNECE explanatory brochure for dried chilli peppers (INF.4, Informal document)

51. The Working Party approved the brochures for the standards on pineapples and fresh chilli peppers with the suggestions reflected in the PowerPoint presentations of these brochures posted on the web as part of the session documentation. The delegations were requested to send the specified photographs to the secretariat by 31 December 2012.

52. The Working Party extended the trial period for the Standard on fresh chilli peppers. At its May 2013 session, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables would consider the proposal by the delegation of Turkey on measuring the size of chilli peppers by diameter. Possible amendments to the standard might then need to be reflected in the brochure. The Working Party asked the countries to submit specific comments and photos by 1 January 2013 to be considered at the next session of the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables in April/May 2013. Suggested changes would be approved via the inter-sessional approval procedure directly after the session. If no comments were received by the 1 January deadline, it was decided to adopt the text in its current state and finalize the work.

53. The Working Party approved the recommendation to start work on a UNECE explanatory brochure for persimmon. The delegation of Spain said that the Spanish industry was interested in that brochure and would be ready to contribute to its development.

IX. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

Documentation: Report of the fifty-ninth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.2/2012/2)

54. The Chair reviewed the work of the Specialized Section, outlining ongoing activities and stressing the progress that had been made in many areas. He invited member States to explore with their trade representatives the possibility of organizing an exhibition of the work and the products covered by the UNECE dry and dried produce standards.

55. The International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) reported on their activities during the past year and noted that major cashew producers supported the revised text of the UNECE Standard for cashew kernels, which was currently in trial. There were also ideas to develop a brochure for cashew kernels and to possibly standardize raw cashew nuts in the future.

(a) Texts for adoption as UNECE recommendations

Documentation: Cashew kernels (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/12)

Pine nut kernels (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/13)

Inshell Brazil nuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/14)

Brazil nut kernels (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/15)

Inshell walnuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/16)

Dried mangoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/17)

Dried grapes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/18)

56. The Working Party adopted the following amended/new texts as new UNECE recommendations for a one-year trial period: cashew kernels, pine nut kernels, inshell Brazil nuts, Brazil nut kernels, inshell walnuts and dried mangoes.

57. The delegation of the United States indicated that work on the brochure on inshell walnuts would recommence.

(b) Text for extension as a UNECE recommendation

Documentation: Dried apricots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/19)

Dried figs (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/20)

58. The Working Party adopted the revised texts on dried apricots and dried figs and extended their trial period until the end of 2013.

(c) Text for adoption as new/revised UNECE Standards

Documentation: Dried apples (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/21)

Dried pears (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/22)

Whole dried chilli peppers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/23) and (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2012/23/Rev.1)

Whole dried chilli peppers - comments by Kenya (INF.1, Informal document)

59. The Working Party adopted the revised standards on dried apples and dried pears.

60. As several delegations had submitted written comments on the draft Standard for dried chilli peppers, the Working Party decided to return the text to the Specialized Section. The delegation of Mexico expressed concern regarding the postponement of the Standard and suggested that deadlines be strictly respected.

61. The trial period of the recommendation for whole dried chilli peppers was extended and delegations were asked to submit specific information and photos by 1 February 2013. These would be considered at the next session of the Specialized Section in June 2013. Suggested changes would be approved via the inter-sessional approval procedure directly after the June 2013 session. If no comments were received by the deadline of 1 February, the text would be adopted in its current state and the work finalized.

62. The Specialized Section established a Working Group to deal with sugaring, food additives and rehydration. With regard to sugaring and food additives, the need to cooperate with Codex was pointed out.

63. The Working Party took note of the draft brochure for whole dried chilli peppers, which had been reviewed during an informal working group session. The work on the brochure would continue through June 2013.

X. Capacity-building activities

64. The delegation of Mexico informed the Working Party about the International Congress on Chilli Peppers, to be held in Mexico in July 2013 and suggested that a workshop be held back-to-back with the Congress to promote the UNECE standards and

brochures for fresh and dried chilli peppers.

65. The delegation of Poland informed the Working Party that a Rapporteurs' meeting on the Standard for porcine meat would be held in Warsaw in July 2013.

66. The delegation of Germany confirmed that the 29th International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables would be held in Bonn from 25 to 27 February 2013.

67. The delegation of the United Kingdom said that the 18th UK Harmonization Meeting had been held in June 2012 and that a similar meeting was planned for 2014.

68. The delegation of the United States informed the Working Party about a workshop on fresh berry fruits held in Serbia in August 2012 to promote the UNECE standards among growers, traders and inspectors. A follow-up workshop on frozen berry fruit was planned.

69. The secretariat informed the Working Party about the training on UNECE/EU standards for fresh fruit and vegetables organized in Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2012 by UNECE jointly with other partners.

70. Ms. Cram-Martos informed the Working Party about the understanding reached by the UNECE and OECD secretariats on their cooperation in capacity-building activities in quality standards and inspection methods. The representative of the OECD secretariat confirmed that such an agreement had been reached.

XI. Other business

Documentation: Glossary of terms (INF.2, Informal document)

71. The Working Party took note of the revised Glossary of Terms and suggested that the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables finalize it at its May 2013 session and submit it for approval.

XII. Future work

72. In the current economic climate, optimal use of resources was essential. Therefore the delegations of Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States asked the support of the UNECE secretariat for exploring how the existing mechanisms of cooperation with other international organizations working on quality standards, such as OECD and Codex, could be strengthened. The aim should be to optimize the use of resources and reduce duplication of activities to better serve the sectors involved.

73. The delegations asked the secretariat to transmit this common position of the Working Party to the secretariats of the other two organizations for consideration by these organizations' members.

74. The Working Party would like to finalize its work on the draft Geneva Agreement.

75. The following meetings will be held in 2013:

- Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes: 11-13 March
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 30 April-3 May
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce: 17-20 June
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat: 8-10 July

- Working Party: 4-6 November

XIII. Election of officers

76. The delegations re-elected Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom) as Chair and Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy) as Vice-Chair.

XIV. Adoption of the report

77. The Working Party adopted the report of the session.
