

18 October 2012

Economic Commission for Europe

Committee on Trade

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-eighth session

Geneva, 5-7 November 2012

Item 6(a) of the provisional agenda

Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Texts for adoption as new/revised UNECE standards/recommendations

UNECE Standard for witloof chicory (FFV-38)

Note by the secretariat

This note is submitted by the delegation of France. It explains why the minimum and maximum sizes should be maintained for different classes.

**Subject: Proposed Amendments to UN ECE standard Witloof
Arguments of the Working Group France Date: 24/09/2012**

Following the meeting of the WG Quality and Standardization of 4 September 2012, please find the following items in support of France's request to maintain sizing templates in the UNECE standard for witloof. This paper is divided into three sections, each of which develops the arguments from the point of view of:

- Consumer demand
- Buyers' expectations
- Technical aspect linked to product conservation

a. **Consumer demand**

Below are some marketing materials explicitly showing the link the consumer makes between the sizing and the bitterness of witloof and therefore justifying retention of the sizing.

This is an extract from a consumer survey conducted by the firm Quintessens in June/July 2008 on behalf of one of the Members of the French Producers Association. The objectives of the study were to "measure the perception of the brand and of the witloof, expectations, satisfaction points, disappointments and production of rough ideas" by bringing consumer groups into a market audit. The methodology used was as follows:

Demographic criteria:

- 70% women, 30% men
- 25-49 years
- Mix of socio-professional classes
- Mix of singles, childless couples and families

Behavioral criteria:

- purchase of the witloof : supermarkets (neither in grocery shops nor markets)
- buyers and/or users and/or consumers of witloof at home
- at least 2 to 3 consumers of "Perle du Nord" per group

Frequency of consumption: mixed

- weekly or almost
- at least once a month,
- rarely or never because they don't think about it
- rarely or never because they don't like it

4-hour group

- Lille: 9 participants
- Paris: 9 participants
- Rennes: 9 participants
- Metz : 9 participants
- Marseille : 9 participants

The following results concern only the link between quality and sizing.

Criterion of choice: size and portion

Participants tend to choose medium to small size witloof. The choice of an witloof that is "not too big" is due to several factors:

- The belief that bitterness is linked to the size of the witloof: a smaller witloof is less bitter
- The required portion: one large witloof is too much to eat for one or two persons. One therefore chooses a smaller one not to have to throw away the remainder.

This idea of a portion also solicited comments on conditioning and packaging, and especially the ready-packed witloof, which seem to offer more than the consumer needs. Some consumers will then turn to unpacked products, where they can choose the size and number they want. The main motivations for buying witloof unpackaged or in bulk are:

- The choice of the number of witloof you want, especially as the packages offer more witloof than the consumer wants to buy
- The choice of the size of witloof, linked with the belief that the small witloof are less bitter. Selection is more difficult if you buy a bag,
- The possibility of controlling exactly the entire witloof.

Participants, however, also raised the issue of hygiene in relation to buying in bulk, mainly because everyone can handle the vegetables before buying them. Hygiene is the reason why some participants prefer to buy packaged products. Some participants minimize this lack of hygiene, saying that afterwards you wash the vegetables anyway. Some participants say they prefer the ecological aspect of buying in bulk (i.e. no packaging).

b. The buyer's expectations

APEF held its annual general assembly on 28 June 2012. A discussion was held on the theme of quality of fruit and vegetables: what are the expectations of the consumer. Mr. Mathieu PECQUEUR, Head of the agriculture and quality service of the Federation of Trade and Distribution was present and addressed specifically the French endive/witloof growers about the desirable quality of the product in the supermarkets. .

Mr. Pierre Volant, regional technical inspector for fruits and vegetables for DIRECCTE Nord Pas, Calais, who was also in attendance, referred in his presentation to aspects associated with the quality and presentation of the endive, from both the distributor's and the consumer's point of view.

"About witloof, it is the 4th vegetable in amount of sales. Supermarkets are improving the presentation quality compared to the past. Yet its consumption is decreasing gradually, with market share being taken by other vegetables."

To sell a quality product, you need to start with a good product and there must be constant follow-up (training department manager). From the point of view of the appearance, bags of witloof, which represent 90% of the sales, should be **homogeneous in size**. In particular, they should not contain large and small witloof inside because the consumer feels cheated (e.g 3 large and 2 small pieces). The ideal is a pack of 5 to 6 medium-sized units. The Head of agriculture and quality service gives his opinion based on his experience with the product:

- Move on from the common notion, without however creating artificial segmentation;
- Sell the witloof all year long not helping innovation but instead trivialization;
- avoid the logic of "pure price" and communicate on new uses thanks to segmentation, such as for tomatoes and apples, which is not currently the case of witloof (salads, witloof with ham);
- convince young consumers that **bitterness** is less pronounced than it was in the past.

Exchanges with the audience brought the following remarks:

- witloof is more and more sold per number of units not weight, which is in line with the consumer habits;
- quality is inversely proportional to the weight of a witloof:

This is an extract from the report submitted by the French technical inspector highlighting the testimony of retailers who sell 75% of the endives in France and Europe.

c. Technical aspect associated with conservation of witloof

Witloof is the product of the growth of the terminal bud of a chicory root placed in suitable conditions (darkness, temperature, humidity ...). The harvest stage will affect the product size (length and diameter) and shape (axis length, firmness, opening of the head...).

Each producer adjusts the harvesting stage according to visual criteria, as well as market constraints and staff. The producer can affect the growth by changing the temperature, for example.

The optimum stage for harvesting is always subjective. Harvesting too early limits the size and weight of the product. A late harvest produces a longer and thicker witloof, the internal axis grows excessively and often causes the opening of the end. However, the current varieties allow exceeding the optimum stage without any damage being caused to the shape. On the other hand, tests show clearly that **the product does not keep as well if harvested too late.** regardless of variety.

Not limiting the size of the product could encourage producers to place on the market a product of lower quality with less storage time.

d. Conclusion

The provisions on sizing, i.e. the minimum and maximum sizes, are today one of the essential criteria for distinguishing the different categories. In particular, the disappearance of a maximum size would lead to a blur between the classes and affect the expectations of both consumers and buyers.

The photo below shows a few examples of atypical products that could change our categories in the absence of criteria for sizing.



Witloof # 2:

- According to current standard: Class I diameter = 7 cm or <8 cm limit

- No limit: Extra Class

Witloof # 3:

- According to current standard: Class II diameter = 9 cm

- Unlimited: Category I

Chicon n° 4 : Chicon # 4:

- According to current standard: Class II = 11 cm diameter and length 22cm = <24 cm limit

- Unlimited: Category I (outer leaves $\frac{3}{4}$).

We could eventually end up with bags of category I, containing only 3 pieces, in the photo below.

