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Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Eating Quality - proposal

The following report concerning the preliminary work on eating quality is brought to the attention of the Working Party. The proposal by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat to initiate work in this area is submitted to the Working Party for adoption as a new work item.

Background

At the 2014 session of the Specialized Section it was agreed to establish an informal, ad-hoc group informal discussion group on eating quality (scientific reference group on eating quality) within the current Specialized Section structure to discuss relevant items. The group, headed by Poland as Rapporteur, reported on progress made at the 2015 and the 2016 session of the Specialized Section. In 2015 and 2016, the group had met several times and formulated recommendations for review and adoption by the Specialized Section. They reflected the growing interest in and importance of worldwide collaboration in the area of eating quality research. A collaborative research agreement has the potential to change “meat grading” internationally and to provide consumers with an “Eating Quality Guarantee” all based on consumer analysis, meat science and the objective measurement of quality traits from farm to fork (including cooking methods). This would be a new development where UNECE could play an important role in providing an international forum for setting the Standards used in these collaborative studies.

The eating quality approach aims at improving the understanding between producers and buyers worldwide. This work ensures that the UNECE standards remain relevant into the future while continuing to be vital to industry and trade. Also, it would be eventually a first step away from including in the standard only trade practices towards including consumer behaviour, expectations and demands.

Proposals for new work

Some of the main problems encountered in international eating quality research projects were linguistic and it was difficult to ensure that the data collected meant the same in every country. It was therefore important to engage with relevant organizations e.g. ICAR (International Committee for Animal Recording); ATOL (Animal Trait Ontology for Livestock) or OntoBeef to ensure the optimal linkage of live animal and genomic data. **The Specialized Section invited the UNECE secretariat to contact the organizations in due course to help work out linguistic barriers.**

The Specialized section following the group recommendation also decided to **work on an explanatory guide to the UNECE Bovine standard** to facilitate research collaboration and data interchange or pooling. The particular focus would be Section “5.7 Meat Quality Standards” which includes MSA criteria and USDA equivalence to provide the basis for carcass eating quality grade inputs. **The explanatory guide would better describe these criteria (marbelling, colour) and e.g. link colour to a colour scale or offer images as visuals for marbelling and fat content determination.** Both, the United States and Australia agreed to make available their standards for use and for study purposes.

It was also agreed to include in the **explanatory guide a first draft of the table in Section 5.6.2 with the numeric muscle codes presented in conjunction with common cut names to facilitate short descriptions.** In addition, it was also agreed to **add days of age as a measure of animal age and the EUROP muscle and fat score description as an interim description of carcass yield.** The Specialized Section will review these additions at its 2017 session.

The Specialized Section also agreed to **adopt the MSA consumer testing protocols** as an interim standard for consumer sensory evaluation and reporting as there was considerable existing European data that had the potential for amalgamation.

The Specialized Section took note of the **issues surrounding data ownership and intellectual property rights (IPR)** linked to a standard data structure, data access and the pooling of data for collaborative research purposes. It was therefore decided to establish a working group coordinated by Australia to look into technical, IP and legal aspects relative to the pooling of data and access arrangements.