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Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization
of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

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Geneva, 6–8 May 2024

Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda

Review of existing standards:

New proposals

Proposal by the delegation of Sweden to amend the standard for headed cabbages

Submitted by the delegation of Sweden

Summary

The following proposal for revisions to the standard for headed cabbages (FFV-09) was submitted by the delegation of Sweden for the consideration of the Specialized Section. The proposed changes are marked in strike-through for deleted text and underline for added text.



I. Proposal

The delegation of Sweden proposes to remove the minimum weight requirement under section III Provisions concerning sizing as follows:

Provisions concerning sizing

Size is determined by weight of the unit.

~~The minimum weight shall be 350 g per unit for early cabbages and 500 g per unit for other headed cabbages.~~

To ensure uniformity in size for produce in the same package, the weight of the heaviest head must not be more than double the weight of the lightest head. When the weight of the heaviest head is equal to or less than 2 kg the difference between the heaviest and the lightest head may be up to 1 kg.

Uniformity in size is compulsory for headed cabbages presented in packages.

The size requirements shall not apply to miniature produce.¹

Alternative proposal:

If the proposal to remove the minimum weight requirement is not acceptable to other countries the delegation of Sweden suggests, as an alternative, to reduce the minimum weight requirement as follows:

The minimum weight shall be ~~350~~ 250 g per unit for early cabbages and ~~500~~ 300 g per unit for other headed cabbages.

II. Justification

In the view of the delegation of Sweden, marketing standards should reflect market requirements. Products of good quality that are demanded by the market, should not be prevented by marketing standards from being sold.

In discussions with representatives from the Swedish fruit and vegetable sector, sector representatives expressed a wish to change the sizing requirements in the standard for headed cabbage. They said that a trend is that consumers wish to buy smaller products. In the case of headed cabbages, large heads often have to be cut in half when sold at retail level. Cutting heads reduces shelf life and means that different requirements (i.e. food legislation) apply. As cabbage heads are not miniature products, the exception from size requirements for miniature products does not apply. The marketing standard for headed cabbages therefore does not fully reflect current market requirements.

In the European Union (EU), headed cabbages do not have a specific marketing standard. Instead, they are covered by the general marketing standard and thus there is no obligatory minimum size requirement on the EU market. However, in Sweden the sector uses the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) marketing standards as a basis for their business agreements as the general marketing standard is found to not be detailed enough.

Sector representatives would prefer to see the minimum weight requirement in the ECE standard removed but as a second alternative they suggest reducing the minimum weight.

The delegation of Sweden therefore suggests changing the provisions for minimum size in the standard for headed cabbages.

¹ Miniature product means a variety or cultivar of vegetable, obtained by plant breeding and/or special cultivation techniques, excluding specimens of non-miniature varieties which have not fully developed or are of inadequate size. All other requirements of the standard must be met.