

International Meetings On A Global Seed Potato Certification Standard

by Willem Schrage, North Dakota State Seed Department

The Extended Bureau of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes of the United Nations Economic Commission of Europe (UNECE) held its meeting on 19-21 October 2009 in Belgium and Luxembourg. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Lebanon, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Russian Federation, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. The travel of the seed certification official from the US is funded by the US Potato Board on a recommendation from the Seed Certification Sub-Committee of the National Potato Council.



Visiting the results of variety trials of Binst.

Part of the duties of the UNECE is to develop global agricultural quality stan-

dards of perishable produce and products to facilitate international trade. The standards are intended to encourage quality production, improve profitability and protect consumer interests. UNECE standards are used internationally by governments, producers, traders, importers, exporters and international organizations. They cover seed potatoes, fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried produce, meat, cut flowers, eggs and egg products.

The UNECE seed potato standard has served as a basis for the European Union directives and are being used to develop new national standards in Russia.

During the last meeting several issues such as soft rot, tuber moth damage, crop inspection practices, post harvest test, varietal identity and comparative trials were discussed.

Soft Rot-needs a better definition in the UNECE Standard, therefore delegates

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from the Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States have volunteered to draw up definitions of soft and dry rots for annex VII of the Standard for the March 2010 session of the Specialized Section.

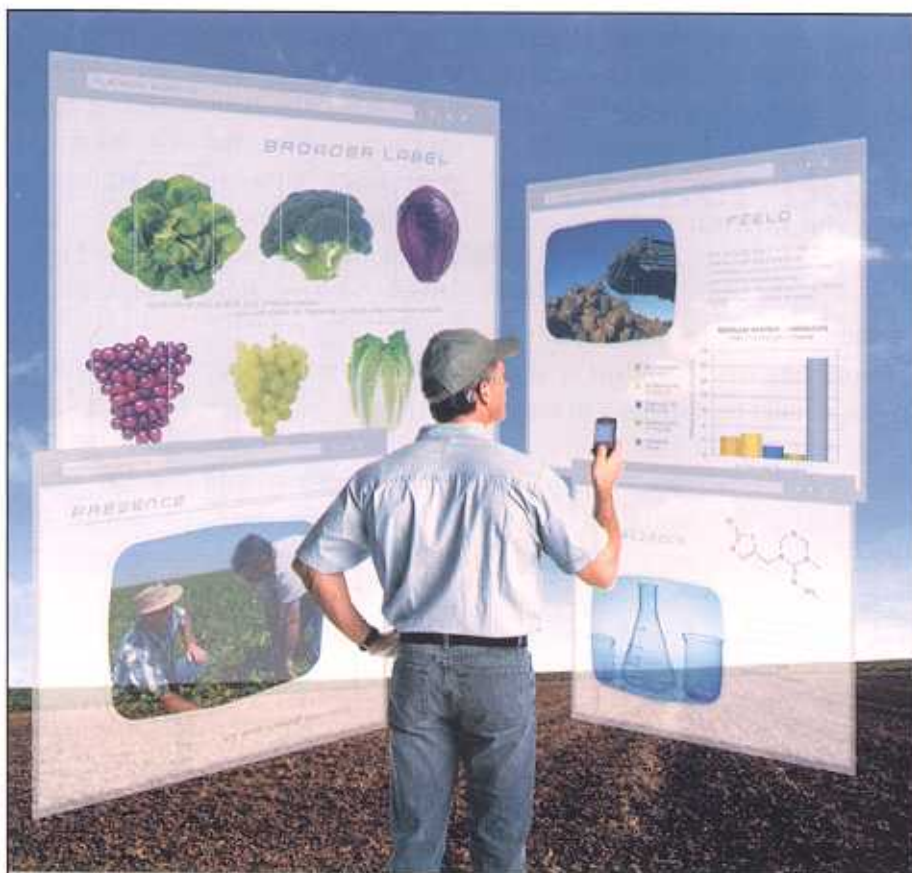
Tuber Moth-The discussion about the approach to tuber moth damage in a lot resulted in the agreement that countries have zero tolerance for living tuber moth larvae for imported seed. Since internal damage is not sufficiently defined in the standard, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and the United States are to propose defining internal defects in the standard. Internal defects include internal tuber moth damage rust spot and spraing, blue or black spot bruise, and glassiness.



Delegates in Libramont, (right to left) Denmark, Czech Republic, Russian Federation, Austria, Netherlands, Lebanon, Canada, Switzerland, and Belgium.

Crop inspection Practices-are to be included as a new annex in the Standard.

Post Harvest Testing-to be called post harvest evaluations that will include field trials was discussed. The submitted



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Seed Potato Exporter, Didier Binst, in his potato storage talking with Gerard Crouau.

paper is to be included in the UNECE standard during the annual meeting of the seed potato section in March 2010.

Varietal Identity-A questionnaire on how certification systems deal with varietal identity is being developed. It will be sent to certification offices. The UNECE standard says that varieties shall be accepted into the standard only if an official description and a reference sample are available from the designated authority. It may be worth noting that the US is the only country that has a reservation, because the requirement to have an official description does not apply in the US.

Comparative Trials are included in the UNECE Standard-Seed potatoes from different sources are planted together. These trials are used to train inspectors. This issue was to be expanded into a larger project where a demonstration of seed from different sources could be used to harmonize the application of the Standard and as an educational tool for inspectors and others. This may be part of a promotional workshop. Delegates of the Russian Federation offered to host such a demonstration trial in 2011. This activity would help the national produc-

ers understand better how the standard is used in practice. The demonstration trials are also a good tool for sharing experience and training inspectors. Denmark, France, Russian Federation, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have volunteered to prepare a technical protocol for demonstration trials for the next meeting of the Specialized Section. Several countries have extended invitations to visit their national demonstration fields.

Promotion-In order to continue efforts to promote the UNECE standard in other countries an offer by Indonesia to host a regional workshop in this country in October 2010 was accepted. The provisional dates of the workshop (18-22 October) are yet to be confirmed. A Steering Group, composed of Canada, France, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States, the chair and the secretariat, will prepare the workshop.

Annual Meeting-The Annual meeting of the UNECE Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes is planned for March 15-17, 2010 in Geneva.

The UNECE website at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/ge.0

6/2009-in-session.htm, contains the documents discussed during the meeting.

The seed potato section maintains a website with potato diseases and pests at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/PestPicturesE.htm

Seed Potatoes in Belgium and Luxembourg-The UNECE delegates were invited to the cooperative of seed potato producers, "Synplants" in Clerf, Luxembourg. There were about 50 active members growing seed potatoes in an isolated area in Luxembourg, where no other potatoes were grown. Some potatoes were also grown in neighboring Belgium. The total area of the operation covered about 1000 acres. Many of the seed potatoes were for export. One great cooperator is the Binst Breeding and Selection Company in Belgium. It was a great pleasure to see Didier Binst again after having met in North Africa and Europe some years ago. I realized how many years ago, when I was introduced to his son, who is now partner in the company. Father and son Binst were great hosts as were the Ministry of Agriculture, Viticulture and Rural Development of Luxembourg and to the Ministry of Agriculture of Belgium.

Post Harvest Testing in Belgium-The Libramont Agricultural Research Centre is the station in Belgium where the green house "grow out" and post harvest test for viruses takes place. The UNECE delegates were invited to tour their greenhouses and laboratories. There is close cooperation between the certification agencies of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, because growers grow potatoes in another country and do not store their potatoes in the same country. Similar arrangements between states are known in the US. Although there are European Union directives, certification is still done according to the national certification programs.