



# Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General  
30 November 2017

Original: English

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## Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

### Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Seventy-third session

Geneva, 7-8 November 2017

## Report of the seventy-third session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

### I. Introduction

1. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) opened the seventy-third session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7). He welcomed delegates and thanked them for their support. He stressed that collaboration among the international organizations was crucial, especially in standards development and capacity-building. He congratulated participants for the successful conference on “Rooting for Sustainable Food” co-organized with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) which took place on the first day of the Working Party session. This event, with participants and presenters from the UNECE region and beyond, had brought new insights into how the sustainable development agenda can move forward in productive and inclusive ways. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on current work, and its improvement at UNECE and Working Party levels to face the sustainability challenge in the coming years. UNECE’s standards served as a reference point for agricultural quality in trade both internationally and domestically. They helped improve quality production and trade to avoid food loss at all levels of the supply chain. That emphasis was particularly important, as agriculture was at the heart of many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also mentioned that over the past year, the Specialized Sections had mapped their work to link it to the SDGs. This, together with already on-going work, could strengthen WP.7’s contribution to the SDGs.

2. He also reviewed the work of the Specialized Sections in developing new standards and revising existing ones and highlighted: by the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, the work on the development of baseline quality requirements that could help guide governments, producers and smallholders in consistently supplying safe and nutritious food for export and local markets; by the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce, the development of explanatory posters to help governments, producers, and traders to pool production and better understand the standards; by the Specialized Section on Meat, the progress in the field of eating quality and capacity-building; and by the Specialized Section

on Seed Potatoes, the development of a first app based on the UNECE Seed Potato Disease Guide. 2017 marked the last year of a successful cross-border trade project which had been implemented jointly by UNECE and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The project had trained close to 600 participants in the past three and a half years with 300 in 2017 alone. He also noted the delivery of seed potato laboratory equipment to Shushary (Saint Petersburg area) financed through extra-budgetary funds from the Russian Federation. He concluded by thanking all delegates for their contributions to these activities, and congratulated them for achieving such remarkable results. The secretariat was making progress in raising new funds for a project on sustainable production and consumption. Further updates would be provided in due course.

3. The Chief of the Market Access Section explained that he had received authorization from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to represent UNMIK Kosovo<sup>1</sup> and introduced the technical expert who had been nominated to take part in the discussions.

4. The 2017 session of the Working Party included on its first day an international conference on food loss with presentations on subjects of interest to all four Specialized Sections and organized in partnership with the FAO Office in Geneva. The programme and the presentations are available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44974>.

5. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Pierre Schauenberg, Chairperson of the Working Party, and Ms. Agnieszka Sudol, Vice-Chairperson.

## II. Attendance

6. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Mauritius, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

7. The European Commission was also represented.

8. The following international organizations, specialized agencies and programmes, and intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Trade Centre (ITC), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), World Trade Organization (WTO).

9. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, companies, academia and independent experts participated in the session: Agriplace, Agronometrics, All-Russian Scientific Research Institute for Poultry Processing Industry, Argentine Beef Promotion Institute (IPCVA), Biovision Foundation for Ecological Development, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Interbranch Association for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (INTERFEL), International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), Lightblue Consulting, Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), Sustainability Management School (SUMAS), University of Novi Sad, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Zachran jidlo.

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<sup>1</sup> References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

10. A representative from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)<sup>2</sup> also attended.

### **III. Adoption of the agenda**

11. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.

### **IV. Matters arising since the last session**

#### **(a) United Nations, Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies**

12. The secretariat informed delegations that the new United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, who had pledged to gear the United Nations towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) had appointed Ms. Olga Algayerova of Slovakia as the new Executive Secretary of the UNECE. He also briefly mentioned that UNECE has taken important budget cuts in this and the next biennium (2018-2019) including posts, consultancy, printing and travel funds. While for the moment the secretariat of the Working Party still availed of project funds, which covered some of the losses, fund-raising needed to continue in the future. At the last session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which had taken place on 12-13 April 2017, the work of WP.7 had been very well received and several delegations had shown their interest in getting more involved in its work. Moreover, delegates had expressed interest in linking the work of WP.7 with that of other bodies and activities.

#### **(b) Recent developments in other organizations**

13. The representative from the European Commission informed delegates about the continued alignment/update exercise between the 10 specific marketing standards of the European Union and UNECE standards.

14. The representative from OECD reported that the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme was currently working on 5 explanatory brochures. The explanatory brochures on leeks and tomatoes were expected to be approved at the next Plenary Meeting on 6-7 December 2017. The work on explanatory brochures on passion fruit, berry fruits and root vegetables was under way. He also noted that Brazil and Croatia formally applied to join the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme and that evaluation missions had already taken place. The OECD Fruit and Vegetables Plenary Meeting was expected to review and, if satisfied, approve the evaluation reports, welcoming Brazil and Croatia as new member countries of the Fruit and Vegetables Scheme. He also noted that the OECD Scheme was working on traceability, tolerances, food waste and internet sales of fruits and vegetables with updates to be discussed at the December meeting. The representative from OECD offered to work with UNECE on a joint educational video to tackle food waste. The OECD, he said, was keen on raising awareness of the importance of standards and inspections to facilitate the trade of fruit and vegetables. Therefore, the Scheme had decided to work with other international organizations in joint workshops. In 2017, OECD was organizing a joint workshop with ESCAP on 20-21

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November 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. The OECD Scheme offered to organize a joint workshop with UNECE in 2018.

15. The representative from the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) presented its work and role in the sustainable global trade of nuts and dried fruit. She highlighted cooperation of the INC with UNECE in the area of a sampling plan for nuts and dried fruit and offered to organize a practical workshop in 2018 to finalize it. She also mentioned that the Chairman of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce had presented the Specialized Section's work at the 2017 INC Congress in Chennai, India, and that the INC had contributed to the collection of samples for the UNECE farmers market held at the 2017 UNECE Commission session. She informed delegates that a new version of the World Nut and Dried Fruit Trade Map had been published on the INC's web site.

16. The secretariat drew the participants' attention to document INF.1 which provided information on activities by the Codex Alimentarius Commission of relevance to the Working Party. Both Committees (Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) and Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV)) are currently embarking on the elaboration of standards for which UNECE had already elaborated standards. Delegations pointed out that there were discrepancies between the two standards and it had become increasingly difficult to harmonize them. After some deliberations, delegations suggested that one option to increase transparency would be to include a reference in the standards drawing the users' attention to the existence of two standards for the same produce traded internationally in addition to a mention of explanatory material prepared by OECD. It was agreed that discussions on this issue should continue also at the level of the specialized sections.

17. The representative from the European Commission informed delegates that at the last CCFFV session in October 2017, the European Union and its member States had expressed their position on this matter (recorded in para 62 of the CCFFV report<sup>3</sup>) with reactions to the proposal recorded in paragraphs 63-64.

## **V. Sustainable Development Goals and the work under the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**

18. The secretariat presented the work completed by the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce and the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes on mapping their activities and their impact against the SDGs (namely SDG 2 (zero hunger), 12 (responsible consumption and production) and 17 (partnership for the goals)). The secretariat noted that the Specialized Section on Meat had launched the exercise this week and would present their results soon (including links with other SDGs). The secretariat will prepare a more concise and shortened version of the current compilation which could be used for internal and external communication purposes as well as on the web page. The Specialized Sections were encouraged to use the messages to prepare posters or other promotional material.

## **VI. Revision of the Terms of Reference of the Working Party**

19. As no written contributions on the revision of the Working Party's Terms of Reference had been received, it was decided to form an open working group consisting of Germany

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.fao.org/fao-who-codexalimentarius/meetings-reports/en/>

Poland, Switzerland, United States and the secretariat to prepare a written proposal for discussion of this matter prior to the 2018 session of the Working Party.

## **VII. Revision of the Working Procedures of the Working Party**

20. The Working Party reviewed initial proposals on procedures for handling, during the revision of standards, reservations placed by countries often a long time ago. Some delegations proposed to delete all reservations contained in the former versions of the standard and to offer countries, if necessary, to place their reservations during the revision process both at the Specialized Section and Working Party levels. Others favoured a written notification procedure at the Specialized Section level or the extension of the trial phase at the Working Party level to give countries the opportunity to reconsider their reservations. Under this second approach, the absence of any response within a set deadline would be considered as an agreement to the deletion of the reservation.

21. It was agreed that a solid step-by-step procedure needed to be developed and it was decided to ask the secretariat to draft a first compilation of proposals for initial review by a working group including Belgium, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland and the United States, with the aim of submitting a proposal to the Working Party at its 2018 session.

## **VIII. Report on the United States Food Safety Modernization Act**

22. The delegation from the United States gave a detailed outline (available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44974>) of the main features of the United States Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) noting that this act also combined the different existing legislation on food imports in one legislation.

23. In reply to questions from delegations, he explained that FSMA was conceived to avoid disrupting trade flows and preventive measures such as education, outreach activities and training were intended to preclude any negative impact at the implementation phase. The economic impact of the FSMA implementation had been probably already measured in on-going studies. The integrated inspection system of the United States will carry on also under FSMA and goods would only be held back by inspection authorities if there was a valid reason to believe that there was a problem.

## **IX. Capacity-building and promotional activities**

24. The secretariat informed the Working Party about capacity-building activities in 2017 including the delivery of a seed potato laboratory in Shushary, Russian Federation (funded by the Russian Voluntary Fund), and workshops funded through the United Nations Development Account including in 2017: a workshop for Balkan countries in Thessaloniki (Greece), one for Central Asian countries in Tashkent (Uzbekistan), for Central Asian countries, a workshop on meat markets in Dublin (Ireland) as part of an eating quality workshop, as well as joint UNECE-ESCAP workshops in Nanjing (meat) and in Tianjin (meat trade and e-certification). Further activities implemented by ESCAP included a workshop in Bandung (Indonesia) on electronic trade and certificates. The project, which will end in December 2017, had also produced case studies, training materials, and built extensive partnerships and local support to ensure sustainability and continuation in the target countries. In total over 600 participants had been trained including a majority of women. The secretariat also described a number of activities funded by partner organizations as well as promotional activities such as a farmers' market organized on the occasion of the <sup>2017</sup> UNECE

Commission session. The secretariat thanked all WP.7 delegations, the INC and the Central Asian countries for their much valued support and contributions.

25. The representatives from the Shushary laboratory who had been invited to the Working Party session thanked the UNECE and the Mission of the Russian Federation in Geneva for making it possible to provide their regional laboratory with updated equipment. That equipment will allow an improvement in the quality and quantity of seed potatoes produced in the region. They also informed the Working Party that the UNECE Seed Potato Standard had been adopted by the Russian Federation and national legislation was being harmonized with it.

26. The delegation from Germany informed the Working Party about the thirty-first International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables which took place in Bonn, Germany, in March 2017 and had attracted 200 participants from 20 countries. She also highlighted a programme with Morocco aimed at a closer exchange of information with respect to inspection, including visits on the spot.

27. In a written communication received by the secretariat during the Working Party session, the Quality Inspection Bureau of the Netherlands (KCB) announced the organization of an International Harmonisation Meeting in the Netherlands on 12 to 14 June 2018.

## **X. Electronic quality certificates for fresh fruit and vegetables**

28. The secretariat provided a brief update on recent developments with regard to a possible project on electronic quality certificates. She noted that consultations had taken place with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) agriculture domain and the delegation from the Netherlands. Further updates would be provided in due course.

## **XI. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

29. The Chairpersons of the Specialized Sections presented the work of their Sections since the 2016 session of the Working Party, as well as current and future activities. The presentations are available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=44974>.

30. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom), provided a detailed presentation of the Specialized Section's 2017 session and outlined future work as contained in the Section's report. He highlighted ongoing work on: sample sizes; a possible guide on minituber production; the survey on virus testing methods; the survey on bacterial testing methods; risk-based inspections; the production of true seed potatoes; the Sustainable Development Goals; and the development of a training package for countries intending to introduce certification systems based on the Guides already produced by the Specialized Section.

31. He also reported on the successful Rapporteurs meeting which had taken place in Emmeloord, Netherlands, in September 2017. This meeting had allowed for discussion and review in practice the aforementioned issues in addition to highly appreciated study visits.

32. The Working Party adopted:

- the report of the forty-fourth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2017/2)
- Blackleg statement

- Food loss/waste – the case of seed potato certification (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2017/7)

and thanked the Specialized Section for its excellent work throughout the year.

## **XII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce**

33. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States), reviewed in detail the work of the Specialized Section and presented the revised standards and the newly developed recommendations submitted for adoption.

34. He also noted that the draft sampling plan for tree nuts and dried produce and the guidelines for inspections of dry and dried produce had been discussed and the Specialized Section had agreed that a practical workshop was needed to validate the sampling plan. He welcomed the offer by the INC to organize such a practical workshop in 2018, open to the public and private sectors, to discuss and test the sampling and inspection practices. This would lead to the development of a new sampling plan in 2018 to be reviewed and discussed at the 2018 Specialized Section session.

35. He highlighted that the first explanatory poster for dried apricots had been prepared by the delegation of Turkey in collaboration with a Central Asian working group (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). More draft posters were currently being prepared for inshell walnuts, walnut kernels and inshell pistachio kernels. The Specialized Section continued its work on a standard for dried papayas and the revision of the Standard for Prunes in addition to new work on the agenda of the 2018 session.

36. The Working Party adopted Recommendations for a 1-year trial period for:

- Dried coconut pieces
- Dried bananas

37. The Working Party took note of the dried apricot poster and adopted:

- the report of the Specialized Section's sixty-fourth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2017/2)
- the revised Walnut Kernel Standard
- the revised Inshell Almond Standard

38. As the walnut kernel brochure had not been ready in time for the Working Party to review, the Working Party decided to adopt the brochure for walnut kernels in an inter-session approval procedure as soon as available.

39. The delegation from Poland informed the Working Party that they were in the process of reviewing their reservations included in the Standards for Dry and Dried Produce. She highlighted her country's decision to lift the reservation contained in the revised Walnut Kernel Standard. The Working Party thanked the Specialized Section for its excellent work throughout the year.

## **XIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**

40. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany), presented in detail the work of the

Specialized Section and the proposed revisions to a number of standards. She explained that at the May 2017 session not all decisions could be taken and consultations and discussions had continued after the session. She also emphasized that many amendments were approved to avoid food loss in addition to facilitating trade. She outlined the main amendments of the Standard Layout including: the standards' application to all stages of marketing; the addition of maturity requirements; the clarification of uniformity requirements and the addition of provisions referring to information lasered on single fruit. The amended Standard Layout also contained new provisions on code marks listed in the newly established UNECE data list. She noted that once these amendment were approved, the secretariat, with the help of the Specialized Section, would amend all existing standards to reflect the revision of the Standard Layout.

41. She also informed the Working Party that the Explanatory Brochure for Persimmon had been published on the UNECE web site in UNECE's three official languages.

42. The Working Party adopted:

- the Report of the Specialized Section's sixty-fifth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2017/2)
- the revised UNECE Standards for rhubarb, cherries, fennel, plums, fresh figs, kiwi fruit, headed cabbage, apples, pears, tomatoes,
- the revised UNECE Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables which would lead to the revision of all standards and brochures of the Specialized Section to include the relevant amendments

and thanked the Specialized Section for its excellent work throughout the year.

#### **XIV. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat**

43. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, Mr. Ian King (Australia), reviewed the workshop on Sustainable Meat Markets, Cross-border Trade and Eating Quality (Dublin, Ireland, co-hosted by the Irish meat research institute Teagasc) with an attendance of 130 participants from public and private sectors and 66 female experts. The focus of that workshop had been eating quality in beef with a parallel training (theoretical and practical) on meat markets and quality production (UNECE standards) for Central Asian countries. It resulted in advancing discussions on eating quality and increased the capacity of Central Asian participants in building meat market structures, traceability and standardization practices. He also reviewed the workshops organized in Nanjing and Tianjin, China, co-organized with ESCAP, Nanjing Agricultural University and Tianjin inspection and quarantine services. These two events had attracted 70 experts from the UNECE and ESCAP regions who reviewed the importance of UNECE meat standards in cross-border trade, revised the UNECE Standard for Duck Meat in a Rapporteurs meeting, and discussed import inspection procedures and electronic certification. He stressed that UNECE standards needed to be practical; countries had acknowledged their importance and use. He thanked all organizers and the secretariat for those successful events.

44. He presented the revised standards submitted for adoption by the Working Party and the on-going discussions on eating quality. He noted that the Specialized Section had approved the preparation of guidelines on standardized methodologies related to eating quality research based on the UNECE Standard for Bovine Meat, to foster the comparability of research results. The proposal would be presented to the 2018 Specialized Section session. He also informed the Working Party that all research data would be hosted in a central database by a newly established not-for profit, self-funding organization outside UNECE. The delegation from the United States pointed out that the work on eating quality required

more evaluation with regard to different production regions and systems. The Chair noted that while differences existed, eating quality was a broad sensory evaluation to predict consumer expectations and encourage consistent quality.

45. The Specialized Section had initiated a review of links between its work and the SDGs with emphasis on linkages to the meat sector's economic role; the reduction of environmental impacts and better resource utilization; the use of products for food and non-food purposes; the production of high-value protein with otherwise non-utilized resources (grass); and the Specialized Section's standardization of by-products for consumption and further processing. He said UNECE was currently the only organization setting standards for meat cut descriptions in international trade.

46. The Working Party adopted:

- the Report of the Specialized Section's twenty-sixth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2017/2)
- the revised Standard for Duck Meat – carcasses and parts
- the revised Standard for Eggs-in-Shell
- the revised Standard for Egg Products

47. The Working Party took note of the Specialized Section's intention to organize a meat symposium in July 2018 and thanked the Specialized Section for its excellent work throughout the year.

## **XV. Future work**

48. The Working Party decided to include the following items in its future work:

- Revision of its Terms of Reference
- Revision of its Working Procedures to clarify the provision on reservations in case of revisions of standards
- An international conference on sustainable consumption and production related to SDG 12, for example, training consumers and traders on avoiding food waste.

49. Further topics of interest to the Working Party should be sent to the secretariat in the coming months.

## **XVI. Other business**

50. The following meetings are planned for 2018:

- Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes: 19-21 March
- Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 30 April – 2 May
- Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce: 25 – 27 June
- Specialized Section on Meat: 2-4 July
- Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards: 12-14 November

51. Possible changes in venue and dates will be communicated in due course.

## **XVII. Election of officers**

52. The delegations elected Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland) as Chair and Ms. Ilse van Dijk (Netherlands) as Vice-Chair. The Working Party thanked the outgoing Chair, Mr. Pierre Schauenberg, (Switzerland) for all his support and work during the past two years.

## **XVIII. Adoption of the report**

53. The Working Party adopted the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2017/2).

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