



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 March 2019

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Fifth session

Geneva, 28-29(am) May 2019

Item 8(a) of the provisional agenda

Programme of work – Updates from subsidiary bodies

Revised Programme of Work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards 2019-2020

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards adopted its Programme of work in November 2018. The Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards is invited to endorse the Programme of Work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards 2019-2020.

GE.19-04473(E)



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I. Introduction

1. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (hereinafter referred to as WP.7), acting within the framework of the mandates and policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and subject to the general supervision of the UNECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the UNECE Trade Subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards, related guidance material, training and sustainable production and consumption patterns for an inclusive economic growth. The activities of WP.7 and its Specialized Sections contribute directly to the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work being primarily of a technical nature complements and is carried out in partnership with policy-related work undertaken by other international bodies.
2. The aim of its work is to develop:
 - (a) Market transparency - define a common trading language, with minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce that facilitate fair and sustainable trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and contribute to economic growth [SDG 8];
 - (b) Food security - Promote the sustainable production and consumption of quality agricultural produce, including the prevention of food loss [SDG 2, 12]; and
 - (c) Collaboration – undertake capacity building activities in cooperation with other public and private sector international bodies (in support of the previous two activities) [SDG 17].
3. The Working Party operates under the ECE Rules of Procedure and the Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies, as agreed in Commission Decision A (65).
4. The Working Party is open for participation by all UN member States in compliance with the accreditation process contained in the guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies (E/2013/37 E/ECE/1464).
5. In addition, representatives from relevant international organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector, can also be invited as observers, in compliance with the UN rules and practices in this respect.
6. The Working Party defines its working procedures and those of its Specialized Sections.
7. The Working Party shall:
 - (a) Develop internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce taking into consideration national standards and industry and trade practices for fresh fruit and vegetables (including early and ware potatoes); dry and dried produce; seed potatoes; meat; and eggs. The Working Party may develop standards, on request from countries, for other agricultural products, subject to the availability of resources;
 - (b) Revise and amend existing standards to reflect changing production, trading and marketing conditions, taking SDG targets into consideration;
 - (c) Undertake activities to harmonize the international application of its standards by developing and disseminating interpretative and guidance material;
 - (d) Collect, communicate, and analyse, when necessary, production, trade and inspection practices and other areas relevant to sustainable development, implementation and promotion of its standards and guidance material;
 - (e) Undertake training activities targeted at public and private sector to support sustainable development of production and trade;

(f) Promote uniform quality-control procedures and the use of the model quality conformity certificate through the Specialized Sections and in cooperation with governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing standards to achieve uniformity of inspection methods and comparability of results;

(g) Cooperate with other international organizations and standard-setting bodies, such as the Codex Alimentarius Commission and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards and interpretation. Ensure that the standard-setting process is consistent with relevant international rules such as from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC); and

(h) Facilitate communication between private and public stakeholder organizations with an interest in the standards to provide a basis for transparent, fair and sustainable trade.

II. (Proposed) Programme of Work under Working Party 7 – 2019-2020

(A) Market transparency: define a common trading language, with minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce that facilitate fair and sustainable trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and contribute to economic growth

8. During the period 2019-2020, the Working Party will provide guidance on the priorities for future work identified by the Specialized Sections in their respective reports and identify whenever possible potential synergies and possible additional areas of work. The Working Party shall review and adopt proposed new and revised agricultural quality standards (discussed at the Specialized Sections) and guidance material (elaborated by the Specialized Sections). This is done to ensure that the ECE agricultural quality standards remain relevant and continue to facilitate trade, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals –including Goals 2, 8,12 and 17.

(B) Food security: Promote the sustainable production and consumption of quality agricultural produce, including the prevention of food loss

9. Background: Since 2014, the Working Party has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals and focused on improving sustainable production and consumption patterns, particularly through its focus on the prevention of food loss/waste and related areas of work in cooperation with other international organizations, the private sector and civil society. This has resulted in the organization of three consecutive international conferences on cross-cutting themes involving all four Specialized Sections within the framework of the Working Party 7 session. Focusing on traceability of agricultural produce, on food loss prevention, and on sustainable food production and standards, the conferences explored trends and traceability requirements for agricultural produce, how international quality standards support traceability efforts, and how a better quality production prevents and reduces food loss. The latter supports directly Target 12.3 on halving food loss by 2030.

10. During the period of 2019-2020, the Working Party will continue its work on sustainable consumption and production related to the implementation of Goal 12 and its target 12.3 on halving food loss by 2030 and related Goals. In particular, the Working Party will work:

(a) with its Specialized Sections and intensify efforts to review and compile practical measures and tools to help all participants of agricultural supply chains (covered by the Specialized Sections) to prevent and avoid food waste and food loss in rural and urban areas;

(b) in cooperation with its Specialized Sections on emerging topics such as food fraud or food integrity to ensure the full implementation of the related Sustainable Development Goals.

(c) in cooperation with its Specialized Sections consider working on the nexus of sustainable use of available natural resources and measures to mitigate the negative effects of climate change and encourage the development of new tools and guidelines and organize international conferences/workshops to promote their use and implementation.

(C) Collaboration with other ECE and public and private sector international bodies

11. During the period 2019-2020, the Working Party will undertake at least 2 capacity-building activities in collaboration with its Specialized Sections and upon availability of funds. The Working Party will do so in cooperation with partners from within the ECE, other international organizations, the private sector and civil society to work towards SDG 17 and foster the nexus approach.

12. During the period 2019-2020, the Working Party will contribute through its work and in a cross-sectoral approach in collaboration with other ECE subprogrammes to the nexus areas identified by ECE, namely on “the sustainable use of natural resources” and “the sustainable and smart cities” to achieve greater synergies, coherence and impact with regard to the implementation of the Agenda 2030.
