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**Economic Commission for Europe****Committee on Trade****Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Specialized Section on Standardization  
of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables****Sixty-third session**

Geneva, 21 - 24 April 2015

**Report of the Specialized Section on  
Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables on  
its sixty-third session****I. Introduction**

1. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany). The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division opened the session and welcomed delegates. She highlighted the much appreciated, high quality work of the Specialized Sections and the Working Party and noted that in recent years WP 7's visibility had increased. She also mentioned an April 2015 dried fruit and nuts exhibition held on the occasion of the biannual UNECE Commission session to explain WP 7's work to delegates and Permanent Diplomatic Missions. Such events, together with capacity-building and the groups' regular work have also helped increase the support for WP.7 over the years. She proposed that the Specialized Section reflect on a side-event at next year's meeting which could be organized in collaboration with producers, e.g. the local agricultural community in Geneva. The Chairperson suggested that a study tour to local supermarkets might also be organized for local Mission personnel to explain the work of the group.

2. The Director also noted the Specialized Section's busy agenda with several standards to be revised, new standards to be adopted and the Brochure for Persimmons to be finalized for publication. She welcomed the discussions on traceability and food waste issues, that have gained in importance in recent years and stressed that UNECE could provide a platform to discuss them. In this regard she mentioned the UN/CEFACT Expert Forum which was taking place currently and their agriculture group which was working on electronic standards for agricultural product information including traceability. In addition, traceability was also discussed within the framework of the Specialized Section on Meat. She noted that in coming months the WP.7 Bureau would be contacted to discuss the

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possible organization of an event at the Working Party's session on, for example, food waste or traceability.

3. She also announced that a new secretary for WP.7, Ms. Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab, had just been recruited.

## **II. Attendance**

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kenya, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

5. The European Union was also represented.

6. The following specialized programme participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the session: Freshfel Europe, South African Citrus Industry and the World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA).

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

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with amendments.

## **IV. Matters of interest since the last session**

### **(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies**

9. The Chief of the Market Access Section reported that the Review of the 2005 reform of UNECE had been completed and the Terms of Reference for a new Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, which replaced the former Committee on Trade, had been adopted. Its first session would be held from 31 August to 2 September 2015 and would include the presentation of a study on regulatory barriers to trade in Kyrgyzstan together with a related business process analysis for an agricultural export product.

10. He welcomed the cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the first back-to-back meeting in Geneva which should also help to save resources. He expressed his strong support for cooperation with OECD and the Codex Alimentarius secretariat in the areas of standards' development and interpretation as well as promotion and capacity-building. As an example, he mentioned UNECE's possible help with the Russian versions of the OECD explanatory texts; other cooperation formats could be envisaged. He also noted that the Codex secretariat had been invited to collaborate with UNECE on a June 2015 workshop on dried fruit and nuts.

11. The secretariat also briefly reviewed the 2014 Working Party session, highlighting the approval of the Geneva Understanding which will be submitted for adoption to the Steering Committee in September 2015. She also reported on past and scheduled future training events such as the June 2015 training workshop on nuts and dried fruit and the Specialized Section meeting on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce in Turkey as well as a fresh fruit and vegetables workshop scheduled to take place in the Balkans. She mentioned that preliminary work had started on an agriculture reference and training platform.

## (b) Other organizations

12. The Representative of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the meeting that the Terms of Reference for the Codex Committee of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) had been amended and their scope expanded to enable cooperation/consultation with the other organisations in addition to UNECE. The meeting was also informed on the ongoing work by the CCFFV including work on the potential changes to the layout of the Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables; proposed draft standards for garlic and ware potatoes; and the new Codex Committee on Spices and Culinary Herbs. He also confirmed the announced meeting dates of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Mexico in October 2015.

## V. Standards on trial

### Sweet Chestnuts and Lambs Lettuce

13. Sweet Chestnuts: During the review of the Recommendation's text the delegation of the United States raised concerns about the proposed high tolerance for surface mould which no other UNECE standard contained. Germany supported this view and it was proposed to remove the special tolerance for surface mould for all classes. The delegations from Spain Italy and France indicated that they needed to consult with their industries and would inform the secretariat of their decision by 30 June.

14. The delegation of the United States also proposed amendments to the sizing provisions and to add "sizing by diameter", i.e. to include a) sizing by number and alternatively b) sizing by diameter. He also proposed to increase the size range (for sizing by number) from 80g to 100g. The section on Commercial Specifications was amended accordingly to read in a new indent "minimum and maximum size in mm". The delegation of the United States would provide a maximum size range when sized by diameter by 30 June 2015. The French delegate indicated that she had to consult her industry with regard to these proposed changes and would inform the secretariat by 30 June 2015.

15. The delegate of the United States informed the Specialized Section that in his country colour was a grading criterion and wanted to find out if this was the same in other countries. The delegations of Spain and France indicated this was not the case. As specific colour requirements could be stipulated in commercial contracts, it was agreed there was no need for such provisions in the standard. In the section on Uniformity the term "ripeness" was deleted in favour of "development". The second paragraph under "Definition of Produce" was amended to include in brackets "e.g. marrons" to clarify that they were covered by the phrase "...particular special commercial denomination". It was, therefore, also decided that the term "marrons" should be indicated where applicable under "Nature of Produce".

16. The Specialized Section decided to submit the text of the revised recommendation to the Working Party in November 2015 provided that Spain, France, and Italy could agree to it. Otherwise, the Working Party would be asked to extend the Recommendation's trial period for another year.

17. Lambs Lettuce: The delegation of France outlined the proposed changes. The Specialized Section decided that the proposed reference to "trimmed" or "kitchen ready" produce should not be included in the standard as UNECE standards in general do not apply to these products. In addition, even if washed or handled under special conditions (which cannot be controlled in any case), as long as the produce was intact (in this case, a rosette) it was covered by the standard. The Specialized Section accepted the additions to the indent "intact" and corrected the French translation of "not running to seed" to read "non montée".

It was decided to change the uniformity requirement for Class I to “practically uniform in size and colour”.

18. After some discussion, the delegations agreed that the French proposal to add that “a few rosettes can have one leaf which does not satisfy the requirements of Class I” was covered by the 10 percent tolerance. During the actual practical application of the Standard, it would be observed whether this was a workable solution or required a revision.

19. While the minimum requirement “yellow cotyledons are not regarded as a defect” was a progressive defect. The group decided that this should not lead to downgrading at retail stage and, hence, no change was introduced in the current text. The delegation of the United States raised the concern that the presence of yellow cotyledons in all rosettes in a package detracts from the fresh greenish appearance of the product and it was their view that it should be restricted by a tolerance.

20. The Specialized Section recommended that the Working Party adopt the revised text as a new UNECE Standard for Lambs Lettuce at its November 2015 session.

## **VI. Explanatory brochure and Standard for Persimmons**

21. The Specialized Section reviewed and adopted amendments to the text and the photographs for the draft brochure which had been discussed in detail at the informal working group meeting the previous day. The Rapporteur (Germany) would provide the secretariat with the new photos for an inter-sessional approval so that the brochure could be presented in its print-layout at the 2015 Working Party session.

22. The Rapporteur (Germany) also guided the meeting through the proposed changes to the Recommendation for Persimmons adopted at earlier working group meetings. The Specialized Section approved these changes in addition to minor editorial changes and Spain’s proposal to delete the column of size codes (the latter varied from country to country). Spain’s suggestion to add three new size ranges for larger fruit (i.e. 180-230, 220-290, 280-350, more than 340 all allowing a maximum size range of 50 gr) would be re-discussed with industry to find out whether their inclusion was necessary or covered by the current “more than 180” size range (which allowed for larger fruit and a 50gr maximum difference). The Spanish delegate will inform the secretariat of the outcome of these consultations by the end of June 2015.

23. The meeting also decided to remove the minimum size requirement from the current draft given that the maturity requirement ensured that immature fruit was not traded. The minimum size requirement could have resulted in the exclusion of small, perfectly edible fruit. The delegation from South Africa pointed out that there needed to be consistency across UNECE standards with regard to minimum size requirements and this should be remembered during future revisions.

24. The Specialized Section decided to ask the Working Party to adopt the revised text of the Recommendation at its November 2015 session as a new UNECE Standard for Persimmon and to publish the explanatory brochure which will be prepared for print. The Rapporteur (Germany) thanked the delegations from Spain and Italy for their support to the development of this brochure.

## **VII. Revision of UNECE standards**

### **(a) Citrus fruit**

25. The delegation of South Africa presented the report on the working group's consultations which had taken place in November 2014 as well as the final outcome document which included subsequent comments from Spain, the United States and Italy. He explained that the review included the Definition of Produce and the Provisions concerning Marking and noted that a list of varieties would not be part of the standard but serve as a separate guidance document. The Specialized Section took note of the working group's report. A member of the South African delegation gave a detailed presentation on citrus lineage and outlined the proposed changes to the standard.

26. The Specialized Section discussed in great length, at both the official session and at an informal working group session, the proposed changes to the Definition of Produce and the Provisions concerning Marking B. Nature of Produce. As several delegations were not in a position to accept the changes without consulting their trade, the Specialized Section prepared a new draft for consultation until its 2016 session. All proposed changes will be published in the post session document, including an informative (but not exhaustive) list of varieties which is intended to be published as a separate document and made available on the UNECE website.

27. Delegations thanked the Rapporteur (South Africa) for his work and the preparation of the list of varieties. All proposed changes would be rediscussed at the 2016 session of the Specialized Section. Additional working group meetings would be organized in the interim, if required.

### **(b) Apples**

28. The Specialized Section discussed in detail the content, structure and length of the List of Varieties currently included in the Annex to the Standard. The representative from the World Apple and Pear Association (WAPA) suggested that the list should include the 40 most internationally traded varieties of the Belrose Inc. List of Major Varieties published on a yearly basis. He emphasized that according to WAPA's information, 4 to 5 varieties covered between 60 and 70 percent of world trade in apples. He also noted that mutants were of no relevance to trade and consumers and should, therefore, be excluded. He proposed to retain the current long list as a separate source of information.

29. An expert from WAPA also gave a presentation on variety development and mutants stressing that mutants were so numerous that it had become impossible even for experts to distinguish them. He supported the shortening of the list to the 40 most internationally traded varieties.

30. The Chair pointed out that including the mutant's name on the label was not compulsory in UNECE standards and even a short list should contain those mutants that were largely traded and known to the consumer such as "Jonagored". She also indicated that traders often thought that varieties that were not included in the UNECE List of varieties could not be marketed.

31. Several delegations (including France, Italy, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States) agreed with shortening the list of varieties to the most traded ones. Others (Germany, Netherlands, and South Africa), indicated that they would prefer a long list. The current list provided important information on colour and russeting requirements which were essential for exporting and importing countries as well as inspection services

to check compliance with colour requirements. The latter, many delegations considered an important quality parameter for consumers and price determinant for traders and producers.

32. The United States and Kenya pointed to the difficulty of certifying the conformity of varieties. Kenya noted that special equipment would be needed to confirm the variety in the case of disputes. The United States delegation stressed that not being included in the list did not preclude varieties from being traded. The Chair noted that a list that reflected what was currently on the market provided clarity and a trusted source to traders and inspection bodies alike.

33. In an effort to find a compromise, the United States together with the delegations of France, Italy and Poland presented a new list of 83 varieties which included the priority varieties of each country as well as some mutants of particular commercial importance (e.g. Jonagored). As no consensus could be reached on shortening the list to the 40 most traded varieties, it was decided to ask all delegations to send to the secretariat a list of the varieties that were of commercial importance to their countries. The format of the list would follow the one of the current standard. This approach would reflect current market realities and include only those mutants in the column of varieties that were of particular importance.

34. The Specialized Section asked delegations to send their lists of varieties to the secretariat by 30 September 2015. The newly compiled list would be circulated prior to the 2016 session of the Specialized Section and discussed at that meeting.

#### **(c) Truffles**

35. The delegation of France provided updated information on the recent changes in the French national regulation concerning this product. While the French version of the UNECE standard now contained the correct terminology, the English speaking delegations were asked to review the equivalent English terms in the “Definition of Produce” section of the Standard for Truffles. The revisions should be sent to the secretariat by mid July 2015. The revisions will be submitted to the Working Party for adoption at its 2015 session.

#### **(d) Garlic**

36. The delegation of Spain outlined his proposals together with photographs for the amendment of the Standard for Garlic which had come up during the work on an OECD explanatory brochure for this product.

37. The Specialized Section adopted the proposed changes with minor adjustments and clarifications but decided not to include the standard layout text referring to “stickers individually affixed...”. This standard layout provision was not relevant for this product. The Specialized Section also aligned the provisions on shape under C. Classification with the Standard Layout.

38. It was decided to submit the agreed changes to the Working Party for adoption.

#### **(e) Watermelons**

39. In 2013, the Specialized Section had agreed to a request by the delegation of Hungary to include “Extra Class” in the Standard for Watermelons; however, its inclusion into the standard had been deferred to the 2015 session. As Hungary was not present at this year’s meeting, the Specialized Section decided to include “Extra Class” as outlined in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2014/7 provided Hungary would indicate its continued interest by 30 June 2015. In this case, the revision would be submitted to the 2015 session of the Working Party for approval.

40. Should the UNECE Standard for Watermelons be amended, the secretariat would inform OECD to allow for a possible update of the recently published OECD brochure.

**(f) Early and ware potatoes**

41. The delegations took note of the proposal by Hungary to revise the provisions on minimum requirements and quality tolerances proposed in 2013 and re-considered in 2014. For the time being, it was decided not to change the current text of the Standard and to wait for the final text of the new Codex Standard for Ware Potatoes in order to harmonize the two standards as much as possible. Delegations participating in the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission were asked to provide their input to the development of this new Codex standard. Document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2014/8 would stay a work-in-progress.

**(g) Tomatoes**

42. The delegations discussed and agreed to the deletion of the reference to “cherry tomatoes” from the commercial types listed under “Definition of Produce” as the new proposal classified tomatoes according to shape. Under Provisions concerning sizing, the reference to cherry tomatoes and other miniature varieties was emphasized. In B. Nature of produce (first indent) reference to cherry tomatoes (if the product was not visible from the outside) was moved into the first sentence. Under Commercial Specification it was decided to include a reference to the use of size codes (Section III).

43. The Specialized Section decided to submit the changes to the Working Party for adoption at its November 2015 session.

**(h) Leeks**

44. As the OECD had indicated their intention to develop an explanatory brochure for leeks in the near future, delegates were invited to submit to the secretariat by early 2016 their proposals for amendments or alignment with the Standard Layout. Further changes might arise during the actual work on the brochure.

**(i) Other standards: Discussion on Quality Tolerances in Marketing Standards**

45. The representative from the Netherlands gave a presentation on the problems the Dutch Inspection Service (KCB) encountered in everyday practice with regard to the application of the 1 percent quality tolerance for serious defects and decay currently included in the standards. The result of this application has led to the rejection of lots of fruit or vegetables with 1.1-1.9 per cent of specimens with serious defects. The food waste created in these cases could be avoided. Therefore, in practice, the inspection service applied a 3 percent tolerance for imported produce and in most cases the inspector decided on the actual, applied tolerance. This situation was not destabilizing for inspectors but it had led to non-harmonized practices within the inspection service. She, therefore, proposed to review the current tolerances taking into account that during transport living products can decay to some extent.

46. Kenya highlighted the seriousness of this issue and the food waste which occurred in the process. He recommended that the issue be further discussed. South Africa shared this view and noted that long shipping times and the fact that fruit and vegetables were living products should be taken into consideration. Other delegations including the Malta, the

United Kingdom (which currently applied a 3 percent tolerance for serious defects and decay), and the United States supported the proposal for a review of the tolerances for decay in UNECE standards. Germany pointed out that in UNECE's dry and dried produce standards, tolerances were expressed in .0 percentages, to exclude upward and downward rounding. As percentages in FFV standards are not expressed as .0, rounding would be allowed.

47. It was agreed to follow up on this approach and ask the OECD how to express the inspection results and whether and how to allow rounding in the OECD inspection guidelines. In addition, the Specialized Section will further discuss the issue at its 2016 session.

## **VIII. Traceability**

48. The delegates from France and Poland, as members of the OECD working group on traceability, briefly presented the background and possible way forward with regard to the discussion on traceability which had started at the 2014 OECD Head of Inspection Services meeting and was acknowledged by the December 2014 Plenary session of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables. Hungary was also part of the working group and had prepared the presentation. UNECE too had indicated their interest in these discussions. The issue, the two delegates stated was the tracking back of the fruit and vegetables to their true origin which currently and, despite European and national legislation, remained a challenge.

49. Delegations welcomed this debate and noted the importance of this cross-cutting issue for the whole of fresh fruit and vegetables trade and the agro supply chain. Delegations briefly described existing privately operated traceability systems for fresh fruit and vegetables (such as in the Global Gap) as well as the rather strict governmental traceability rules adopted in the aftermath of 9/11 in the United States or the regional legal requirements of the European Union.

50. Delegates also mentioned a possible amendment of the marking and labelling section in UNECE standards to better support the traceability of products. Some delegations also noted that even official codes that were currently used were difficult to verify. It might be reasonable to opt for the physical address instead or indicate both, the seller's address and a code. Coded systems, it was stressed, already gave important information on packers. There should not be additional labelling requirements; the use of either a meaningful bar code or a physical, traceable address would be enough.

51. The secretariat suggested to consult with other Specialized Sections who faced similar problems with traceability (e.g. in the meat area). The OECD seed scheme which included a traceability component could be consulted as a guide. Delegations agreed that the aim was not to develop a new traceability system but to examine how, through simple measures, the standards could support traceability efforts and decided to revisit the UNECE Standard Layout provisions for labelling. The working group was invited to prepare for the 2016 session a presentation on progress made. Delegations were invited to send their suggestions to the members of the working group (Hungary, France and Poland) by mid-September 2015.

## **IX. Food waste related to the use of standards**

52. The delegate from Sweden briefly reviewed the information note which had been prepared by the working group. She noted that retail trade in Europe currently sold mostly Class I and sometimes Class II products and there was no indication to believe that marketing standards created a lot of food waste. It was decided that in the coming 12

months the working group would examine first, the standards for leeks and tomatoes, followed by the Standard Layout. The working group would then prepare a discussion paper on ways to amend the Standard Layout to reduce food waste. OECD would be informed in due course of any resulting change in the Standard Layout.

53. Delegates were invited to send their comments to the Rapporteur (Sweden) on the standards for leeks and tomatoes by the end of July 2015. Input to the discussion paper should be provided to Sweden by the end of the year.

## **X. Glossary of Terms used in UNECE Standards**

54. The Rapporteur (France) explained that work on the Glossary was progressing and that the next informal working group session would take place during the Working Party in November 2015. For this informal working group session, comments were welcomed by the beginning of September 2015. France would compile a document with the comments received from delegations by the beginning of October 2015.

## **XI. Standard Layout for explanatory text in UNECE brochures**

55. The Chairperson (Germany) briefly explained that this new Standard Layout for UNECE explanatory brochures on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (FFV) had been harmonized with the standard layout text for explanatory notes of the OECD Scheme. The document would make it easier in the future to develop new brochures. The Specialized Section will submit this text for approval to the Working Party.

## **XII. Promotion and capacity-building**

56. The delegations and the secretariat shared information about their promotional and capacity-building activities. The secretariat previewed the upcoming training on nuts and dried fruit standards and trade which will take place in Izmir, Turkey from 29 June to 3 July 2015 (in conjunction with the annual session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce) and invited delegates to help promote the event. She also mentioned that a scheduled workshop for the Western Balkans had to be postponed owing to time constraints but will either be held later in 2015 or in 2016. In addition, she outlined a project to develop an agri information/reference platform which had recently been initiated. It will be a simplified version of the United Nations Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide-TFIG (<http://tfig.unece.org>) and contain newly drafted material as well as references and links to already existing international material.

57. Germany reported on the 30<sup>th</sup> International Meeting on Quality Control (Bonn, 9-11 March 2015 which included quality and quality management, pre- and post-harvest treatment, risk analysis as well as the practical application of selected marketing standards. The electronic proceedings will be available in the coming weeks.

58. Kenya reported that its national inspection authority will organize the next training workshop for their national inspectors and the region in 2016. Dates will be communicated in due course. Morocco will organize a seminar on quality control and conformity assessment on 10-11 June 2015.

## **XIII. Future work**

59. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for 2016:

- Standard for Sweet peppers (revision)
- Citrus fruits - labelling requirements
- Apples - list of varieties
- Leeks - amendments and food waste review
- Tomatoes - food waste review
- Table grapes - tolerance for loose berries
- Headed cabbages - running to seed
- Standard Layout - general review, traceability and food waste review
- Glossary of terms, and
- if required, review of discussions at the Codex CCFFV meeting on garlic, aubergines, kiwi fruit and ware potatoes.

60. Any further requests should be sent to the secretariat by the beginning of January 2016.

#### **XIV. Other business**

61. The secretariat reported that given the importance of traceability for all the Specialized Sections, the Bureau of WP.7, together with other delegations, had proposed to organize a 1- day side event on traceability on 3 November 2015. The event would be open to all stakeholders including the private sector. Delegations were invited to participate in the development of a programme and the identification of participants.

62. The provisional dates for the next session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables are 18 to 21 April 2016

#### **XV. Election of officers**

63. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany) as Chair and Ms. Kristina Mattsson (Sweden) as Vice-Chair.

#### **XVI. Adoption of the report**

64. The Specialized Section adopted the report of the session.

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