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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 Dry and Dried Produce****Sixty-sixth session**

Geneva, 24-26 June 2019

**Report of the sixty-sixth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce****I. Introduction**

1. Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States) chaired the meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce and welcomed delegates to this session. He thanked the delegations for their support and contributions to the symposium. He also highlighted the secretariat's and the Specialized Section's work in the Central Asian countries noting their increased adoption and use of UNECE's standards, which are the main standards in international trade of nuts and dried fruit.

2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, welcomed the delegates to the sixty-sixth session. He noted the large delegation from Central Asia, including the public and the private sectors as well as donor agencies and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He expressed his gratitude for the work of the Specialized Section during the past years, and the concrete results achieved in Central Asia with the help of the Central Asia Working Group. He also thanked the Specialized Section for helping the secretariat organize the symposium and the tasting events, stressing that without the generous contributions from many countries, the private sector and the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), these events could not be held. He also noted the important contribution and efforts made by the nuts and dried fruit sector to sustainability and conserving biodiversity worldwide, factoring in commercial interests, climate issues, and infrastructure barriers. He stressed that nuts helped build sustainable high value supply chains. UNECE had been able to foster countries' participation through standards, guidance, advice and continuous training.

3. Relating to the United Nations, he indicated increasing efforts were undertaken to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in areas including food loss prevention and the sustainable use and management of natural resources - noting that both areas were of relevance to the Specialized Section as well. He cited the example of Sustainable Development Goal Target 12.3 i.e. calling for halving food loss and waste by 2030. He explained as an example for success that in addition to policy work, the secretariat had designed an innovative online food-loss management system. This system has a blockchain-enhanced traceability of the food lost and an online market platform to buy and sell this food which has fallen out of the main supply chains. The platform will be made available to governments and implemented in public-private partnerships in

several pilot countries for business-to-business and business-to-government transactions to make the invisible lost food visible. He also mentioned that the secretariat will make available to all countries and the private sector a simple food loss recording methodology to help all supply chain actors to systematically record losses. This data, he noted was very important to help policy makers to plan strategies and the private sector to use currently forgone business opportunities. He also said that through the collaboration in the UNECE's cross-cutting group (nexus) on the sustainable use of natural resources, discussions on issues of high relevance to forest and cultivated nuts and dried fruit have been initiated. They also include links between climate change, environmental challenges, changing agricultural production and agri- trade.

4. He thanked all participants for their active participation throughout the year and for their support in training events, stressing that this had helped advance the quality agenda worldwide and was an essential contribution to the sustainable development of all countries.

## **II. Attendance**

5. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, United States of America, Uzbekistan.

6. The following specialized programmes and intergovernmental organization participated in the session: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

7. Representatives from the following observer organization, non-governmental organizations, associations, academia and private sector groups attended the session: Aegean Exporters Associations, Alimkhan Exim Group, Austrian NGO "Hilfswerk International", Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), DFA of California/Safe Food Alliance, The International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), Jahon Exim Group, Quality Management Centre – Tajikistan.

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

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with amendments.

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

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

9. The Chief of the Market Access Section explained that the Secretary-General of the United Nations had undertaken a reform process of the United Nations development system, the United Nations Secretariat and its operations. He noted that as part of that process, a review of the work of the Regional Economic Commissions has been launched with the results to be presented to the General Assembly in September 2019. Additionally, the Executive Secretary of UNECE had launched an internal review of the organization's activities in order to achieve more synergies and better collaboration among the various programmes within the UNECE. The Executive Secretary also had developed a framework to enhance cross-sectoral collaboration through four dedicated nexus areas which-under the "Sustainable use of natural resource" nexus included the work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and its Specialized Sections. He noted that all nexus areas were supporting the member States in their implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and that efforts would be made to better publicize the results of implementations of standards and the impact of using them – particularly in Central Asia.

10. He also provided information on the November 2018 Working Party session and the symposium on food loss held during that meeting. He noted that the Working Party had revised its Terms of Reference and adopted a new Programme of Work which include the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets. The Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards had endorsed those documents in May 2019,

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

11. The representative from UNDP Uzbekistan outlined their work on inclusive economic development, trade and export promotion. He highlighted UNDP Uzbekistan's long-standing partnership with UNECE in quality and standards. In 2017, Uzbekistan's standardization agency (UZstandard) had adopted over 70 UNECE standards. The aim of the work was to bring the national productions to a level of compliance with international standards. He also noted the cooperation with other development partners such as GIZ. He stressed that bringing international quality standards to Central Asia will have a beneficial impact on employment, job creation, and the improvement of productive capacities.

12. The representative of the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) stressed the excellent working relations and collaboration with UNECE and his organization's support for that work. He also introduced the INC as the principal representative of the global dried fruits and nut industry, with over 800 member companies from 77 countries on five continents which work with over 45 million farmers. He noted that the international trade of nuts and dried fruit is currently valued at 45 billion USD of raw material which amounts to over 500 billion USD at retail price. The INC, he said, represented 60 per cent of the international trade and the largest producing countries. He also stressed the forward-looking perspective of the organizations and its work on climate change effects and on mega trends (2025 and 2040). He explained the INC's vision of being the international source for information on nuts and dried fruits on health, nutrition, production statistics, trade and consumption, food safety, government standards and regulations and agricultural quality standards to stimulate and facilitate the sustainable growth in the global industry. He mentioned that the INC regularly publishes statistical reports and information on production and market values which are available on their web site.

## **V. Review of existing standards**

### **(a) Prunes**

13. The Specialized Section reviewed the Recommendation for prunes adopted by the Working Party in November 2018 for a 1-year trial period and the comments and proposals submitted by the delegation from France. The Specialized Section decided to change the title "Prunes/dried plums" back to "prunes" only and amended the footnote accordingly. The proposal from France to mention one variety was noted but not retained. It was considered that each country or region could decide which variety might be most suited for drying and the production of prunes.

14. There were lengthy discussions on several provisions including the sizing parameters and the table of tolerances. It was agreed that more time was needed to finalize both issues. The delegation from France agreed to continue leading the working group. All agreed changes from this session will be reflected in the post-session document.

15. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised draft to the Working Party session in November 2019 for an extension of the trial period for another 1 year and continue discussions at the 2020 session of the Specialized Section.

**(b) Inshell pistachio nuts**

16. At its 2018 session, the Specialized Section had agreed to continue the discussions on the kernel content and shell ratio of inshell pistachio nuts. In the absence of the delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Specialized Section postponed further discussions.

**VI. Development of new standards****(a) Dried coconut kernel pieces**

17. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised Recommendation for dried coconut kernel pieces and decided to use the terms “dehydrated coconut kernel pieces” in the title and throughout the standard. Further amendments were made to the table of tolerances. All agreed changes are reflected in the post-session document.

18. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised Recommendation to the Working Party session in November 2019 for adoption as a new Standard.

**(b) Dried ripe papayas**

19. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised Recommendation and decided to change the title of the Standard to “Dried ripe papayas” (term to be used throughout the standard). The Specialized Section also agreed to further amendments. All agreed changes are reflected in the post-session document.

20. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised Recommendation to the Working Party session in November 2019 for adoption as a new Standard.

**(c) Dried melons**

21. The Rapporteur (Uzbekistan) presented the results of the trial phase. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposed changes and approved several amendments aligning the recommendation with trade practices including the level of tolerance for Damage caused by pests was set at 1 per cent for Extra Class, 2 per cent for Class I and 4 per cent for Class II. All agreed changes are reflected in the post-session document.

22. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised Recommendation to the Working Party session in November 2019 for adoption as a new Standard.

**VII. Walnuts from forests**

23. The Specialized Section discussed the proposal submitted by the delegation of Kyrgyzstan on the possibility of including specific provisions for forest-grown wild walnuts in the current Standard for Walnut kernels. The delegate of Kyrgyzstan presented the production, export and trade in walnuts in Central Asia, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, and explained that over 100 cultivars were growing in high altitude regions providing the local population who carry out the gathering of the crop with an important source of income. She also noted that as these nuts were a wild crop, the colour and quality attributes of the nuts are different from cultivated nuts, thus making it difficult to meet several of the provisions of the current UNECE Standard. She said that the UNECE Standard had been reviewed by the Kyrgyzstan national and the Central Asian working groups. Both concluded that the standard did not adequately take into consideration wild growing walnuts. Therefore, it was proposed to amend the Sections on tolerances, colour and tolerances for defects.

24. A representative from the private sector from Kyrgyzstan highlighted the social issues in more detail, noting the structure of this business which was different from cultivated walnut production. He explained that in the mountain forests – belonging to the state – walnuts were gathered by the local population. The average income these people derived

from this activity amounted currently to around 100 EUR per month. An expansion of the business activities would therefore not only have economic and social impacts but would also allow the families who depended on the walnut gathering to increase their incomes. In addition, as the demand for the product and the market was currently still limited, the families use the trees for firewood and construction. If the demand for walnuts would increase, there would be less tree cutting (logging) which in turn would also be more beneficial for the environment.

25. The Chair explained that generally none of the UNECE standards was based on the produce's cultivation method and, therefore, only very few standards had been developed for wild growing products (e.g. ceps, blueberries). Usually, efforts were made to fit the wild-growing cultivars into the provisions of the standard with, if necessary, very slight amendments. He stressed that during an inspection, inspectors could not distinguish between the production methods unless the produce were labelled accordingly (e.g. "wild-growing"). However, he said, there are currently agro-forestry product promotions on the market which are either exempt from a standard or the standard contains a specific allowance. Therefore, efforts should be made to incorporate the wild walnuts within the current standard.

26. The delegations from France and Turkey agreed with the Chair and noted that they also trade in wild-growing walnuts for which they used the UNECE standard. The representative of the INC noted that the consumer should not be confused. Currently, over 2.5 million tons of the walnuts were produced worldwide and belonged to two varieties. Consumers requested high quality walnuts, he said. He suggested that if the kernels of wild origin were carefully selected, this would ensure the high quality demanded by the consumers. If not, consumers would choose the currently available production over the Central Asian ones. He also noted that several countries of the Caucasus region and in Eastern Europe also traded in wild walnuts; efforts were under way to renew the tree stock and the varieties.

27. In order to better specify the scope of the standard, the Specialized Section agreed to add "wild walnuts" to the Definition of produce. The proposal by Kyrgyzstan to increase to 35 per cent the allowance for shrunken and shrivelled kernels was not retained in order to avoid that low-quality cultivated walnuts that were shrivelled were labelled as "wild" kernels. Similarly, the proposed new style tolerance table would be difficult to uphold and inspect as it was impossible to distinguish wild and cultivated walnuts and a new table could disturb already established trade practices.

28. The Specialized Section also discussed the request for exempting wild walnuts from the colour requirements. After explanations, it was agreed that the colour range of wild walnuts is already covered by the UNECE colour chart (which included e.g. in Class I a tolerance of 15 per cent for the very dark kernels). The representative from the INC noted that even an Extra Class of wild kernels was currently already traded.

29. The Specialized Section also took note that those lots of walnut kernels that did not meet the size and style tolerances could already be marketed, if labelled as "mixed styles". Therefore, it was considered that there was no need to include the proposed new size and style tolerances for wild walnuts. Under the marking provisions, the section "Nature of produce" was amended to include "Walnut kernels from wild walnuts or equivalent denomination, where appropriate" and in the section "Origin of produce" the reference to "collected" was introduced.

30. The Specialized Section agreed that the Central Asian countries (producers and traders) need to be trained in the interpretation of the colour chart and the rest of the Standard's provisions in order to sort the wild walnuts accordingly, achieve uniformity and comply with the Standard's requirements. It was stressed that buyers are looking for uniformity no matter the walnuts' method of production - wild or cultivated. It was agreed that options to organize a training or a series of trainings would be explored in the coming months.

31. The Specialized Section decided to submit the approved changes to the Working Party session in November 2019 for adoption as a revised Standard. The Russian and French language versions would be reviewed by the delegations.

## **VIII. Sampling plan for tree nuts and dried produce and guidelines for inspections of dry and dried produce**

32. The Chair of the Specialized Section introduced the work on the sampling plan which had been a work in progress for several years. He noted that since the 2018 Specialized Section session and the working meeting in Naples, Italy, another working session had been organized in Izmir, Turkey, to validate the sampling plan. He thanked the delegations from Turkey and the INC for the organization of those events.

33. The Specialized Section reviewed the final draft plan presented by the delegation from Germany and clarified the issues identified during the working sessions.

34. The Specialized Section decided to approve the sampling plan guidelines and to submit it to the Working Party session in November 2019 for adoption. The Specialized Section also requested the secretariat to publish the adopted sampling plan as an illustrated guide and inform the OECD secretariat in order to allow the OECD to cross-reference the guidelines in its work.

35. The delegation from the INC informed the Specialized Section that they were in the process of preparing a video on sampling for review by the Specialized Section to support the training on the uniform use of the sampling plan. The Central Asian countries expressed their strong support for the video and the sampling plan which they will translate into their national languages.

36. The Specialized Section also discussed the need to organize a dedicated workshop to demonstrate the sampling plan. This was supported by many delegations who indicated it would be useful for existing trading countries and very important also for newly emerging exporting countries, including Central Asia or China. The Specialized Section requested the secretariat to explore possibilities for a workshop together with an informal session of the Specialized Section in the second quarter of 2020. Several delegations offered to assist the secretariat in finding a suitable location and time.

## **IX. Revision of the Standard Layout**

37. The delegate of Germany outlined some of the issues encountered with the Standard Layout, noting editorial and substantive inconsistencies and divergences highlighting the provisions on quality and the marking sections and the applicability of the standards currently defined as “at the export control stage”. She compared this Standard Layout with the recently updated UNECE Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables; it was suggested to consider a possible alignment taking into consideration the changing trading practices and consumer requests.

38. The Chair also noted that the nuts and dried fruit industry had indicated their willingness to participate in the revision process.

39. The Specialized Section decided to prepare a post-session document with the comments already made and to circulate the UNECE dry and dried produce Standard Layout for review and comments in preparation for its revision at the 2020 session.

## **X. Explanatory materials**

### **(a) Pistachio nuts**

40. The Specialized Section reviewed the final draft poster which had been assembled by the delegation from Turkey with input received at the sampling plan working session in Izmir, Turkey, in November 2018. The poster reflected the changes agreed at the June 2018 Specialized Section session and included the photos provided by the delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

41. The Specialized Section approved the poster with some minor changes and invited the delegation from Turkey and the secretariat to check the resolution of the photos. The Specialized Section thanked the delegations from the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey as well as all other contributors for their work. The draft poster will be submitted to the November 2019 Working Party session for adoption.

**(b) Dried apricots – explanatory guide**

42. The Specialized Section reviewed the explanatory guide for dried apricots developed by the Central Asian working group, led by Tajikistan. It was agreed that Photos 13 and 24 should be replaced to better depict the provisions. The Specialized Section asked the delegation from Turkey to send new photos to the Rapporteur (Tajikistan) by 1 August 2019.

43. The Specialized Section decided to endorse the revised brochure and recommend its adoption by the Working Party in November 2019 as a new UNECE Explanatory Brochure for Dried Apricots. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to prepare and publish the brochure on its website, once adopted. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation from Tajikistan, the Central Asian working group, Turkey and all other contributing delegations and the UNECE secretariat for their work.

**(c) Walnut kernels and inshell walnuts – posters**

44. The Specialized Section reviewed the explanatory guides for walnut kernels and inshell walnuts and selected the photos from those publications to demonstrate defects to be included in the new posters. The delegation from the United States and the California Walnut Board had offered to provide the photos to develop the posters.

45. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to prepare the first draft posters for review by the Specialized Section in the coming months. Once completed, they will be circulated for a written adoption procedure and reviewed during an informal session at the November 2019 session of the Working Party. If approved, the posters would be submitted for adoption at the formal segment of the Working Party.

**(d) Dried figs and dried grapes – posters**

**Dried figs**

46. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft poster for dried figs prepared by the delegation from Turkey and provided recommendations.

47. The Rapporteur (Turkey) will prepare the new version of the poster with the secretariat for final review and approval by the Specialized Section in a written procedure. Should the final version be approved, the draft poster would be submitted to the November 2019 session of the Working Party for adoption.

**Dried grapes**

48. The Specialized Section provided comments on the initial draft of the dried grapes poster, noting that given the small size of the produce, the photos needed to be enlarged and presented under different lightening. The Central Asian Working Group will provide photos with black grapes to the Rapporteur (Turkey) by 1 August.

49. The Rapporteur will prepare a consolidated version of the poster with the secretariat for review and approval by the Specialized Section in a written procedure. Should the final version be approved, the draft poster would be submitted to the November 2019 session of the Working Party for adoption.

50. The Specialized Section thanked the Rapporteur (Turkey) for the work.

**(e) Cashew nuts – explanatory guide and cashew kernel colour chart**

51. The Specialized Section discussed the possible development of an explanatory poster for cashew nuts taking into account the material already developed by the INC. The INC welcomed the development of a poster and will explore the possibility to help with its development. The Specialized Section will decide on further steps once the response from the INC on the development of a poster was received.

**XI. Other business****Symposium on “Sustainable trade of nuts and dried fruit”**

52. The Specialized Section thanked all contributors and the secretariat for the excellent organization of the tasting event and the symposium on “Sustainable trade of nuts and dried fruit” (organized jointly with the FAO). The symposium had shown the importance of the sustainable management and use of natural resources in the forest nut value chains worldwide. All symposium presentations have been made available at: [www.unece.org/index.php?id=50600](http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50600).

**Impact assessment**

53. The Specialized Section requested the secretariat to prepare, together with UNDP Uzbekistan and the collaborating donor agencies (Hilfswerk Austria and GIZ), an impact assessment of the work, results and concrete impact achieved in Central Asia in recent years. The assessment should cover the nuts and dried fruit industry as well as the fresh fruit and vegetables industry. The outcome of the assessment would be also very important for governments. The representative from UNDP Uzbekistan will provide a first draft for comments by UNECE and the other development partners. The survey questionnaire will be sent to all beneficiaries and the governmental agencies - including the standardization agencies - and cover the period of the past three years. The results will be jointly analysed with all organizations involved to prepare a consolidated report for publication.

**Training**

54. The representative from UNDP Uzbekistan informed the Specialized Section of an upcoming high-level regional UNDP conference focusing on productive capacities, trade and SDGs scheduled to be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, during the third week of September with an attendance at ministerial and technical levels of about 100 participants. The conference will be followed by a targeted UNECE-led “train-the-trainer” event at a company-site close to Tashkent. The event will be open to a very limited number of participants in an intensive training to improve the productive and trade capacities of the participants. The format of the training takes into account that over the past years UNECE - together with UNDP, Hilfswerk Austria and GIZ - had built a knowledge base which now needed to be taken to the next stages both at industry and country levels.

55. The delegate of Tajikistan informed the Specialized Section that the Fall 2019 session of the Central Asia Working Group would be held in Tashkent (Uzbekistan) in mid-October. He also noted that discussions were under way to include Turkmenistan in the group which currently includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

56. The delegation from Kenya and the secretariat introduced the UNECE’s work on food loss and waste, highlighting the work on an innovative IT-based food loss management system and related policies.

**XII. Future work**

57. The Specialized Section discussed the possible development of a standard for peanuts and decided to postpone further work.



58. The Specialized Section discussed the possibility of developing a standard for pecan nuts (inshell and kernels). The delegation from Germany offered to prepare a draft standard for the 2020 session. The draft would be based on the work already initiated several years ago.

59. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for 2020:

- Recommendation for prunes
- New standard for pecan kernels and inshell pecan nuts
- Standard Layout
- Development of a poster on prunes
- Update on development of the cashew kernel poster
- Sampling plan workshops

60. Any other proposals for future work should be sent to the secretariat as early as possible, preferably by 1 February 2020.

61. The date and venue of the next session will be communicated in the coming months. The possibility of holding a sampling workshop in conjunction with an informal session of the Specialized Section at a venue outside Geneva would be explored. Should an informal session be held, the results of the session would be adopted in a written procedure or at a formal session prior to the 2020 Working Party.

62. It was pointed out that a similar meeting set-up might also be considered for the fresh fruit and vegetables meeting in 2021. Delegations were also invited to reflect on the possibility of holding the two sessions (fresh fruit and vegetables and dry and dried produce) in one week to reduce meeting days and improve resource efficiency for delegations.

### **XIII. Election of officers**

63. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States) as Chair of the Specialized Section and Ms. Aysegül Uluhan (Turkey) and Mr. Umed Aslanov (Tajikistan) as Vice-Chairs.

### **XIV. Adoption of the report**

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

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