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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 Seed Potatoes****Forty-sixth session**

Geneva, 18-19 March 2019

**Report of the forty-sixth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes****I. Introduction**

1. The meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was chaired by Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom).

2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, opened the forty-sixth session and welcomed the delegates. He expressed his appreciation for the active engagement, valuable work and materials produced by the group. He noted the participation of a large delegation from the Russian Federation and expressed his appreciation to the Russian Federation for funding several projects for modernization of seed-potato cultivation, quality control and certification in the Russian Federation. He thanked all delegations who had helped with the drafting and the translation into various languages of the Section's highly appreciated guidance material and their promotion efforts, for example at the 2018 World Potato Congress in Peru. He also thanked the delegation from Australia for developing and financing the Seed Potato Guide App which will help extend the use of the Guide on Diseases and Pests even further. He previewed the upcoming session highlighting the discussions on possible training workshops for better harmonization of seed potato standards; and the surveys on testing methods which can help harmonize existing practices and give impetus to the development of new ones.

3. He informed the Specialized Section that the strategic alignment of the work of the UNECE and the Specialized Section with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was very important. He noted the Specialized Sections' promotional poster on the SDG work was available at [www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/agr/promotion/Brochures/Seed\\_Potatoes\\_Poster.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/agr/promotion/Brochures/Seed_Potatoes_Poster.pdf). He also explained that the UNECE's Executive Secretary had developed a Nexus strategy to provide an over-arching framework to support the member States SDG implementation efforts.

4. He informed delegates that Ms Ivonne Higuero, the former Division Director who had taken up her position just prior to the 2018 meeting, had been nominated as Secretary-General of the CITES Secretariat at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Geneva.

5. On behalf of the UNECE secretariat, he thanked the outgoing Chair of the Specialized Section, Mr. John Kerr, for his many years as delegate and Chair

stressing the UNECE's appreciation for his support for this Section as well as for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7). He expressed his gratitude for Mr. Kerr's help in advancing major themes under the Sustainable Development Goals which had helped shape the future of WP.7.

## **II. Attendance**

6. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States

7. A representative of the European Commission attended.

8. The European Seed Association (ESA) also participated in the session.

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

9. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.

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

10. The Chief of the Market Access Section explained that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has undertaken a reform process of the United Nations development system, the United Nations secretariat and its operations. He noted that as part of this, a review of the work of the Regional Commissions has been launched with the results to be presented to the General Assembly in September 2019. In addition, the Executive Secretary of UNECE has launched an internal review of the organization's activities to achieve more synergies and collaboration among the various themes within the organization. The Executive Secretary has also developed a strategic framework to enhance cross-sectoral collaboration through four dedicated Nexus areas which under the "Sustainable use of natural resource" nexus includes all work of WP.7 and its sections. He noted that all nexus areas were supporting the member States in their implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

11. He provided information on the November 2018 session of WP.7 and the symposium on food loss. He noted that the Working Party had revised its terms of reference and adopted a new programme of work which includes the SDGs and their targets. The Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, which will convene in May 2019, will be asked to endorse these new documents.

12. The representative of the European Commission provided an update on new European Union legislation relevant to the work of the Specialized Section. He explained that the new Plant Health Regime (Regulation (EU) 2016/2031) would be applicable from December 2019. It aims at protecting the EU's agriculture, horticulture, forestry and the environment from new pests with a focus on the preparedness and prevention aspect of pest and quarantine management. The new legislation, which is fully in line with IPPC and ISPM rules, addresses both the regulated quarantine pests and regulated non-quarantine pests - RNQPs (so far "quality pests"). This is the first time that plant health legislation includes what was formerly regulated in the seed marketing legislation. He also described the challenges in including and translating tolerances for quality pests into the required format chosen by this legislation particularly linking the symptoms of the "quality pests" to harmful organisms. Currently, the new legislation was in the decision-making process with the drafting of the implementing act as well as subsequently the stakeholder and World Trade Organization (WTO) consultative processes.

13. Delegations discussed the implications of this new legislation for the UNECE standard. The delegation from Finland noted that the UNECE standard included mechanical and physical injuries as part of the total tolerances allowed for a lot whereas the new European Union legislation covered only disease tolerances. In addition, for the first time, "quality/marketing diseases" were now included in a plant health legislation. It was agreed

that while harmonization might become necessary, the main aim should be the compatibility between the UNECE standard and the EU legislation, once the latter had come into force.

14. The delegation from the Russian Federation gave two presentations. The first provided an update on the developments during the past 4 years and highlighted the harmonization of the Russian national standard with the UNECE standard; the on-going harmonization of the national certification system with the EU certification system; the important role of public-private cooperation and the active cooperation between the association of potato growers (Potato Union), laboratories and the public sector government agencies. The delegate also mentioned the establishment of modern seed potato laboratories; the production of seed potatoes at high altitude and in tunnels; the organization of training workshops and experience sharing; and the intensified research activities.

15. The Russian delegation outlined some of the challenges faced which had led to a need for the development of the selection of potatoes, methods of genome editing as used in the United States and other countries, as well as the introduction of high-speed modern methods which allowed to employ less highly-trained staff in the laboratories. The Russian delegation also stressed that authorities are giving more attention to the production of high-quality potatoes. Problems which remained to be addressed were the production of virus-free seed potatoes and the geographic distribution of the currently existing laboratories which were mainly located in the European part of the Russian Federation.

16. The second presentation by the Russian delegation provided an overview of the Russian Agricultural Centre, its roles and functions which include also seed standardization and seed quality tests. The Russian delegation also updated the Specialized Section on the new seed potato laboratory in the Leningrad region which had been equipped under a UNECE project and financed by the Russian Voluntary Fund. The delegate informed about the laboratory's work and capacity as well as the training undertaken with other laboratories and offices.

## V. Draft guide on minituber production

17. At its 2018 session, the Specialized Section had asked the Rapporteur (Australia) and a working group (France, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa as well as the European Seed Association) to prepare a draft guide on minituber production to complement Annex I of the UNECE Seed Potato Standard.

18. The delegation from Germany reiterated its reservation on the need to develop such a guide given that the existing ISPM 33 Guide provided enough information. In addition, the German delegation stressed that breeder companies bear the responsibility for the production of mini-tubers. They should not be faced with additional control and regulatory burdens. She also noted that the task of the German certification authorities is certification of marketed material, but not checking breeders' minituber production laboratories nor their tissue culture production sites. She mentioned that accreditation of laboratories can be achieved by established systems.

19. Delegations discussed why a new guide could be relevant for certification agencies and outlined how their inspection services tested or audited minituber production laboratories. The Chair also noted that the ISPM 33 applied to trade between countries and not within the national territory which this guide would address. It was pointed out that a guide could help clarify the role of inspection or certification of minituber production and add more transparency while not imposing more control measures. It was also stressed that the guide was for voluntary use. The delegation from the Russian Federation welcomed the initiated work to provide necessary guidance to ensure the quality of minituber production.

20. The Specialized Section reviewed in depth the draft guide and the comments submitted by the delegation from France and introduced the changes reflected in the post-session document. Several open substantial as well as drafting issues would be addressed by the Rapporteurs group.

21. The European Seed Association (ESA) voiced their opposition to the development of the current guide as it could impose more regulations on processes which are company

internal and within their authority. This could result in additional costs, also for consumers. Nevertheless, the representative announced ESA's readiness to participate in the Rapporteur's group and provide their comments on the current draft.

22. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to inform all delegations of the availability of the new draft as a post-session document on the UNECE web site. It was also decided that the current draft would be reviewed by the Rapporteurs through an electronic procedure and discussed at the 2020 Specialized Section meeting.

## **VI. Results of the survey on seed potato virus testing methods**

23. At its 2018 session, the Specialized Section had reviewed in detail the results of the virus testing survey. The delegate of Finland noted that the initially prepared report and the power point presentation were long and contained valuable information. The Specialized Section discussed the proposal to shorten the report and highlight the most important points as well as some conclusions or recommendations. Most delegations felt that the long report contained a wealth of information which would be difficult to summarize. The survey had shown that there were differences, for example, in how sampling and pooling were organized in various countries. It was also agreed that while the survey was done for information purposes, the Specialized Section could, at one point, consider including in the UNECE Standard generic recommendations formulated on the basis if the information obtained in the survey.

24. It was also noted that the survey had been very comprehensive, and this resulted in complex results. Although the structure of the upcoming bacterial survey had been based on that of the virus testing survey, the Specialized Section decided to review its structure.

25. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to publish the long report and the power point presentation on the UNECE web site and inform all members of the Specialized Section as well as all countries participating in the survey of its availability.

## **VII. Draft survey on bacterial testing methodologies**

26. The Rapporteur (United States) reviewed a revised draft survey of bacterial testing methodologies. The delegations discussed the new draft and decided to restructure the survey with separate sections for the various pathogen groups (Blackleg, *Ralstonia*, *Clavibacter*). All changes are reflected in the post-session document.

27. The Specialized Section invited the Rapporteur to finalize the survey in the coming months together with a working group (Australia, Belgium, Finland, and the United Kingdom). The secretariat will circulate the new version to the Specialized Section for final comments and launch the online survey as soon as possible.

## **VIII. Discussion on diseases and pests: *Liberibacter* and Tomato Potato Psyllid**

28. The Specialized Section exchanged information on current research and studies on new and emerging diseases and pests such as *Liberibacter* and the Tomato Potato Psyllid. The delegation from Finland provided an overview presentation on the occurrence, spread and development of *Liberibacter* and the latest findings in Finland. The United Kingdom updated on the research on *Liberibacter* implemented together with other countries. The delegate of New Zealand reported on the multiple ongoing projects in his country which had effectively managed to contain the spread and occurrence of *Liberibacter*. The United States and New Zealand will provide further information at the 2020 session. The delegation from Australia provided information on the Tomato Potato Psyllid.

29. The delegation from New Zealand informed the Specialized Section about his country's problems with the potato mop top virus and asked for guidance from other countries on how to contain the disease.

30. The Specialized Section decided to include on its 2020 agenda a discussion on ways to deal with the potato mop top virus and updates on *Liberibacter* and Tomato Potato Psyllid.

## **IX. True Potato Seed**

31. At its 2018 session, the Specialized Section approved its statement on True Potato Seed (TPS). The delegate of the Netherlands noted that so far only one variety (Oliver) had been included in the European Union's temporary experiment for gaining experience with TPS. Only one year had passed and experience was still limited. The targeted markets were mainly outside the European Union region rather than within it. This might make it more difficult to obtain feedback on how TPS performed. In the Netherlands, several companies are currently working on TPS without so far listing any other variety. While the temporary experiment was focused on growing seed potatoes with TPS, other companies seemed to grow ware potatoes with TPS. The delegate from Germany informed the Specialized Section about the interest of a Dutch company to produce TPS in Germany. The delegate from the Netherlands noted that a legal opinion on this subject was in the course of preparation in the Netherlands. It would be shared with the delegations.

32. The Specialized Section decided to keep this item on its 2020 agenda for further updates.

## **X. Review of risk-based inspections**

33. The Specialized Section exchanged experiences on risk-based inspections. The delegate of the Netherlands reported that while her country had used risk-based inspection in the past, it had stopped some time ago. The representative of the European Commission explained that the EU seed marketing legislation did not include reference to risk-based inspection. During a future revision, this might change.

34. The Specialized Section decided to postpone further discussions on this subject until further notice.

## **XI. Capacity-building**

35. The delegation from Australia presented the final version of the Seed Potato Disease Guide Application and announced that it would be made available free of charge to the UNECE. The Specialized Section and the UNECE secretariat thanked the delegation from Australia for this donation and the financial and substantive support provided during the development phase. The Application will be made available to all member States on the UNECE web site.

36. The Specialized Section decided to postpone to the 2020 session, the review of the new UNECE "Guide on capacity-building to introduce a seed potato scheme" and thanked the delegation from Germany for the revised draft.

37. As a follow-up to the discussions at the May 2018 Rapporteurs meeting in Peru, the Specialized Section discussed the possible organization of training workshops in Latin America as well as possibly in southern Africa to enhance the harmonization of seed potato standards and the establishment of certification schemes for the production and trade of seed potatoes. The delegations from Belgium and the United States suggested to reconnect with the Latin American countries and to help with the distribution of the UNECE's translated Spanish language material. The secretariat thanked the delegation from the United States for the translation of the UNECE's disease guide into Spanish with funds from Potato USA. The delegation from the United States noted the United States would organize study visits for a Latin American country in the summer of 2019 and that capacity-building could eventually be envisaged as well.

38. The delegation from South Africa drew attention to the August 2019 Congress of the African Potato Association (APA) which will be held in Rwanda. She noted that she had

submitted an abstract and offered to add reference to UNECE's work should the abstract be accepted. The delegations from the United Kingdom and Australia offered to help with possible capacity-building in Africa.

## **XII. Future work**

39. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2020 agenda:
- Guide on capacity-building
  - Overview of lot size of seed potatoes
  - Update on the survey on bacterial testing methodologies
  - Draft guide on minituber production
  - True Potato Seed
  - New and emerging diseases and pests - information on *Liberibacter*, and the Tomato Potato Psyllid
  - The potato mop top virus - sharing experience
  - Capacity-building workshops
  - Possible revision of the "List of national certification schemes"
  - Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses, particularly, the evaluation of false positives and false negatives

## **XIII. Other business**

40. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to remove all documents under the heading "Seed Potatoes: UNECE/EU/national standards comparison" and to archive them. The list had been replaced in 2017 by the "List of National Certification Schemes".

41. The Specialized Section discussed the possibility of holding a Rapporteurs meeting in the autumn of 2019. The delegate from the United States offered to host that meeting in Montana in September 2019. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation. More detailed information will be circulated by the secretariat in due course. The delegations from Sweden and the Russian Federation offered to consider organizing a Rapporteurs meeting in 2020 or later.

42. The Specialized Section took note of the 11th World Potato Congress which will be held in Dublin, Ireland, in May 2021. The secretariat thanked the delegation from Belgium for its support and promotion of the UNECE's work at the 2018 Congress in Peru.

## **XIV. Election of officers**

43. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair and Ms Nina Zidack (United States) and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) as its Vice-Chairs. The Specialized Section and the secretariat thanked the outgoing Chair, Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom), for his many years of service as Chair and delegate and his contributions and support for the work of the Specialized Section and the Working Party.

## **XV. Adoption of the report**

44. The Specialized Section adopted the report on its forty-sixth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2019/2).