



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 November 2015

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Seventy-first session

Geneva, 2-4 November 2015

Report of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on its seventy-first session

I. Introduction

1. The meeting was opened by the Chief of the Market Access Section (Economic Cooperation and Trade Division) who noted the increased number of participants and participating international organizations. Since the 1950s, when the work on agricultural quality standards started, ECE had adopted over 100 standards for fresh fruit and vegetables (52); dry and dried produce (27); meat (16); eggs (7) and cut flowers (8). The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) had done excellent work in overseeing the development and adoption of these standards, a core area of ECE's work. He also stressed the importance of ensuring that these standards advanced and remained relevant. He emphasized that WP.7's and the Member States' guidance was critical in today's rapidly changing markets and in the context of increased recognition of their work both within and outside of the United Nations system. He emphasized the Working Party's role in identifying emerging issues and synergies of relevance to all four specialized sections of the Working Party. The ECE Conference on the Traceability of Agricultural Produce, which had been held in conjunction with this meeting, had been organized against this background. The document on future work prepared for this meeting was intended to provide a basis for discussion on areas of synergy and topics for possible integration into WP.7's work. He also noted the increased cooperation with the FAO Codex Alimentarius Secretariat and the decision by the ECE's Specialized Section on Meat to include references (where applicable) to Codex Alimentarius food safety standards.

2. The recently adopted United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will strongly influence the work of the United Nations over the next 15 years (see <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics>). Two of these goals (SDG2 on food security and nutrition, and SDG12 on sustainable consumption) were closely linked to agriculture and food, and WP.7's work would be important in helping to achieve them. Currently, at the General Assembly in New York, Member States were discussing agricultural technology for development which could also impact WP.7's work.



3. The 2015 session of the Working Party included on its second day an International Conference on Traceability of Agricultural Produce with presentations on subjects of interest to all four Specialized Sections. The conference was opened by the Deputy Executive Secretary of ECE. A summary report on the conference, the programme, the opening remarks and the presentations are available at <http://www.unece.org/wp7-2015/>

4. The formal session of WP.7 was chaired by the Chairperson of the Working Party, Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom). The UNECE Conference on Traceability of Agricultural Produce was chaired by Mr. Hewett and Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland), Vice-Chairperson of the Working Party.

II. Attendance

5. Representatives from the following States attended the meeting: Australia, Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Morocco, Netherlands, Philippines, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, and Zimbabwe.

6. The session was attended by a representative of the European Commission.

7. The following international organizations, specialized agencies and programmes and intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: Eurasian Economic Commission; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the International Plant Protection Convention Secretariat (IPPC); the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); the International Trade Centre of UNCTAD/WTO (ITC); the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme; the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

8. The following non-governmental organizations with a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) also attended the session: GS1 and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

9. Representatives of the following other organizations attended at the invitation of the secretariat: Carton Group, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (IHEID), International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), Metro Group, Nestlé, QS Qualität und Sicherheit GmbH, and University Putra Malaysia.

III. Adoption of the agenda

10. The delegations adopted the revised provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2015/1).

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) ECE and subsidiary bodies

11. The Chief of the ECE Market Access Section reported that the ECE had completed its review of the inter-governmental structure supporting the Trade subprogramme in February 2015. As a result, the Working Party now reported to the newly established Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which had held its first session in September 2015. During these discussions, Member States had unanimously indicated their

continued satisfaction with the work on standards setting and, in particular, agricultural quality standards.

12. At its September 2015 session, the Steering Committee had endorsed the Geneva Understanding and the ECE's Executive Committee had adopted the final version with an addition on page 3 (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2015/22) so that it now reads ...“12. ECE aims at coordinating its activities with other international organizations active in the area of agricultural quality standards, in order to avoid duplication of work, especially with Codex Alimentarius (FAO/WHO).”

13. The secretariat thanked the Turkish authorities for hosting in Izmir, Turkey, the highly successful June/July 2015 training workshop on nuts and dried fruit and, in conjunction, the meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce. He also mentioned that preliminary work had started on an agriculture reference and training platform and discussions with potential partners were under way.

(b) Recent developments in other organizations and the use of standards by countries

14. The representative from the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Secretariat reported on the main outcomes of the 19th Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV) that took place in Mexico in October 2015. The report will be posted on the Codex website at <http://www.codexalimentarius.org>. The CCFFV agreed to: replace the distribution of the texts of ECE standards that are on the agenda of the CCFFV sessions with a link to the ECE website; forward the standard for aubergines for final adoption to the Codex Alimentarius Commission; recommend to the Commission to advance the standards for garlic and kiwifruit in the Step Procedure to be finalized at its next session; return the standard for ware potatoes for further work and consideration at its next session; and develop a standard for fresh dates subject to approval by the Commission. Proposals for new work on shallots and yams would be considered as a matter of priority at its next session.

15. The CCFFV also agreed to most of the sections of the Layout for Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables. A few outstanding issues would be finalized at its next session. Most of the sections on quality provisions were aligned with the ECE Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. A glossary of terms applied in the Layout/Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables would be developed as an annex to the Layout.

16. As regards work on quality standards for dry and dried produce, the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV) which had competence on these products will meet in the United States of America in the second half of 2016. The CCPFV will consider the findings of a document on ways to deal with the standardization of dry and dried produce. The preliminary findings indicate that there may be room for the revision of the Codex standards for raisins, dates and pistachios.

17. The Codex Secretariat expressed its appreciation to the ECE for the inclusion of references to Codex food safety provisions/standards in the ECE standards for meat, and reasserted its willingness to continue cooperating with the ECE secretariat in the development of agricultural quality standards for fruit and vegetables.

18. The representative from the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) reported on the INC's participation in the ECE Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce meeting and workshop held in Izmir, in June/July 2015. She highlighted ECE's contribution to the INC's Scientific Committee held during the May 2015 INC Congress in Antalya, Turkey, which had been attended by 900 delegates from more than 70 countries.

She also mentioned that INC was working on a training film illustrating ECE's sampling plan for nuts and dried fruit.

VI. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

19. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, Mr. Ian King (Australia), reported on the work of the Specialized Section¹ and stressed the importance of keeping the standards relevant for international trade. He described the Specialized Section's new area of work, eating quality research in bovine meat, and reported on the establishment of an informal electronic scientific discussion group to work on the collaborative management of pooled international data on eating quality research which, in just one month, had attracted 20 new Members.

20. He also reported on the group's discussions on food loss/waste along the meat supply chain and the group's point of view that, in the meat industry, little waste occurred in the production phase. Many products were already traded internationally or could be used by the agro industry but required closer control and quality parameters. This had led to the proposal to develop, for the Specialized Section's 2016 session, a new draft standard for co-products from slaughter and processing (e.g. blood or other products, to be identified).

21. He also reported on the second meat symposium held as part of the Specialized Section's 2015 annual session which had focused on public and private food safety standards and certification schemes. Both the 2014 and the 2015 symposia had been excellent fora for public and private sector participants and had brought back interest in and vigour to the work of the group. He also outlined the group's future work stressing that in the area of eating quality, in particular, the ECE held the potential to play a key role in the future. At the suggestion of Jamaica, the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) would be invited to participate in the group's work and a proposal to include wild meat would be added to the agenda.

22. The Working Party took note of the September 2015 Meat symposium and its outcome and adopted the:

- 2015 Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat;
- New List of Examples annexed to the ECE Standard for Processed Poultry Meat including ready-to-cook preparations and ready-to-eat products (adopted in 2014);
- Revised ECE Standard for Edible Co-Products; and the amended ECE Standard for Bovine Meat.

VII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

23. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom) reported that while the Specialized Section did not have a formal session in 2015, an informal Bureau and Rapporteurs meeting had been organized by the delegation of Finland in Helsinki and Oulu. In addition to technical visits focusing on viral and bacterial diseases of potatoes and the presentation of Finland's seed potato production, participants had advanced the work on two guides (on operating a seed potato inspection service and on seed potato tuber inspection).

¹ The presentation is available on the ECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/wp7-2015#/>.

24. He stressed that in recent years the group had successfully promoted the use of the ECE standard for seed potatoes which contributes to sustainable agricultural practices, i.e. a system ensuring that work from soil to farm to trade was operated and linked in a sustainable way.

25. The Working Party took note of the online version of the ECE Guide to Seed Potato Field Inspection which was ready for download. The printing of this Guide had been delayed owing to budgetary constraints but would be finalized in the coming months. In March 2016, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes will organize a rapporteurs meeting in South Africa and invite the countries of the region to participate.

VIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

26. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany), presented the work² of the Section and explained that membership in ECE's Specialized Sections was open to all United Nations Member countries. ECE standards applied to produce intended to be sold fresh and could be integrated into countries' national legislation and/or used by trade in commercial transactions. In this regard, coordination with the Codex Alimentarius Commission was essential to avoid duplication.

27. She also reported on the development of two new standards (lamb's lettuce and persimmons); the progress made on the persimmon brochure; and the changes proposed to the standards for sweet chestnuts; truffles; garlic; tomatoes; and watermelons. She also mentioned that the Standard Layout for ECE Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Explanatory Brochures had been finalized.

28. The Working Party adopted the:

- 2015 Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
- New ECE Standards for Lamb's Lettuce and Persimmons (with an amendment to the definition of produce to include the term "kaki")
- Revised ECE Standard for Sweet chestnuts
- Revised ECE Standard for Watermelons
- New Standard Layout for ECE Fresh Fruit and Vegetables Explanatory Brochures (the future outcome of discussions on quality tolerances would be incorporated once agreed upon and at a later stage)

29. As France could not agree to the proposed changes to the English version of the ECE's standard for Truffles, namely in the "Definition of Produce" the text was returned to the Specialized Section for further discussions. Currently, the proposed text and reference information contained in ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2015/9 reads: "Tuber aestivum Vittad. - Common names: Summer Truffle and Burgundy Truffle; and Tuber uncinatum Chatin - Common name: Burgundy Truffle - Explanation: This name is used commercially but from a scientific view this is the same species as Tuber aestivum (T. aestivum is the older name and therefore has priority)".

² The presentation is available on the ECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/wp7-2015#/>.

30. The Working Party also decided to return to the Specialized Section the standards for garlic (to review Sweden's concern about the tolerance for physiological damage on two cloves as well as to accommodate discussions at the Codex CCFFV) and the standard for tomatoes (to discuss Morocco's and France's concerns about provisions on cherry and cocktail tomatoes as well as the concerns expressed by the Netherlands during the inter-sessional approval procedure).

31. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables also provided an overview of the Specialized Section's 2016 agenda noting the addition of a comparison of the ECE standard for aubergines with the CCFFV standard which will be adopted in 2016.

32. Finalization of the persimmons brochure: The Working Party decided to request the secretariat to submit the four photos yet to be agreed upon for an inter-sessional approval procedure with a deadline for comments set for the end of January. This would allow all countries to comment, and particularly some of the main producing countries (Spain and Israel). Should no consensus be reached, the Specialized Section would review the brochure in April 2016.

33. Delegates also discussed the issue of printed explanatory brochures in the light of the scarce resources available for their production. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce explained that the DDP Section had opted for the development of a standard poster layout which would be made available online. While this possibility had already been discussed at previous FFV meetings, it was recognized that, in the future, alternatives needed to be found to replace expensive printed publications, and to facilitate the online availability and translation of material. This would also make it easier for farmers and growers to use them. Apps which could be an option were currently still relatively complicated and expensive to develop. However, as witnessed by a project in the seed potato area, there are options to make apps available as in-kind contributions to be used free of charge by United Nations Member States.

34. The secretariat stressed that all budgetary decisions, including cuts in the United Nations printing budget, were made by Member States at the General Assembly in New York. It was therefore out of the hands of the ECE secretariat to impact on these decisions. Delegates, however, could inform their Ministries and diplomatic missions.

IX. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

35. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America), expressed the Specialized Section's gratitude to the government of Turkey for hosting this year's Specialized Section meeting and a back-to-back workshop on cross-border trade in nuts and dried fruit. He highlighted the increased number of participants, and the useful training workshop which had been organized with the support of the Turkish inspection service.

36. The delegation of Turkey thanked the ECE secretariat for their assistance in organizing the Specialized Section session and the workshop in Izmir. He noted that the events had also contributed to explaining to its industry and trade sectors the importance of ECE standards and how these standards are negotiated and developed, especially since Turkey's commercial quality controls at export and import stage are based on ECE standards. He also informed the Working Party about an exchange programme recently initiated with the South African Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB), and underlined the importance of ECE meetings as a platform that brings together parties interested in furthering bilateral collaborations.

37. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce reported on the work of the Specialized Section³ noting that progress had been made on the revisions of the recommendations for dried grapes, dried apricots and dried figs. As more time was needed to finalize some of the points under discussion, the trial periods of the recommendations needed to be extended for another year. The revision of the standard for dates had been finalized and the revised standard was submitted for adoption. The Specialized Section had also revised the Standards for Inshell Pistachio Nut and Almond Kernels and submitted them for adoption as Recommendations for a 1-year trial period. Work had also started on revising the Standard for Walnut Kernels (work-in-progress) as well as on the development of an Explanatory Brochure for Walnut Kernels (developed and financed by the United States of America and its industry). In addition, the walnut colour gauge would be revised to include the Livermore variety which was also traded internationally.

38. He also reported that work on an ECE Sampling Plan for Nuts and Dried Fruit had been finalized and, with the agreement of the OECD secretariat, related OECD definitions had been added. The INC had indicated its intention to prepare a training film illustrating the sampling plan.

39. During its discussions on various standards several issues affecting terms and definitions had been raised, therefore the Specialised Section had decided to revise, at its 2016 session, the recommended terms and definitions of defects included in Annex III of the Dry and Dried Produce Standard Layout.

40. Discussions on the production of explanatory material had resulted in the decision to develop a generic explanatory poster layout. The Specialized Section, like all other Sections, had also reviewed food loss/waste implications along the nuts and dried fruit supply chain and highlighted the often stringent provisions of the standards, the issue of non-exportable produce and the re-grading of non-conforming produce. The Specialized Section had decided to expand its Bureau and, as a result, had elected a second Vice-Chairperson (Ms. Elif Ulug-Sakalsiz, Turkey). He also noted that the workshop had resulted in increased interest in the work of ECE on dry and dried produce.

41. The Working Party adopted the:

- 2015 Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce;
- Revised text of the ECE Standard for « Dates » and amended the title to read “Dried Dates” (to avoid confusion with a future Codex standards on “Fresh Dates”)
- Texts of the revised Standards for Inshell Pistachio Nuts and Almond Kernels as ECE Recommendations for a one-year trial period (until November 2016)

42. The delegation of the United States of America informed delegates that consultations with their national industry on the proposed ECE Sampling Plan for Tree Nuts and Dried Produce were still on-going and might result in changes. The Working Party, therefore, returned the recommended Sampling Plan draft to the Specialized Section for further work and extended the trial period for another year.

43. The Working Party also extended the trial periods of the revised ECE Recommendations for Dried Apricots, Dried Figs and Dried Grapes through November 2016.

³ The presentation is available on the ECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/wp7-2015#/>.

44. The Working Party took note of the newly printed Explanatory Brochure for Inshell Walnuts and thanked the delegation of the United States for their contribution to the development and printing of the brochure.

X. Food waste and standards

45. The Chairpersons of the Specialized Sections informed delegations on the discussions on food waste and standards that had taken place at their 2015 sessions. The Working Party delegations reviewed the subject and considered further steps for 2016 in the light of the adoption of the agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, particularly, Goal 12 on sustainable consumption. The delegation of Sweden reminded the members of the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to send their comments on two standards currently under review (i.e. leeks and tomatoes) to identify possible ways to avoid food loss. She also noted that there would be a discussion at the Specialized Section's April 2016 session on possible changes to the Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to avoid food loss related to the application of standards.

46. The Working Party decided to organize at its 2016 session a one-day conference on food loss/waste. The Specialized Sections were asked to continue their work on this issue.

XI. Capacity-building and promotional activities

47. The secretariat informed the Working Party about capacity-building activities in 2015 and planned activities for 2016 in the areas of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, dry and dried produce and seed potatoes⁴. Particular attention was drawn to the 2015 activities under the United Nations Development Account project on cross-border agricultural supply chains including a case study (business process analysis) on dried apricot exports from Tajikistan; a training workshop on cross-border trade in nuts and dried fruit in Izmir (July 2015) as well as training for Balkan countries on meat supply chains and food safety standards in September 2015.

48. Preliminary work on an agriculture reference and training platform had started and an implementation partner (the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)) had been identified. Work would start in November 2015 with a going-live date scheduled for the first half of 2016.

49. In 2016, workshops are planned for March (Regional supply chain workshop on nuts and dried fruit in Uzbekistan); a case study for one agricultural product (Albania); and a fresh fruit and vegetables supply chain workshop for the Balkan region. Under the Asian (UNESCAP-led) part of the project, three more activities will take place in 2016, all focused on agricultural trade facilitation. The secretariat will send out more information on all these activities and dates in due course.

50. The Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes will organize a rapporteurs meeting and a training session in South Africa in March 2016 with the participation of the countries of the region and possibly with the support of the WTO.

51. The Working Party also took note of the 20th United Kingdom Harmonization Meeting on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables which will be held in Edinburgh, United Kingdom, from 7-9 June 2016.

⁴ The presentation is available on the ECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/wp7-2015#/>.

XII. Future work

52. Delegates reviewed the traceability conference held the previous day and noted the wealth of very useful information that had been presented. It was decided to continue the work in this area and establish an informal, electronic discussion group under the Working Party which in a first time would try to find out which information presented was proprietary and which was freely available. The following countries agreed to join this group: France, Hungary, Italy, Philippines, Poland, United Kingdom and United States of America. The secretariat would circulate the information via the list server and coordinate with the OECD's traceability working group as well. Further participation was welcomed.

53. It was also stressed that the Working Party should continue to look into what industry needed and solicit feed-back also from regulators such as the European Union. A workshop focusing on e.g. industry updates and needs; regulators' views and rules and regulations etc. could be organized at a future date. This would help make the standards more effective and reflect market realities. It could also help improve national policies.

54. The delegation from Jamaica expressed their appreciation for the conference and the Working Party session which would have an impact on the work of all delegations. The delegate also expressed hope that capacity-building activities could expand into the Caribbean region.

55. As decided earlier, in 2016, the Working Party would organize a conference on food loss and waste.

56. The following meetings are planned for 2016:

- Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 18-21 April 2016
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat: 23-25 May 2016
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce: 27 – 29 June 2016
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes: 31 August (afternoon) – 2 September 2016
- Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and International Conference on Food Loss/waste: 9-11 November 2016
- Informal Bureau and Rapporteurs Meeting for Seed Potatoes (Kimberley, South Africa): 14-18 March 2016

XIII. Other business

57. The delegation from Jamaica suggested that the secretariat increase its public awareness efforts including by organizing events in conjunction with the observance of United Nations international days (e.g. World Food Day), a client-friendlier web page (with printable posters for events and training) as well as global outreach also to the Caribbean region. This would facilitate discussions on ECE standards in fora worldwide as well as testing some of the standards and inspection guides in different environments and climates to increase their adoption and support capacity-building.

XIII. Election of officers

58. The Working Party elected Mr. Pierre Schauenberg (Switzerland) as Chairperson and re-elected Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland) as Vice-Chairperson.

XIV. Adoption of the report

59. The Working Party adopted the report of its seventy-first session and requested the secretariat to publish it in English, French and Russian
