United Nations Economic Commission for Europe UNECE

The development of standards for fruit and vegetables

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International Workshop on Commercial Quality Standards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
Dubrovnik, Croatia, 17 to 20 October 2011
Five Regional Commissions of the United Nations

UNECE was set up in 1947
56 Member States
All UN Member States may participate in its work
Over 70 international non-governmental and professional organizations take part in UNECE’s activities
UNECE and Agricultural Quality Standards

Historical legacy - Period after World War II in UNECE region:
○ National quality standards regulated trade in agricultural products within each country‘s national borders

Existing national regulations were often barriers to the growing international trade

Against this background:
1949 UNECE – Europe’s only functioning pan-European body – establishes Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards
○ To harmonize national standards into international standards
○ To provide a mechanism for their practical enforcement
UNECE and Agricultural Quality Standards – International standards

International standards

Build common trading language
○ Standards are developed and agreed by exporting and importing countries (including all trading partners)
○ Make business contacts and communication between buyers and sellers easier along the whole supply chain
○ Allow produce to be traded long distance without inspection prior to making the business deal
○ Build trust

Facilitate fair international trade
○ Increase transparency on international and national markets
○ Base competition on uniform minimum standards
○ Open markets and new export opportunities
○ Establish price-quality relationship
UNECE and Agricultural Quality Standards - International standards

International standards help

Guide producers, improve and keep overall quality of products
They set minimum quality requirements which do not destroy competition

Increase profitability of the sector
○ Producers’ profitability depends to a large extend on trading volume and price. Both are influenced by quality.

Protect consumers’ interests

STANDARDS ensure consistent quality; help groups of growers to offer homogenous products to buyers; encourage high quality production and help establish lasting trading relations
In sum:

○ There is no quality without safety!

○ And quality is safety plus more…..

Commercial quality is a set of parameters describing internal (taste, maturity, etc.) and external (cleanliness, color, freshness, shape, presentation, packing, etc.) characteristics of the produce, which are necessary to ensure transparency in trade and good eating quality.
UNECE and Agricultural Quality Standards – Assuring quality and standardizing agricultural produce within UNECE

Since 1954 UNECE standards follow a simple structure and set uniform minimum quality criteria, definitions and classifications and produce – specific tolerances.

**UNECE Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**
- Definition of produce
- Minimum requirements
- Maturity requirements
- Classification (Extra, class I, class II)
- Sizing provisions
- Tolerances (quality, size)
- Presentation (uniformity, packaging)
- Marking
- Annexes: Definitions, Lists of varieties, Testing and Sampling procedures
UNECE and Agricultural Quality Standards
Principles for the Development of UNECE Standards

**Inclusive, transparent process:**
- All UN member countries participate with the same rights
- All relevant actors (public and private) in the supply chain participate (i.e. traders, producers, consumers etc.) from producing and importing countries
- All relevant international organizations cooperate

**Flexible, inter-active, responsive process**
- All UNECE standards are demand-driven standards: their development and revision reflect changing production, marketing, trading and regulatory conditions. Standardization only when internationally traded volumes justify existence of a standard or when a product is of such importance

**Final Decisions are taken on a consensus basis** – reviewed by Working Party – Recommendation on trial basis for industry – feedback to adjust the Standard as required – final adoption
Implementing a UNECE Standard

- UNECE Standard
- GOVERNMENT
  - National Standard
- EU
  - EU Regulation
- FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius
  - Codex Standard
- OECD
  - Explanatory Brochures
UNECE standards - the legal context: the national level

UNECE standards are tools created to be used on a voluntary basis to make trading easier.

UNECE standards can be incorporated into national legislation:
- As an export requirement to ensure that the produce have a certain quality level
- As a requirement for the domestic, export and import markets

BUT
- International trade rules do not allow higher requirements for imported produce than for domestic produce
  - principle of national treatment.
UNECE standards - the legal context: EU level

UNECE Standards are enshrined in EU legislation
EU standards are fully harmonized with UNECE standards

For other products - compulsory product specific standards

For other fruits and vegetables - General Marketing Standard
UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Four Specialized Sections
○ Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
○ Dry and Dried Produce
○ Seed Potatoes
○ Meat

Mission
○ Develop quality standards setting minimum requirements (commercial quality, maturity, sizing, tolerances, presentation, marking)
○ Prepare explanatory material
○ Promote UNECE standards worldwide

Participation
○ Global
UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

UNECE Standards for Agricultural Produce:

Fresh fruit and vegetables (over 50 standards)

Dry and dried produce (over 20 standards)

Seed Potatoes (1)

Meat (11)

Eggs (2 updated standards)

Cut Flowers (8 – dormant 1994)
UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Activities:

- **Standardizing:**
  currently 54 standards
  
  http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/fresh/FFV-standards.htm

- **Drafting explanatory brochures in coordination with OECD**
  (UNECE - sweet peppers, pineapples, chilli peppers)

- **Organizing capacity-building worldwide**
Elaborates Standards
- 2010 Inshell Macadamia Nuts and Macadamia Kernels
- 2011 working on new standards for Whole Dried Chilli Peppers, Brazil Nut Kernels, Pine Nuts, Dried Mangoes

Develops explanatory brochures
- for example Walnut Kernels, Whole Dried Chilli Peppers

Organizes workshops and trainings on dry and dried produce
- Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Moldova, Tajikistan
Develops Standards detailing agreed specifications for meat items commonly traded internationally

Standards:
- Bovine meat - carcases and cuts
- Caprine meat - carcases and cuts
- Chicken meat - carcases and parts
- Duck meat - carcases and parts
- Edible meat co-products
- Llama/alpaca meat - carcases and cuts
- Ovine meat - carcases and cuts
- Porcine meat - carcases and cuts
- Turkey meat - carcases and parts

New standards:
- Horse meat, Goose meat, Veal,
- On-going: Retail meat cuts, Rabbit meat and deer meat
UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

More than a Standard…..

○ Explanatory Brochure

and a defined

○ Coding System for communication and electronic trade with information combined in 20 digits
**UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

**UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes**
- Unique reference covering all aspects of seed potato certification
- List of Diseases and Pest (35 Diseases, 85 Pictures)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Status in UNECE Standard</th>
<th>Recommended diagnostic method</th>
<th>General disease description</th>
<th>Tuber symptoms</th>
<th>Plant symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Potato wart disease</td>
<td><em>Synchytrium endobioticum</em></td>
<td>Zero tolerance</td>
<td>Disease</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuber: tumours</td>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Tuber Symptoms" /></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plant: tumours and galls on stolons and stem base</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Plant Symptoms" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Worldwide promotion and training on development, implementation and interpretation of UNECE standards

2010/2011 South Africa, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Croatia, Chile, Ghana, Moldova, Thailand

Purpose:
- help understand the quality requirements that have to be met for exporting to major agricultural markets esp. in UNECE region
- outline legal, institutional and technical infrastructure required for their practical use
- help understand the importance of quality and its control in an overall agricultural policy agenda
- explain the role of the private sector
Situation today – some of the challenges

Main challenges – new market realities
- Capturing market realities means looking beyond traditional import (Europe and US) and export markets
- Diversification of players with more trade from countries from around the world
- Quality requirements do not decrease – new entrants have to learn to use them and learn to help them shape

Main challenges in standardization work
- Differences in appreciation
- Differences in defects
- External vs. internal criteria (maturity requirements definition, determination, size/no size)
- Emergence of new varieties from new production zones
Some conclusions – standards and quality

Needed:
○ comprehensive, balanced input from all regions concerned to ensure that standards reflect actual market realities, include new production areas (their problems, their produce)
○ Public-private sector delegations

Stake:
○ Standards are instruments that facilitate trade and help open opportunities. Not being there to shape standards can have serious consequences (e.g. changes in tolerances can result in the de-classification of produce, or loss in market shares)
○ Standards need to be applied correctly to make them work

Cooperation for comprehensive, inclusive global standards and their uniform application
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http://unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm