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Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes

Thirty-second session, 4-6 March 2002, Geneva

Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda

INFORMATION ON THE RESULTS OF THE MEETINGS OF THE BUREAU

Note by the secretariat

In this document the secretariat summarizes the outcome of the meetings of the bureau of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes held in Milan on 23 July and in Changins from 17 to 19 September 2001.

1. Bureau meeting in Milan

1.1 Attendance

Following an invitation from the Chairman of the Specialized Section Mr. P.G. Bianchi the meeting was held at the offices of Ente Nazionale Sementi Elette in Milan.

Participants: Mr. P.G. Bianchi (Italy), Mr. T. Heilandt (UNECE), Mr. P. Miauton (Switzerland), Mr. M. Valvassori (European Commission).

1.2 Discussions

The Specialized Section had mandated the Bureau to revise the introduction to the UNECE standard for seed potatoes to better reflect its purpose and role in trade facilitation. The Chairman had prepared a draft document that formed the basis of the discussions. Also discussed was the reply received from the legal services concerning the possible mentioning of the WTO SPS agreement in the standard. A new version of the introduction was drafted which will go into a second reading at the next bureau meeting.

2. Bureau meeting in Changins

2.1 Attendance

Following an invitation from the Vice-Chairman of the Specialized Section Mr. P. Miauton the meeting was held at the offices of the Swiss research station for seed in Changins (VD).

Participants: Mr. P.G. Bianchi (Italy), Mr. S. Carnegie (United Kingdom), Mr. G. Crouau (France), Mr. T. Heilandt (UNECE), Mr. A. Klay (Switzerland), Mr. P. Miauton (Switzerland), Mr. M. Valvassori (European Commission).

2.2 Discussion during the session

2.2.1 Presentation on the WTO SPS agreement

Dr. Alfred Klay from the Plant Protection and Certification Section in the Federal Office of Agriculture gave a presentation on the SPS agreement and the different classes of quarantine pests defined in it. The presentation gave a good background for the following discussions and was highly appreciated by the delegations.

2.2.2 Introduction to the standard

The revised introduction elaborated in Milan was discussed. The text will be finalized by the Chairman and the Secretariat and presented to the Specialized Section in March 2002.

The new text will explain

- the history and overall goals of the Working Party and the Geneva Protocol (which does not apply to Seed potatoes)
- history of the standard
- history and relationship to the EU (provided by the European Commission), EPPO (provided by the United Kingdom) and NAPPO standard
- the goals of the standard:
- defining a harmonized trading language,
- defining commercial quality for seed potatoes,
- fill the gap between national phyto-sanitary requirements and
- defining a certification scheme and
- tolerances for certain quality pests,
- what is not covered by the standard
- quarantine,
- plant health aspects as long as they are not necessary for the certification scheme etc.)
- who is covering those aspects not included in the standard;
- what advantages a country will have by using the standard;
- what it means when a country says that it applies the standard or has a reservation;
- application means that seed potatoes exported from the country fulfil at least the requirements of the standard and seed potatoes according to the Geneva standard are accepted provided national phyto-sanitary requirements are observed.
- reservations mean that the provisions concerning which the reservations have been entered do not apply to the country

2.2.3 Separation of quality and quarantine pests

At the meeting in Milan it was decided to look into the possibility to separate quality and quarantine pests in the standard.

The discussion in Changins raised several interesting ideas and questions without concluding the subject:

- The way quarantine diseases are dealt with by the standard at present is not sufficient for the needs of international trade – the rules are not strict enough and incomplete.
- To remove quarantine diseases from the standard and only deal with quality and varietal purity could avoid overlap with other organizations and focus the work.
- What would be lost if quarantine pests are removed?
- The different situations in countries should be taken into account (some have just one authority for quality and phyto-sanitary aspects others have separate services).
- Should the standard include those quarantine organisms that can be dealt with in a certification scheme?

Broadly there seem to be three options for the future direction of the standard:

- To eliminate quarantine diseases and become the only reference for quality. (Disadvantage: important certification information might be lost.)
- To make the standard complete by increasing the provisions concerning quarantine pests. (Disadvantage: difficult to find consensus; overlap with other organizations)
- To leave quarantine provisions as they are and improve quality provisions.

Conclusions: The Chairman and the Secretariat will prepare a discussion paper on that topic. France will prepare a table of quarantine and quality pests dealt with in the standard.

2.2.4 Replies to the questionnaire

More than 20 countries have replied up to now. The Chairman and the Secretariat will prepare a proposal for the publication of results for the next session of the Specialized Section.

2.2.5 Inclusion of a list of varieties

It was agreed that the standard should define the concept of variety it but not include its own list of varieties because such a list would be too difficult to keep updated.

The approach could be similar to the one used by the OECD Seed Scheme which recognized varieties which are maintained in at least one country.

A list of authorities should be included on the homepage and possibly a list of links to their lists of varieties.

Switzerland will prepare a paper explaining

- how OECD deals with this question;
- why it should be included in the standard (transparency, GMO, use of micropropagation)
- how it could be included in the standard.

2.2.6 Introduction of sub-divisions in the categories

A new proposal was available from the United Kingdom and agreed by Canada. Comments were made that the introduction of a field generation marker might lead buyers to always demand earlier generations. The Specialized Section will be invited to discuss this proposal.

2.2.7 Superficial necrosis and the mop top virus

France and the United Kingdom will prepare a proposal concerning superficial necrosis caused by virus (e.g. rattle). It was agreed that the mop top virus was already covered through the recent inclusion of powdery scab in the standard.

2.2.8 GMO

The European Commission will provide the relevant Council decision and the report of the standing committee establishing a threshold.

2.2.9 Inclusion of visual aids in the standard

It was agreed not to produce a compendium of potato diseases as similar publications already existed. France will prepare a proposal to amend Annex IX to include common and powdery scab.

The United Kingdom will prepare a paper on updating test methods in the standard and maybe cross reference the EPPO standard.

2.2.10 Preparation of a circular letter to increase participation

The Chairman and the Secretariat will prepare a letter before the next session of the specialized Section.

2.2.11 Reply from the legal services

The secretariat received a reply from the legal services the conclusions of which will be distributed to delegations as an official document.