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### ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND  
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of  
Perishable Produce and Quality Development  
Fifty-eighth session, Geneva, 29-31 October 2002

Item 10 (a) of the provisional agenda

#### REVISION OF THE WORKING PROCEDURES

##### Note by the secretariat

The text is based on the working procedures in force. Only changes to the last version of the document have been indicated with underlining for new text and strike-out for deleted text.

This text was distributed for comments to the participants of the Working Group in April 2002. Comments were received from Germany. Some further changes and corrections were made by the secretariat. All changes since the last version of the document are marked with underline and bold.

**WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY  
ON [AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS][QUALITY STANDARDS FOR AGRICULTURAL  
PRODUCE]  
AND ITS SUBSIDIARY SPECIALIZED SECTIONS**

**NOTE:** *These working procedures have been agreed by the ..... session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards.*

*They describe the:*

- *History and purpose of the work.*
- *Structure of intergovernmental bodies*
- *Role of the secretariat*
- *Rules for participants and observers*
- *Steps to be followed by the Secretariat and delegations in the preparation, holding and follow-up of sessions of the Working Party and its [specialized sections]*
- *Procedure for developing a UNECE Standard.*

## **1. BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Goals of the work**

The UNECE Working Party on [**Agricultural Quality Standards**][**Quality Standards for Agricultural Produce**] has responsibility for the elaboration of internationally harmonized, agricultural, commercial quality standards for perishable produce on the basis of existing national standards or trade practices to:

- *Facilitate fair international trade and prevent technical barriers to trade:*  
The standards are indicative of actual commercial practice and define a common trading language for sellers and buyers. Negotiations and the establishment of a contract become easier and more transparent. In case of conflict, standards can be used as a reference point for international arbitration.
- *Improve producers' profitability and encourage production of high quality produce:*  
The standards allow producers and their organizations to reduce costs at the production and sales levels and simplify their inventories because they have only one standard to comply with. The standards give them an indication of what is acceptable on international markets and they can produce, sort, pack and label their products accordingly.
- *Protect consumers' interest:*  
Consumers profit from an increased quality of the produce and transparency of the market. The presentation, packaging and marking requirements ensure that they receive relevant information on the produce.

The UNECE groups provide a forum where countries can discuss all issues of commercial quality that may arise from their domestic markets and which have an implication on international trade. The groups aim at filling the gap between food safety regulations and marketing. The groups also offer assistance to countries in transition by organizing workshops on the harmonization of national standards with international commercial standards.

## 1.2 History

The activities began in 1949 and have led to the elaboration of a wide range of UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, **early and ware potatoes**, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat (~~porcine, bovine and poultry~~) and cut flowers. Standards for fruit juices and quick frozen foods have been elaborated in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts and are now further developed in the relevant Codex bodies.

## 1.3 Work achieved

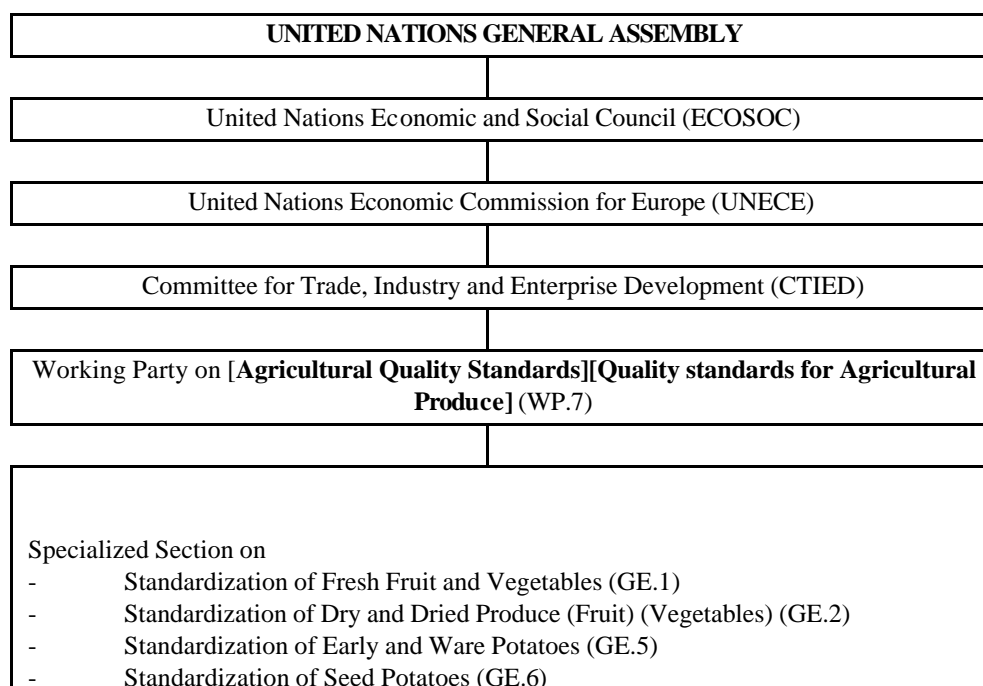
Close to 100 standards have been adopted in the different areas:

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (46)
- Dry and Dried Fruit (17)
- Early and Ware Potatoes (2)
- Seed Potatoes (1)
- Eggs and Egg Products (5)
- Meat (3)
- Cut Flowers (8)

## 2. ORGANIZATION

### 2.1 Structure of the intergovernmental ~~subsidiary~~ bodies

The following chart presents **the framework of intergovernmental bodies in which the UNECE meetings concerning ~~various subsidiary bodies which participate in~~ the elaboration of UNECE Standards for Perishable Produce operate:**



- Standardization of Eggs and Egg Products (GE.8) - adjourned sine die
- Standardization of Cut Flowers (GE.9) - adjourned sine die
- Standardization of Meat (GE.11)

## 2.2 Geneva Protocol and Standard Layout

The framework and basis of the standardization activities work is the Revised Geneva Protocol for the Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Fruit (1954, revised 1964 and 1985) (see Annex I). Two standard layouts (one for fresh fruit and vegetables and one for dry and dried produce (fruit) have been developed on the basis of the Geneva Protocol (see Annex II).

The standards establish the definition of the produce, levels of quality by means of minimum characteristics (**quality and maturity requirements**), ~~and~~ quality classes, size classifications, tolerances, marking, packaging and presentation requirements.

The standards are intended for application at the point of export/dispatching control.

## 2.3 Secretariat

The secretariat is responsible in particular for:

- Preparing draft agendas for the meetings of the specialized sections and the Working Party in cooperation with the chairperson.
- Preparing pre-meeting documentation on request and ensuring that proposals from participants and observers are translated and distributed (if received on time).
- Preparing draft reports during the sessions of the specialized sections and the Working Party.
- Preparing the final report and its annexes and addenda.
- **Preparing informal meetings on request from the Working Party and the specialized sections.**
- Maintaining a database of contacts for the Working Party and each specialized section
- Maintaining the home page with up-to-date information on meetings, meeting documentation and the text of all standards and related texts.
- Ensuring cooperation with other international organizations by attending their meetings and presenting the views of the Working Party.
- Promoting the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections.
- **Coordinating assistance programmes (seminars, training courses etc.) to assist countries in the application of standards to increase their potential to trade (subject to funding)**
- **Coordinating cross-sectoral activities with other groups within or outside UNECE.**

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## **2.4 Cooperation with other organizations**

### *2.4.1 World Trade Organization*

UNECE participates as an observer in several WTO committees among them the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). **UNECE cooperates closely with the WTO Agricultural Division to ensure that the standards set are in line with WTO regulations.**

### *2.4.2 FAO/WHO Joint Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius)*

The Working Party and the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius) especially the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables cooperate to achieve harmonization of standards and to avoid duplication of work.

### *2.4.3 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)*

The OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables has adopted the UNECE standards and elaborates explanatory material based on them. Their explanatory brochures include color photographs illustrating specific defects and serve as a tool for interpreting the provisions of the standards as well as promoting their international uniform application.

### *2.4.4 European Commission*

The Working Party and its subsidiary specialized sections-work in cooperation with the European Commission to achieve the closest harmonization possible of UNECE and EC standards to promote trade facilitation. The UNECE standards are taken into account when drafting European Community standards which are mandatory at all levels of marketing from producer to the retail level.

## **3. MEETINGS**

### **3.1 Attendance**

As the purpose of commercial standardization is trade facilitation, the work greatly benefits from the attendance of a wide range of importing and exporting countries as well as regional and international organizations. The rules for attendance and the work procedure for the elaboration of a new UNECE standard or the revision of an existing standard are designed to give a wide range of opportunities to consult all interested parties and come to a generally accepted compromise.

#### *3.1.1 Participants*

The following can attend the meeting as participants if they so wish:

- members of the United Nations Economic Commissions for Europe and Africa;
- members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Western Asia;

- members of the United Nations or its Specialized Agencies;
- members of the World Trade Organization.

Participants may

- propose amendments for the revision of existing standards, according to their needs or interests;
- propose the elaboration of commercial quality standards for items of economic importance to them or their region;
- propose guidelines on issues related to standards;
- serve as members of the bureau (Chairperson/Vice-Chairperson);
- serve as expert rapporteurs for the elaboration or revision of UNECE standards;
- express objections to the decisions of the Working Party by formal reservations included in the texts of the standards, or noted in the reports of the specialized section or the Working Party.

#### *3.1.1.1 Composition of participants delegations*

Each participant will appoint through its administration (government(s)) a representative to be the head of the delegation who may be accompanied by their representatives as members of the delegation.

A member of a delegation may not serve concurrently during a session as a member of any other delegation.

Normally the head of delegation will speak during the sessions. Other members of the delegation may be authorized to speak by the head of the delegation for the purpose of explaining a technical or factual point under discussion.

#### *3.1.2 Observers*

Observers may be either intergovernmental organizations or non-governmental organizations.

Intergovernmental organizations e.g.

- CODEX (Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme)
- EPPO (European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization)
- FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization)
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)
- WTO (World Trade Organization)

Any other intergovernmental organizations can attend if they wish. They should address a letter to the secretariat informing about their attendance.

Non-governmental organizations, e.g

- CLAM (Comité de Liaison de l'Agrumiculture Méditerranéenne),
- CIMO (Confederation of Importers and Marketing Organization in Europe of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables)
- COLEACP (Comité de Liaison - Europe - Africa - Caraïbes - Pacifique - pour la promotion des fruits tropicaux, légumes de contre-saison, fleurs, plantes ornementales et épices),
- EAN International,
- EUCOFEL (European Union of the Fruit and Vegetable Wholesale Import and Export Trade)

- EUROPATAT (European Union of the Potato Trade)
- INC (International Nut Council)

Any other Non-governmental organization having an interest in the standardization activities can apply for observer status to sessions of the Working Party and/or specialized sections. This status can be granted by the chairperson of the relevant body.

Observers may:

- propose amendments for the revision of existing standards, according to their needs or interests;
- propose the elaboration of commercial quality standards for items of economic importance to them or their region;
- serve as rapporteurs for the elaboration or revision of UNECE standards;

### **3.3 Preparation of sessions of the Working Party and the specialized sections**

#### *3.3.1 Pre-session timetable*

The following timetable ensures timely publication and translation of documents as well as an orderly preparation of the meetings.

*14 weeks before the session:*

**The secretariat (in coordination with the Chairperson) prepares a draft agenda (based on the agenda contained in an addendum to the last report (see 3.5)) and sends out with a call for documents by email/fax to regular participants and observers accompanied by an invitation to the meeting.**

**Chairpersons and Vice-chairpersons will receive a special invitation to attend the Working Party session to present the relevant reports.**

*14-12 weeks before the session:*

**Authors inform the secretariat of:**

- **subject, length, language, and expected date of submission of documents they intend to send,**
- **any additional documents that do not yet appear in the draft agenda**
- **eventual cancellations of documents appearing in the draft agenda.**

*12-10 weeks before the session:*

**The secretariat (in coordination with the chairperson) prepares the detailed draft agenda and makes it available on the home page as soon as it is finalized.**

*10 weeks before the session:*

**Documentation received by this date will be sent for translation and distributed on the homepage and on paper with an official document number.**

*6 weeks before the session:*

**Documentation received by this date will be distributed (homepage, paper) in the original language only with an official document number**

**Any document received later will be given an INF number and be made available on the homepage and in a limited number of paper copies at the session. The authors are advised to bring a sufficient number of paper copies to the session. INF documents can only be discussed if the participants agree.**

*2 weeks before the session:*

Delegations should submit registration forms to the secretariat.

### **3.3.2 Pre-session documentation**

#### **3.3.2.1 From delegations**

Documents for sessions should be sent to the secretariat in electronic format (e-mail or diskette).

All proposals must include a written justification

In case of a major revision of a standard the original file for the standard should be obtained from the secretariat and deletions should be marked with a strike out (~~strike out~~) and additions or modifications either bold or underlined (**bold** or underlined).

#### **3.3.2.2 From the secretariat**

**The secretariat will usually prepare the following documentation:**

- **agenda**
- **matters of interest arising from the work of other groups within UNECE**
- **matters of interest arising from the work of other international organizations**
- **information about application of UNECE standards**
- **information on any corrections necessary to UNECE Standards**

### **3.4 Methods of work during the sessions**

#### **3.4.1 Opening of the session**

Each session held in Geneva will be opened by an official from UNECE outlining events within the organization that have an influence on the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections.

#### **3.4.2 Adoption of the agenda**

At the beginning of the session the secretariat will give the status of the documentation indicating what documents were received. Documents that arrived too late for translation or informal documents can only be discussed if the participants agree.



### *3.4.3 Discussions and decisions*

At the close of discussion of each agenda item or sub-item the decision(s) taken by the meeting will be identified by the Chairperson ~~or the Secretariat~~.

#### *3.4.3.1 Rules for decision taking*

The rule for decision taking in the Working Party and its subsidiary specialized sections is the ~~unanimous~~ consensus among the participants present at the session.

~~Unanimous Consensus does not prevent the possibility of any delegations disagreeing with the group.~~

Participants have the possibility to disagree with the group without preventing a decision being taken.

Their disagreement can be reflected:

- either in the report,
- or in the standard by means of reservations which should be restricted to specific technical points.

#### *3.4.3.2 Presentation of the work of the Specialized Sections to the Working Party*

**The Chair or the Vice-Chair of each specialized section will present the report of their group to the Working Party. If they cannot attend the meeting and they did not delegate this responsibility to another participant, the secretariat will present the report.**

#### *3.4.3.3 Technical discussions in the Working Party*

**Detailed technical discussions cannot be held in the Working Party. Texts requiring further technical discussion must be referred to the appropriate specialized section.**

**Minor technical points, corrections and changes may be considered and agreed to by the Working Party upon the agreement of delegations without returning the document to the specialized section to avoid lengthy delays over minor technical details.**

**The Working Party may tentatively agree to such adjustments and request, through the secretariat, that the delegates to the appropriate specialized section confirm the decisions.**

#### *3.4.4 Report*

Based on the Chairperson's summaries of each item, the secretariat prepares a short concise summary report reflecting the decisions taken, including revised versions of the working documents. This report is distributed to delegates for formal adoption before the end of the Meeting.

#### *3.4.5 Elections*

The bureau (Chairperson and up to two Vice-chairpersons) of the Working Party/specialized section will be elected at the end of the session. Following a proposal from a participant and seconded by another participant If

there are no further proposals or objections - the new bureau is elected. If there is no agreement the existing bureau remains in office until the beginning of the next session where new elections will be held.

### 3.5 Post-session work and documentation

The secretariat will prepare the final version of the report and its addenda. A list of follow-up actions and an executive summary of the results of the session will be added to ~~each the~~ report. **Addendum 1 to each report contains the draft agenda for the next session.**

Other addenda to the reports of the specialized sections contain the texts agreed for transmission to the Working Party or **any other text which the specialized section considers important to be translated after the session.**

Each specialized section will present their work and agreements for adoption to the Working Party.

The addenda to the Working Party report contain the standards/recommendations adopted. These documents contain the official texts of the standards. They can normally only be changed through the procedure of revising the standard except in the case of minor editorial amendments and corrections which will be documented in a yearly corrigendum produced by the secretariat for the Working Party. **Typing errors can be corrected by the Secretariat.**

Every two years the work programme for the new biennium is updated and added as an addendum.

### 3.6 Schedule of formal meetings

Working Party (WP.7)	3 days	annually
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (GE.1)	4-5 days	annually
Dry and Dried Fruit (GE.2)	4-5 days	annually
Early and Ware Potatoes (GE.5)	2-3 days	biannually
Seed Potatoes (GE.6)	3-4 days	<del>bi</del> annually
Meat (GE.11)	3-4 days	annually
Eggs (GE.8)	adjourned sine die	
Cut flowers (GE.9)	adjourned sine die	

Official languages: English, French and Russian.

Formal sessions of the specialized sections and the Working Party usually take place in Geneva. They can also be held in a different place at the invitation of a host country. In this case no additional cost may occur to UNECE which means that the inviting country has to bear the cost for the meeting room and interpretation services as well as the travel and per diem of the Secretary of the group.

### 3.7 Informal meetings

In addition to their official meetings, the working party and the specialized sections, as parent bodies can delegate tasks to informal groups which can take the **form** of:

- *bureau meetings*: meetings of the secretary, chairperson and vice-chairperson and eventually other participants or observers. These meetings have as main task to prepare the next official session.
- *meetings of rapporteurs*: groups working according to terms of reference given by their parent body in a field of expertise of their members. These groups are usually of a standing nature.
- *working groups*: groups formed to achieve a specific task given by the parent body (usually within 1-3 years)

The meetings are held in Geneva or at the invitation of a host country. This offers the possibility for other experts to attend who would not normally attend the formal sessions and also for technical visits which help the groups to achieve their goals. The UN secretariat will service these meetings provided that adequate travel funds are available.

#### 4. PROCESS OF ELABORATING UNECE STANDARDS FOR PERISHABLE PRODUCE

Work on a standard for a product is initiated by a delegation (participant or observer) having a particular interest in the quality, marketing and standardization of the particular perishable item. A request to elaborate a standard should include information on the commercial importance of the item in import or export trade or both.

In reaching a decision as to whether to proceed with this work, the Working Party takes into account the commercial importance of the commodity for one or several countries on the basis of import and export volume, or both; the importance of one or several national commercial standards among; and, the quality characteristics of the item.

The following outline illustrates the steps necessary in the elaboration or revision of a standard.

##### Step 1 *PROCESS IN THE SPECIALIZED SECTION*

- Step 1.1 A proposal is made by a delegation to a specialized section
- to develop a new UNECE Standard for a commodity, or
  - to update an existing UNECE Standard
- The proposal must contain a justification as to why a new standard or the updating of an existing standard is deemed necessary.
- Step 1.1.1 If the specialized section agrees, the proposal is transmitted to the Working Party for approval. This process can be shortened by making the proposal directly to the Working Party.
- Step 1.1.2 If the Working Party does not approve the proposal, it will transmit a justification of the decision of the specialized section and the process ends here.
- Step 1.2 The task for drafting or re-drafting is assigned to an informal meeting (which can be established for this purpose) or to an individual rapporteur.
- Step 1.3 The working group or rapporteur work on the text seeking and taking into account comments from other delegations.
- Step 1.4 The new text (draft standard or draft revision) is presented to the specialized section for

consideration.

The text accepted by the specialized section **is** published as addendum to the report of the session.

Step 1.5 Proposals for amendments or comments on the draft should be sent in writing to the Secretariat and the rapporteur;

Step 1.6 **If participants do not agree with specific technical points they may enter reservations and referendum to allow further consultation with their national experts.**

**NOTE:** Steps 1.3 to 1.6 can be repeated several times.

Step 1.7 The new text is accepted by the specialized section and can be forwarded to the Working Party for consideration either:

- to adopt it as a UNECE Recommendation with a trial period of one or two years for testing in actual application; for revisions of existing standards this means that the existing standard remains in force but the revision can be tested in trade.
- or to adopt it directly as a new or revised UNECE Standard

**NOTE:** In practice a trial period will always be proposed for a new standard and a major revision of an existing standard. Minor revisions will be proposed for direct adoption as a UNECE Standard.

Step 2 *PROCESS IN THE WORKING PARTY*

The Working Party studies the proposal of the specialized section **and will either:**

Step 2.1. Adopt the proposal as it was made by the specialized section.

Step 2.2 Reject adoption of the proposal as a UNECE Standard but adopt it as a UNECE recommendation for a one or two-year trial period.

Step 2.3 Reject adoption of the proposal by the specialized section and refer the text back for further discussion.

In this case the process begins again at step 1.3.

**Step 2.4** In all cases (2.1, 2.2, 2.3) participants may **lift their previous reservations or may** enter new reservations against ~~all or~~ specific provisions if they are not in agreement with the text. **In case of adoption as a UNECE Standard, revised standard or recommendation existing reservations have to be confirmed at the session or in writing by participants or will be considered as withdrawn.**

Step 3 *PROCESS IN THE SPECIALIZED SECTION AFTER THE TRIAL PERIOD*

If a Recommendation completes its trial period it is again considered in the specialized section who will either:

Step 3.1 Agree that the Recommendation performed successfully in its trial period and recommends

adoption by the Working Party as a new/revised UNECE Standard.

- Step 3.2 Agree in general with the text but make minor amendments and adjustments and recommends adoption by the Working Party as a new/revised UNECE Standard.
- Step 3.3 Agrees that the Recommendation needs further study. It recommends to the ~~the~~ Working Party of its view that the trial period should be extended.
- Step 3.4 In all cases (3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.3) participants **may lift their previous reservations or may also enter new reservations against specific provisions if they are not in agreement with the text.**

Step 4. *PROCESS IN THE WORKING PARTY AFTER THE TRIAL PERIOD*

The Working Party studies the proposal from the specialized section and will either

- Step 4.1 Agree the proposal and adopt the Recommendation as a new or revised UNECE Standard. In this case existing reservations in the text have to be confirmed by a participant or will be considered as withdrawn.
- Step 4.2 Agree the proposal to extend the trial period of the Recommendation to allow further study
- Step 4.3 Refuse the proposal and reject the Recommendation noting the reasons for rejection. The Recommendation then returns for further consideration in the specialized section at step 1.3.
- Step 4.4 In all cases (4.1, 4.2, 4.3), participants may **lift their previous reservations or may enter new reservations against specific provisions if they are not in agreement with the text.. In case of adoption as a UNECE Standard or revised standard existing reservations have to be confirmed at the session or in writing by participants or will be considered as withdrawn.**

Annex I: Geneva Protocol

Annex II: Standard Layout (Fresh)

Standard: Layout (Dry)