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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development
Fifty-fifth session, 3 to 5 November 1999, Geneva

Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda

REVISION OF THE WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY
AND ITS SPECIALIZED SECTIONS

Note by the Secretariat

Background: The delegation of the United States had offered to prepare, assisted by the secretariat, a proposal concerning the review of the working procedures of the Working Party and its specialized sections.

**WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY
ON STANDARDIZATION OF PERISHABLE PRODUCE AND QUALITY DEVELOPMENT
AND ITS SUBSIDIARY SPECIALIZED SECTIONS**

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Goals of the work

The UN/ECE Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development has responsibility for the elaboration of harmonized commercial quality standards for perishable produce.

UN/ECE standards are meant to harmonize existing national commercial quality standards for perishable produce 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 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 UN/ECE 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 UN/ECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat (porcine, bovine and poultry) and cut flowers. World-wide Codex standards for fruit juices and quick frozen foods have been elaborated in co-operation with the Codex Alimentarius Commission in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts.

1.3 Geneva Protocol and Standard Layout

The framework and basis of the standardization activities work is the Geneva Protocol for the Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Produce (1954, revised 1964 and 1985). A Standard Layout has been elaborated on the basis of the Geneva Protocol which serves as a format for the elements included in commercial quality standards.

The standards establish the definition of the produce, levels of quality by means of minimum characteristics and quality classes, size classifications, marking, packaging and presentation requirements for the purpose of promoting orderly and efficient trade by providing a common trading language.

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

1.4 Work achieved

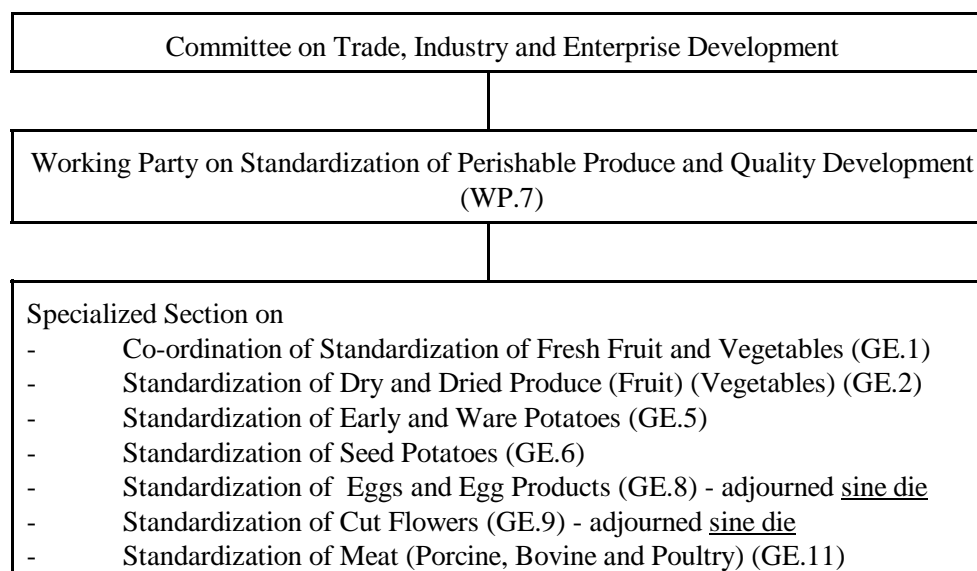
Close to 100 standards have been adopted in the different areas:

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

2. ORGANIZATION

2.1 Structure of the subsidiary bodies

The following chart presents the various subsidiary bodies which participate in the elaboration of UN/ECE Standards for Perishable Produce:



2.2 Secretariat

The secretariat servicing WP.7 and its Specialized Sections is situated in the Trade Facilitation Section of the UN/ECE Trade Division.

The secretariat is responsible 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.
- Maintaining the homepage with information on meetings and the text of all standards.
- Ensuring cooperation with other international organizations by attending their meetings and presenting the views of Working Party.
- Promoting the work of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections.

Address of the secretariat:

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Agricultural Standards	Fax: +41 22 917 0041
Palais des Nations	Email: agristandards@unece.org
Room 432	Homepage: http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm
1211 Geneva 10	
Switzerland	

2.3 Cooperation with other organizations

Cooperation with the European Commission

The European Union uses UN/ECE standards as a basis for its regulation. The ECE quality certificate is recognized as equivalent to the EU form for third countries. Close cooperation is maintained between the European Union Meeting of Governmental Experts on Standardization and the UN/ECE groups to ensure harmonization.

The EU working group takes UN/ECE standards into account when discussing EU standards. If during this work the need for amendments to UN/ECE standards arises the group proceeds as follows:

- if the amendments are minor or less strict than the UN/ECE standard, then they are adopted by the EU working group and sent to UN/ECE for harmonization;
- if necessary they are first presented to UN/ECE before they are adopted by the EU working group.

Cooperation with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables has adopted the UN/ECE standards and elaborates explanatory brochures based on them. The 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.

The work of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables on occasion leads to the need to revise or update a standard to align it more closely with current marketing practices.

World Trade Organization

UN/ECE participates as an observer in several WTO committees.

FAO/WHO Joint Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius)

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

3. MEETINGS

3.1 Attendance

As the purpose of commercial standardization is trade facilitation, the work greatly benefits from the attendance a wide range of United Nations member countries as **participants** and interested organizations as **observers**. The work procedure for the elaboration of a new UN/ECE standard or the revision of an existing standard gives a wide range of opportunities to consult all interested parties and come to a generally accepted compromise.

3.1.1 Participants

Any member State of the United Nations can attend as a participant if it has an interest in the standardization work either as a producing, importing or exporting country.

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;
- serve as members of the bureau (Chairperson/Vice-Chairperson)
- serve as expert rapporteurs for the elaboration or revision of UN/ECE 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.

Countries beyond the UN/ECE region that have participated are:

Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, India, Ivory Coast, Jordan, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Thailand, South Africa.

Composition of participants delegations

Each participant country will appoint a government representative to be the head of the country's delegation. The head of the delegation will be responsible for selecting government and non-government representatives to serve on the delegation.

The delegation of a participating country may be composed of government members and non-government members.

Government members are selected as follows:

- Has expertise relevant to the items on the agenda of, or likely to be discussed at, the particular UN/ECE Specialized Section meeting;
- Can assist the head delegate with items on the agenda of, or likely to be discussed at the particular UN/ECE Specialized Section meeting;
- Is representative of the individuals, groups, and organizations that have an interest in the items on the agenda of, or likely to be discussed at the particular UN/ECE Specialized Section meeting; and,
- Is representative of the individuals, groups, and organizations that could be affected by standards to be considered at the Specialized Section meeting.

Non-Government members are selected as follows:

- The head of the delegation may select non-government members from labour groups, the academic community, trade associations, specific business firms, that have an interest or could be affected by standards to be considered at the Specialized Section meeting; and
- The head of the delegation shall consider the necessity of obtaining the informed views of non-government individuals during the UN/ECE Specialized Section meeting;

Responsibilities of Non-government members:

- A non-government member of a delegation may not serve concurrently during a session as a member of any other country's delegation or on the delegation of an observer organisation; and,
- Non-government members of the delegation are not permitted to speak, unless the head of the delegation authorizes that person to speak for the purpose of explaining a technical or factual point under discussion.

3.1.2 *Observers*

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 expert rapporteurs for the elaboration or revision of UN/ECE standards;

The following organizations attend currently as observers:

- European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO)
- European Union
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- International Organization for Standardization (ISO)

- Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius),
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- World Trade Organization (WTO)

- International and regional trade organizations, e.g.,
 - CIMO (Confederation of Importers and Marketing Organization in Europe of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables)

- Non-governmental organizations, e.g.,
 - CLAM (Comité de Liaison de l'Agrumiculture Méditerranéenne),
 - COLEACP (Comité de Liaison - Europe - Africa - Caraïbes - Pacifique - pour la promotion des fruits tropicaux, légumes de contre-saison, fleurs, plantes ornementales et épices).
 - European Article Numbering International (EAN)
 - European Union of the Potato Trade (EUROPATAT)

Other intergovernmental organisations can attend if they wish.

Any other Non-governmental organisation having an interest in the standardization activities can apply for observer status to sessions of the Working Party and/or Specialized Sections. This status is granted if the participants agree.

3.2 Rules for adoption of agreements

The rule for adoption of agreements in the Working Party and its subsidiary Specialized Sections is the unanimous consensus. For this reason some technical discussions in the Specialized Sections are long and difficult, in order to reach compromise solutions which can be valid for all interested parties.

Unanimous consensus does not prevent the possibility of any delegations disagreeing with the group, which can be reflected in the standard or the reports by means of reservations.

Reserved positions are not compulsory for the country(ies) affected, as regards the particular requirement of the standard.

3.3 Documentation

3.3.1 Deadlines for documentation of official meetings

The secretariat should be informed at least 12 weeks before the session by the authors which documents can be expected and an estimation how many pages they will be. This is important for the translation forecast and for the timely preparation of the agenda.

Documentation to be translated and distributed by the secretariat have to be received by the secretariat 10 weeks before the session.

If documentation is received 6 weeks before the meeting it can be distributed in the original language only.

Documentation received later will be made available at the session as an informal document.

Documentation will be made available on the homepage.

3.3.2 *Format of proposals*

Documents for Meetings should be sent to the secretariat in electronic format (e-mail or diskette). The preferred word processing software of the secretariat is WordPerfect.

All proposals concerning standards should be change commands to the standard/recommendation in force. Each change should be justified in a proposal. The documents should have the format:

<Introduction>

<change 1>
<justification 1>

<change 2>
<justification 2>

....

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

3.4 **Methods of work during the sessions**

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

At the close of discussion of each agenda item the decision(s) taken by the Meeting will be identified by the Chairman or Secretariat.

On the basis of the decisions taken by the Meeting and identified by the Chairman or the secretariat, the secretariat prepares a revised version of the working documents during the Specialized Sections, distributed to delegations at the end of the meeting and annexed to the final report.

Based on the Chairman's summaries of each item, the secretariat prepares a short concise summary report for formal adoption by the Specialized Section before the end of the Meeting.

3.5 **Schedule of 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	biannually
Meat (GE.11)	3 days	annually

Official languages: English, French and Russian.

Meetings take place in Geneva, or in a different place at the invitation (and cost) of a host country.

In addition to the official meetings, informal working groups or meetings of rapporteurs are organized by host countries.

4. PROCESS OF ELABORATING UN/ECE STANDARDS FOR PERISHABLE PRODUCE

Work on a commercial standard for a product is initiated by a request from an interested party such as: a country interested in production, export or import of the item; an international or intra-governmental organization; or, an international trade organization 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 would take 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.

1. *Process in the Specialized Sections*
 - 1.1 Proposal by an interested party, or selection by the Specialized Section of a commodity of commercial importance to exporters, importers or both, as the subject of a future UN/ECE Standard or a Revised UN/ECE Standard which is approved by the Working Party to be prepared.
 - 1.2 Volunteer Rapporteur (if necessary) selected by the Specialized Section or an informal Meeting of Rapporteurs is established.
 - 1.3 Draft Standard or Draft Revision presented by Rapporteur(s) or an interested party for consideration by Specialized Section. Rapporteur or interested party revises after each session to reflect discussions and to request further technical data provided by experts.
 - 1.4 Countries' proposals for amendments or comments on the drafts should be sent in writing to the Secretariat;
 - 1.5 During discussions of the Draft Standard or Draft Revision countries may enter reservations against tolerances, etc., including ad referendum to allow further consultation with their national experts.
 - 1.6 Draft Standard or Draft Revision, once accepted by Specialized Section, forwarded to the Working Party for consideration to adopt as a UN/ECE Recommendation with a trial period for testing in actual application or as a UN/ECE Standard or Revision.
2. *Working Party studies the proposal of the Specialized Section and may:*
 - 2.1 Adopt the Draft Standard as a Recommendation for a trial application or as a UN/ECE Standard or Revision. Reservations may be entered against the standard or specific provisions by countries not in full agreement with the Draft Standard or Revision.

- 2.2 Working Party may decide to return the Draft Standard or Revision to the Specialized Section for further study. Reservations may be entered by countries having specific or general reservations. Specialized Section would study the returned draft and address reservations to the extent possible. Once the Specialized Section completes its review and revision of the Draft Standard, it would re-submit it for the consideration of the Working Party for adoption as a Recommendation.
3. *Recommendation completes its trial period(s) and is considered by the Specialized Section*
 - 3.1 Specialized Section agrees that the Recommendation performed successfully in its trial period and recommends adoption by the Working Party as a new Standard.
 - 3.2 minor amendments and adjustments to the standard may be necessary in light of findings without extending the trial period.
 - 3.3 delegates are requested to consider whether any remaining reservations might be lifted.
 - 3.4 Specialized Section agrees that the Recommendation needs further study. It informs the Working Party of its view that the trial period should be extended.
4. *Working Party considers the proposal of the Specialized Section. It may :*
 - 4.1 accept the proposal and adopt the Recommendation as a new UN/ECE Standard (further reservations may be entered)
 - 4.2 accept the proposal of the Specialized Section to extend the trial period of the Recommendation to allow further study by experts.
 - 4.3 refuse the proposal of the Specialized Section to adopt and instead rejects the Recommendation noting the reasons for rejection. The Recommendation then returns for further consideration in the Specialized Section.

Note: The Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the Working Party do not discuss technical aspects of the proposed standards, revisions of standards or Recommendations. Whenever a proposal or Recommendation reaches the Working Party which requires further technical discussion, it must be referred to the appropriate Specialized Section. Minor technical points 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. This approach is acceptable as a means of avoiding lengthy delays over minor technical details. The Working Party may tentatively agree to such adjustments and request, through the secretariat, that the experts concerned (delegates to the appropriate Specialized Section) confirm the decisions to accept the Recommendation or Revised Standard.