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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes

Thirty-first session, 12-14 March 2001, Geneva

Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING SINCE THE THIRTIETH SESSION

Note by the secretariat

This document sums up the relevant outcome of the fourth session of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the fifty-sixth session of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development.

FOURTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Committee (ECE/TRADE/262, paragraphs 32 to 39):

Item 6 - Agricultural quality standards

32. The secretariat introduced the activities of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7) and gave an overview of the work carried out since the last session of the Committee. The Vice-Chairman of WP.7, Mr. David Priester, gave an in-depth explanation of the background and discussions in WP.7 on the elaboration of explanatory material.

33. At the third session of the Committee, the European Community had requested that the secretariat prepare a study on the modalities of preparing explanatory brochures for UN/ECE standards within the framework of WP.7 and its specialized sections. This request had been supported by the United States and agreed by the Committee.

34. The results of this study had shown that the work could be integrated without significantly increasing the number of meeting days but not without increasing existing resources. Specifically, an additional staff member would need to be employed. Because of the 0% growth budget of the UN/ECE this could only be achieved either through the creation of a trust fund with voluntary contributions from countries or through a reallocation of resources within the secretariat.

35. At its last session WP.7 decided to create an ad hoc group to look into this question, while stressing that there should be no duplication of work, i.e. WP.7 would be prepared to take on the preparation of explanatory material only if this work ceased to be done at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

36. Both the delegation of the European Community and that of the United States indicated their interest in seeing this work transferred to the UN/ECE provided that work on explanatory material is discontinued at the OECD and the problem of funding the work at the UN/ECE is solved.

37. The delegation of the European Community stated that while it had taken note of the possibility of funding this activity *via* a trust fund, priority should be given to solving this problem by reallocating resources within the Trade Division. The Committee then **requested** that the secretariat report on possibilities for doing this and provide feedback to the Working Party at its next session in November 2000.

38. The delegation of the Russian Federation said that it placed high priority on the work of WP.7 and its specialized sections, especially Meat and Seed Potatoes. It welcomed the fact that the latter group would discuss genetically modified organisms in the future but requested that work already done by other bodies be taken into account in order to avoid any duplication of work.

39. The Committee then **noted** documents TRADE/2000/5 and TRADE/WP.7/1999/7, which contain further details of the work done by WP.7 during this period.

FIFTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY

The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Working Party (TRADE/WP.7/2000/11, paragraphs 56 to 64):

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Document for this session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.2/2000/8 (Report of the thirtieth session)

56. The new Chairman of the Specialized Section, Mr. P. G. Bianchi (Italy), informed the Working Party on the outcome of the thirtieth session of the Specialized Section as well as the meeting of rapporteurs on seed potatoes which was held in Moscow from 24 to 27 October 2000. He thanked the former Chairman, Mr. B. Borrel (Canada), for his contribution to the work of the group.

Amendments to the UN/ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes

Documents for this session: TRADE/WP.7/2000/4

57. Mr Bianchi introduced the proposed amendments to the standard concerning the introduction of tolerances for powdery scab and viruses.

58. The Working Party adopted the amendments. The consolidated text of the standard will be published in Addendum 20.

Meeting of Rapporteurs

59. The meeting was held in Moscow following an invitation from the Ministry of Industry, Science and Technologies, responsible for food standards. Mr. Bianchi thanked the Russian authorities for the kind invitation, the excellent organization and their hospitality.

60. The meeting was, on the one hand, a regular meeting of the rapporteurs meant to advance the UN/ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes according to the tasks given by the Specialized Section, and on the other hand, it was meant to learn more about the situation of potato production in the Russian Federation and to give recommendations if possible.

61. The rapporteurs took note of the information provided by the Ministry of Agriculture that Russia had the biggest growing area for potatoes in the world, but that there were concerns with a relatively low yield (if compared internationally) and high losses. They agreed with the assessment of the Russian authority that it will be necessary to improve seed potato production in quantity and quality, to use certified seed and to update production and storage methods in order to ameliorate the situation.

62. The rapporteurs recommended several ways forward, mainly focussing on the necessity to educate farmers and inspectors about the importance of using certified seed. They stressed that farmers had to learn the connection between the use of certified seed, higher yield, less use of pesticides, better products and a higher profit. The recommendations were greatly appreciated by the participants and it was ensured that Russia would continue to participate in the UN/ECE meetings.

63. The rapporteurs undertook a technical visit to the Centre "Bioengineering" and were informed by the Deputy Director, Dr. Dorokhov, about the current status of certification of GMO varieties of potatoes.

Future Work

64. The Specialized Section has identified the following items for its work in the next year:

- evaluation of the replies received on the questionnaire on national certification schemes and preparation of a summary publication;
- annexing of a sampling plan to the standard;
- elaboration of subdivisions of categories for international harmonization (which are at the moment left to individual countries);
- research on concerns of seed buyers in order to address these in the standard;
- evaluation of the impact of GMOs on the standard;
- holding a cooperation meeting with other organizations concerned with standardization of seed potatoes.