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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes

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Item 4 (b) of the Provisional Agenda

DISCUSSION PAPER ON PROVISIONS ACKNOWLEDGING POTENTIAL DETERIORATION OF A
LOT ATTRIBUTABLE TO PROGRESSIVE DISEASES*

Transmitted by the United Kingdom, the United States and the Netherlands

Note by the secretariat: The UNECE Seed Potato Standard defines quality tolerances at the export control point. However, there is a perception by the importing country that these are the quality standards to be applied at the point of import. This expectation is achievable for most of the diseases and defects listed in Annex III as they do not develop during storage. However, a number of potato pathogens cause diseases which can progress during storage and, hence, during shipment, so that there is a risk that a tolerance may not be met at the point of import even although the tolerance was met at the point of export. The present paper provided the background for the discussions and proposal contained in 2005/4.

* This document was submitted after the deadline due to missing secretariat resources.

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Introduction

The UNECE Seed Potato Standard defines quality tolerances at the export control point. However, there is a perception by the importing country that these are the quality standards to be applied at the point of import. This expectation is achievable for most of the diseases and defects listed in Annex III as they do not develop during storage. However, a number of potato pathogens cause diseases which can progress during storage and, hence, during shipment, so that there is a risk that a tolerance may not be met at the point of import even although the tolerance was met at the point of export,. This risk will be greater if the seed potatoes have been subject to poor handling and holding conditions during transportation. Among the diseases which can develop during this period are dry rot, gangrene, bacterial rots, late blight, silver scurf and skin spot. The only group in the UNECE Standard which would be regarded as containing progressive diseases is Group 2 of Annex III, covering dry and wet rots. The development of a range of rot diseases may be initiated by damage during grading when preparing a lot and by conditions favourable for disease development during transit. At present, there are no provisions or conditions in the UNECE Seed Potato Standard which acknowledge such a potential loss of quality between export and import because of disease development.

Possible Proposals

Option 1: Addition of a provision covering general obligation on soundness of lot

UNECE Standards for other agricultural commodities contain a general provision which specifies that the National Designated authority should be satisfied that the commodity should travel with a minimal risk of deterioration by the time of arrival at its destination. Clearly it is important that lots containing tubers with progressive rot diseases are not accepted solely because they meet the tolerance. Other factors may affect the acceptability of a lot for marketing. For example, infected tubers may not have time to develop into rots if the tubers are examined within a day or two of grading. In such cases, there may be a significant risk that a consignment could deteriorate during transport. The addition of a general obligation in the Standard would empower an NDA to take additional action in such a scenario. The lot could be held for a number of days to assess whether further rotting might occur or the seller could be asked to remove the rots.

It is proposed that the following statement should be inserted at II.A.Minimum requirements:

The condition of the seed potatoes at point of export, particularly with regard to progressive diseases e.g. tuber rots (Annex III), should be such as to enable them:

- *to withstand transport and handling*
- *to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination*

Option 2: Retain current tolerance of 1% with a additional provision covering guidance on inspections by NDA

The current tolerance of 1% would be retained but a statement providing general guidance on the use of stricter tolerances at point of export inspection would be proposed in order to minimise the risk of further significant development of progressive diseases after inspection. The following statement would be added under 2 of Annex III which sets out the standard for tuber inspections: “ For progressive diseases such as rots, inspection at the point of export may only give an indication of the quality at the the place of delivery as an unpredictable increase in disease may occur, on occasions, on lots which comply with the minimum export tolerance. Producing countries may apply a lower tolerance at the point of export sufficient to comply with the 1% tolerance at the point of delivery.” The effect of this addition is to imply that the 1% tolerance is a destination tolerance without using that terminology which is not used in other UNECE Standards.

Option3: Introduction of a specific destination tolerance

A destination tolerance would specify a quality standard which should be reasonably achieved at the point of import from a specified export tolerance. However, the adoption of a destination tolerance would not be consistent with the approach in other UNECE Agricultural Standards. Moreover, compliance with such a tolerance is outwith the control of the NDA which is responsible for export controls. While destination

tolerances might be appropriate for progressive diseases, they are less appropriate for other diseases such as common scab. The introduction of destination tolerances would, therefore, be appropriate for some diseases but not for others. The inclusion, in the UNECE Seed Potato Standard, of destination tolerances for some diseases but not others could be confusing. This option did not receive support at the Meeting of the Specialised Section in 2004 and should not be considered as a proposal for the forthcoming meeting in 2005.