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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Thirty-sixth session
Geneva, 20-22 March 2006

REPORT OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION

Executive summary

The Specialized Section agreed on the following changes to the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes:

- Amend annex V regarding the reference to the UNECE standard on the label
- Amend chapter III, Provision Concerning Quality:
 - Section E. Comparative trials
 - Annex VI: General amendments to the text
- Amend the List of Diseases and Pests
- Complement the List of Diseases and Pests with images
- Suspend discussions on Living Modified Organisms (LMOs) at the meetings of the Specialized Section.

Opening of the session

1. The Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes held its thirty-sixth session in Geneva from 20 to 22 March 2006. It was chaired by Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy). The Director of the Trade and Timber Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, opened the session and welcomed delegations to Geneva.
2. On behalf of UNECE, she thanked the delegations of Germany and Switzerland for hosting the meetings of the extended bureau that had been held in the intersessional period. She regretted that lack of official travel funds had prevented the secretariat from attending these meetings.
3. She informed the group that Mr. Claudio Meza had been nominated secretary to WP.7 and its specialized sections.
4. She drew attention to the fact that a major independent evaluation of UNECE had taken place, and that the resulting Work Plan on UNECE Reform (E/ECE/1434/Rev.1, 12 December 2005) had recommended that the activities in agricultural quality standards should be strengthened. The Agricultural Quality Standards Unit has thus benefited from the allocation of a new post.
5. She said that consultations shall be initiated with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in order to concentrate the agricultural quality standards activities of the two organizations within the UNECE. This work includes the development of implementation guidelines for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. Currently, the UNECE is preparing a transition plan to be submitted to the OECD Scheme on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables on how this transfer should be made.

Participation

6. The session was attended by delegations from the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
7. The European Community was also represented.
8. A representative from the non-governmental organization Dutch Potato Organization participated in the session.

Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/1

9. The agenda was adopted with the changes that are reflected in this report.
10. The following document was deleted from the provisional agenda:

- ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/8 Exchange of practices for taking samples for tuber inspection.

11. The following documents were added to the agenda:

- INF.1: Consolidated text of the standard with the proposed amendments included. (Secretariat).
- INF.2: Exchange of practices for taking samples for tuber inspection. (Netherlands and United States).
- INF.3: Rules and Practices of the Inter-European Trade in Potatoes (RUCIP), 2006.

Item 2: Matters of interest since the last session

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/2

12. The secretariat introduced document ECE/TRADE/WP.7/2006/2, which contains the discussion on the work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) that was held at the 2005 session of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED). This is an excerpt from the report of the 9th session of the Committee (ECE/TRADE/360, paragraphs 33 to 35).

13. At the request of delegations, the secretariat informed the participants that the Prototype training course for seed potato certification was among the material to be considered in capacity-building activities to be conducted by the secretariat in the near future.

14. Delegations recommended that capacity-building activities be especially addressed to a group of countries and/or regions rather than to individual countries. A significant increase in the promotion of the quality standards should be reinforced in particular in countries that have not yet implemented them, and implementation should be supported in less advantaged member States.

Item 3: Information on the results of the meetings of the bureau

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/3

15. The chair informed the Specialized Section on the results of the meeting of the bureau. Parts of this document are used as input for discussion under specific agenda items.

Item 4: Review of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes

16. The standard, including the changes proposed at this session, is contained in INF.1. The reservations currently contained in the UNECE Standard were reviewed and maintained. The secretariat was asked to consult with Belgium, Greece, Romania and Sweden to ascertain whether their positions in reservations 4 and 5 should be maintained or removed from the standard.

(a) Reference to the UNECE standard on the label

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/4

17. At recent meetings, the Specialized Section had discussed ways to raise awareness and give more visibility to the UNECE Standard by reflecting it on the label.

18. The Extended Bureau proposed that the words “UNECE Standard” be included in the information provided on the label (Annex V). Countries trading in seed potatoes internationally would thus have this wording on the official label. This would significantly enhance the profile of the UNECE Standard if used by exporting countries either at the request of an importing country or as common practice.

19. Suggestions were made to reference the UNECE Standard within the additional information on the phytosanitary certificate.

20. The Specialized Section discussed this proposal extensively. Although there were some reservations on the practical implementation of this amendment in the label, the proposal was widely supported by delegations.

Decision:

- Amend Annex V, modifying heading “A. Required particulars” to read “A. Particulars”.
- Introduce new item “1. UNECE Standard, if appropriate” in the list of particulars. Renumber list of particulars to reflect the new item.

(b) Further development of Annex VIII: Images for common scab/netted scab

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/5

21. In previous sessions of the Specialized Section, new images had been developed to replace the existing ones. Germany had prepared a presentation with new images for common and netted scab, which were proposed to the Section.

22. The images, their use and presentation in the standard were analysed in detail. It was felt, however, that a more comprehensive set of images was needed for inclusion in the standard.

Decision:

23. It was decided to retain the standard as it is with the current images. The Section requested Germany to coordinate a working group with Canada, France and Switzerland to prepare a set of images describing common and netted scab and powdery scab. The images should be presented in a table of 2 rows by 3 columns.

(c) Proposed amendments to chapter III, Provision Concerning Quality, section E and to annex VI (comparative tests)

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/6

24. At previous sessions, the Extended Bureau and Specialized Section had discussed the possibility of amending the text of chapter III, Provision Concerning Quality, section E and the annex VI to represent the standard with a more updated text.

25. The proposed text was discussed extensively.

Decision:

26. Section E. Comparative tests, amend paragraph to read:

“E. Comparative trials

It is recommended that comparative trials be established by the DA to ascertain the condition of seed potatoes certified according to the Standard, taking into account statistical variability outlined in annex IX. The guidelines for organizing such trials, set out in annex VI, should be followed.”

27. Annex VI, amend the text of the title and parts I and II as follows:

Guideline for organizing comparative trials of plots grown from samples collected from lots of seed potatoes

I. Purpose of the comparative trials

The examination of seed potatoes in plots enables the quality (vigour, purity, healthiness, productivity) of seed lots put on the market to be checked at random.

II. Organization

1. Responsibility for the sampling

The sampling shall be done under the authority of the DA.

2. Sampling

(a) The lot as defined in annex VII is the unit represented by at least one sample.

(b) A sample consists of 110 tubers, taken at random from the lot.

(c) The sample shall be placed in a sealed sack; its label shall bear the information mentioned in annex V.

3. Trial fields

(a) Planting should be done in plots of 100 plants. The plots should be grouped by variety so as to facilitate comparison.

(b) Fertilization must be moderate, especially N to facilitate virus expression.

4. Visual examination

To be accurate, the visual examination shall in general be carried out in two stages, with an interval of 10-15 days between them. Laboratory testing may support visual examination. Primary viral infections shall not be taken into consideration.

Item 5: Arbitration rules/dispute settlement

Documentation: INF.3

28. The working group (France and the Netherlands) has prepared a document that defines rules and procedures to solve disputes using the structure already in use for perishable produce.

29. The Dutch Potato Organization observer presented on behalf of EUROPATAT the new document of Rules and Practices of the Inter-European Trade in Potatoes (RUCIP), 2006 version. These rules apply for Inter-European trade in potatoes (the secretariat is located in 13 countries).

30. The delegation of France asked for clarification on who does what when using RUCIP to solve international trade disputes. It is not clear which organization was responsible for physically controlling the products.

31. The delegation of the European Commission suggested to the group that they should avoid taking an urgent decision on the subject. The Chair mentioned that EUROPATAT might reference UNECE Standards in RUCIP.

32. The Specialized Section decided to collect concrete cases of arbitration disputes in international trade that would be reviewed in the next extended Bureau meeting. France would coordinate the collection of data.

Item 6: Exchange of practices for taking samples for tuber inspection

Documentation: INF.2

33. The working group (Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States) would propose a document to complement annex III of the standard with descriptions of generally used inspection procedures for lots including sampling methods and checks on homogeneity in different countries.

Decision:

34. The working group was requested to prepare a paper to define the best structure to collect input from different countries.

Item 7: The concept of Living Modified Organisms (LMO) in the Standard

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/9

35. At the last Specialized Section meeting, the concept of “variety” had been reinforced. On the other hand, no agreement on the introduction of a reference to novel traits for varieties had been reached. A previous attempt to refer to Genetically Modified varieties also failed. The Chairman proposed the study of the terminology used in the Cartagena protocol on biodiversity (LMO) to find ways of solving this problem.

36. It was felt that the group was not progressing on this subject. There was a lack of support to continue with these discussions in the Specialized Section.

Decision:

37. The Chairman recommended suspending discussions on LMO until the subject became more relevant to the Specialized Section. The subject would be withdrawn from the agenda of the next session.

Item 8: Superficial necrosis caused by virus (PTNRD)

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/10 (France)

38. The subject had been addressed in a concept paper for the meeting. It concludes that the methodology to check and distinguish relevant viruses was not available.

39. The delegation of France reported that in the meantime progress had been made. They proposed to prepare a new paper to address how the methodological problems could be overcome. They offered to organize a meeting with other interested parties in their research institute specializing in this issue. The delegation of the United Kingdom offered to cooperate with France on the paper.

Decision:

40. It was agreed to update the 2004 paper in the light of developments in methodologies for testing and recent information regarding the spread of the virus.

41. France was requested to coordinate a working group with the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom to prepare a proposal. The document would be discussed at the next extended Bureau meeting.

Item 9: Paper on distribution of tomato spotted wilt virus

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/11 (United Kingdom)

42. The delegation of the United Kingdom had prepared a background paper on this subject. When reviewing the list of diseases and pests it had been found that other agents were included in other regulations but not in the UNECE standard.

Decision:

43. There was agreement to not put any tolerance within the standard. It was reported that the tomato spotted wilt virus was considered as 0 tolerance in the EU. The Bureau proposed not to include the tomato spotted wilt virus in the standard.

Item 10: Further development of the pest list and mentioning of standard test methods

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2006/12

44. The Specialized Section accepted several amendments proposed to the list of diseases and pests.

45. The possible enhancement of the list of diseases and pests with the introduction of images was discussed. The Specialized Section felt that the use of pictures in the list would provide the user community with a better understanding of such definitions. Delegations of Canada and France expressed their support for this proposal. France would provide pictures from one of their publications, but acknowledgement was requested. The Dutch Potato Organization would provide an update to the bibliography.

46. Delegations discussed the possible introduction of the pest list as an annex to the standard. It was agreed that the list should be kept as a separate document.

Decision:

47. The secretariat would include in the list the amendments proposed by the Bureau and the Specialized Section. The updated list would then be published on the website.

Item 11: Homogeneity/size of the lot

48. The extended Bureau discussed this subject at its meeting in Rostock. The aim was to improve the standard, specifically annex III, Minimum Quality Conditions for Lots of Seed Potatoes. Different examples were analyzed to conclude that individual samples should not have more than double the tolerance specified.

Decision:

49. The delegations of the United States and the Netherlands will draft the text on sample tolerances for consideration by the Specialized Section.

Item 12: Information collected by the secretariat on National Catalogues and Designated Authorities

- (a) National catalogues
- (b) National designated authorities

50. The secretariat will include the information received in an addendum to the report.

Item 13: Next meetings and future work

51. The Specialized Section was informed about plans for meetings of the extended Bureau.

(a) Date and place of the next session

52. The next meeting of the Specialized Section has been tentatively scheduled in Geneva from 19 to 21 March 2007.

53. The next meeting of the extended Bureau has been scheduled for 16 to 18 October 2006 at Arras, France. The delegation of the Netherlands has kindly offered to host the 2007 meeting of the extended Bureau.

(b) Future work

54. The draft agenda for the next meeting includes the following items.

- Images to complement the List of Diseases and Pests
- Assessment key for common and netted scab and powdery scab
- Improvement of assessment key for Rhizoctonia
- Amendment of Annex III with references to Tuber Inspections Procedures in particular for sampling and checking of the homogeneity of lots
- Discussion on the aim of comparative trials
- Collection of concrete cases of dispute on international trade
- Update 2004 paper on PTNRD in line with developments on testing methodology

55. The draft agenda for the next session is contained in annex 1 to this report.

Item 14: Preparation of the next session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

56. The secretariat will prepare a consolidated version of the standard including the amendments made at this session, which will be transmitted to the Working Party for adoption.

Item 15: Other business

57. The secretariat demonstrated the use of the List Server technology created to enhance the work of the Specialized Section. In addition, it presented the tool "Track changes" of MS Word. These tools will help the secretariat to strengthen both the work of the group and communications among its members.

Item 16. Election of officers

58. According to the Commission's Rules of Procedure and established practice, the Meeting re-elected the following Chair and Vice-Chair:

Chair Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy)
Vice-chair: Mr. Willem Schrage (United States)

Item 17: Adoption of the report

59. The Specialized Section adopted the report of the session.

The following addendum was published separately:

ECE/TRADE/GE.6/2006/13/Add.1 Information collected on National Catalogues and
Designated Authorities

Annex
Provisional Agenda for the thirty-seventh Session
Tentatively scheduled for 19 – 21 March 2007

1	Adoption of the agenda	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/1
2	Matters of interest since the last session	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2
3	Information on the results of the meetings of the bureau	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/3 (Report Arras)
4	Review of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes	
	(a) Improvement of assessment key for Rhizoctonia	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/4
	(b) Further development of annex VIII: Assessment key for common and netted scab and powdery scab	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/5 (Canada, France, Germany and Switzerland)
	(c) Further development of annex VI: Discussion on the aim of comparative trials	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/6
	(d) Amendment of annex III with reference to tuber inspection procedures	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/7
5.	Arbitration rules/dispute settlement.	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/8 (France)
6.	Exchange of practices for taking samples for tuber inspection	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/9 (Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States)
7.	Superficial necrosis caused by virus (PTNRD)	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/10 (France, Netherlands, Switzerland and United Kingdom)
8.	Further development of the List of Diseases and Pests: Images to complement the list.	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/11 (France)
9.	Homogeneity/size of the lot	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/12 (Netherlands and United States)
10.	Information collected by the secretariat on National Catalogues of Varieties and Designated Authorities	ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/13
11.	Preparation of the next session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards	
12.	Next meetings and future work	
13.	Other business	
14.	Election of officers	
15.	Adoption of the report	