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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Meeting of Experts on Co-ordination of
Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
(Forty-fourth session, 9 to 13 March 1998, Geneva)

Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING SINCE
THE FORTY-THIRD SESSION

Note by the secretariat

This document reports the discussions and decisions of the fifty-third session of the Working Party of relevance to the work of the Meeting of Experts.

Opening of the Session

The session was opened by the Director of the UN/ECE Trade Division, Ms. Carol Cosgrove-Sacks who informed the Working Party on the sudden death of Mr. Monastra, Chairman of the Meeting of Experts on Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit). The Working Party stood for a minute of silence in his honour.

The Director thanked the government of Turkey for hosting the Meeting of Experts on Dry and Dried Fruit in Istanbul in June 1997 and the government of France for hosting the Meeting of Rapporteurs on Potatoes (Seed) in Paris in April 1997.

Delegates were also welcomed by the Chairman of the Working Party, Mr. Vilchez-Barros (Spain) who stressed the need for close cooperation between all standardization bodies to facilitate international trade and increase the quality of perishable produce.

Matters of Interest Related to the Activities of the Working Party

UN/ECE and UN/ECE Trade Division

Informing the Working Party that the annual session of the UN/ECE had taken the decision to abolish the Committee on Agriculture, the Director of the Trade Division, Ms. Carol Cosgrove-Sacks, explained that the Working Party would now report to the newly created Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development. She also stressed the UN/ECE's and the member states' commitment to the work of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development. Furthermore, she mentioned that the Chairman of the Working Party had attended a recent meeting of the bureau of the Committee at which, as the Chairman explained the activities of the Working Party had received strong support.

The Director also stressed that within the contexts of the reform of the UN/ECE, all Working Parties were requested to review the activities of their Meetings of Experts as a routine exercise. She also noted that the working procedures of the Meetings of Experts working under the auspices of WP.7 were consistent with the requirements set during the course of the UN/ECE reform.

The Director also briefly explained that the vacant post allocated within the secretariat to service the Working Party had been announced and recruitment was underway.

Codex Alimentarius Commission

The representative of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the Working Party that at the twenty-second session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission the final versions of the Standards for Bananas and Mangosteen had been adopted. He also noted that the Seventh Session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables had reached the following conclusions:

- advanced draft Codex Standards for Limes, Pummelos, Guavas and Chayotes to the Commission for adoption at Step 8;
- advanced the proposed draft Codex Standards for Mexican Limes and Ginger for adoption by the Commission at Step 5/8, with a recommendation to omit Steps 6 and 7;
- advanced proposed draft Codex Standards for Pineapples (Revised), Grapefruits, and Longans to the Executive Committee for adoption at Step 5;
- Suspended consideration on the Draft Code of Practice for the Quality Inspection and Certification of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and Annex II (Inspection Site Requisites) at Step 7 in order to evaluate the need for a Code specific to the inspection and certification of fresh fruits and

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vegetables;

- Forwarded proposals to elaborate Codex Standards for Tiquisque (Lilac and White), Yucca, Uchuva, Yellow Pitahaya and a proposed draft revised standard for Papaya, to the Executive Committee for approval as new work;
- returned the proposed draft Codex Standards for Oranges including Guide for Use in Scoring Freezing Injury, to Step 2 so that Codex and UN/ECE Secretariats could elaborate a harmonized Codex Standard based on the quality provisions of the UN/ECE Standard for Citrus Fruits for circulation and comment at Step 3 prior to the Committee's next Session;
- Returned the proposed draft Codex Standard for Asparagus to Step 3 for additional comments including consideration by the UN/ECE in arriving at a harmonized text, for discussion at its next meeting;
- discontinued the consideration of the Application of Quality Tolerances at Import and the Use of Objective Indices of Maturity in Commercial Transactions of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables;
- agreed that two discussion papers concerning the establishment of size tolerances and definitions for terms used in the establishment of fresh produce standards to be prepared for consideration at its next Session.

In reviewing the seventh session of the Codex Alimentarius Committee for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, he pointed out that the close harmonization between UN/ECE and Codex Standards would continue in the future in view of facilitating international trade. He also noted that the UN/ECE Standards for Asparagus and Citrus Fruit had been made available during the session. With reference to the Standard for Oranges, he mentioned that the UN/ECE and the Codex secretariats would elaborate a harmonized Codex Standard based on the quality provisions of the UN/ECE Standard for Citrus Fruit. With reference to the Standard for Asparagus, he welcomed the efforts made by the UN/ECE meeting of experts to include slender asparagus in the Standard and noted that a revision of the sizing table contained in the UN/ECE Standard should be considered.

With regard to the joint FAO/ECE Expert Groups on Quick Frozen Foods and Fruit Juices, he noted that although these groups had been adjourned, their work could be taken up by the Codex Committee for Processed Fruits and Vegetables or as an alternative solution, revisions to the standards could also be taken up in the future via correspondence.

At the request of the delegate from the US and the Chairman, he explained that botanical names for new produce to be standardized by the Codex Committee for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables were included in the Priority List and that although the use of terms in other languages could be useful, confusion existed, even within the same country, over the use of one specific name.

At the request of the delegate from Belgium, who inquired about working procedures which had been established to prevent duplication, the representative of the Joint WHO/FAO Food Standards Programme explained that the Executive Committee had given instructions to continue the close cooperation and to take UN/ECE Standards as starting points. Furthermore, he noted that specific provisions were also included in the Codex Alimentarius Procedural Manual and that in case there were differences between Codex and UN/ECE Standards, those would be indicated in a footnote.

The representative of the European Commission noted that the described procedures were Codex procedures and that although initially UN/ECE standards were meant to be recommended for world-wide use, this was at a later stage

changed to UN/ECE Standards being starting points for the elaboration of Codex Standards. He suggested that the UN/ECE Meeting of Experts on Co-ordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables elaborate working procedures at its next session. This view was shared by the delegate from Greece who asked for well determined procedures.

The Chairman commenting on these remarks noted that every standardization body had the right to establish its own procedures and that the best procedure would be the adoption of existing standards. However, in so far as this was not possible under the Codex Alimentarius Procedural Manual, he urged for UN/ECE member countries to send their comments on Codex standards to the relevant contact points. In his view the most important issue was to not confuse the international trading community.

The representative of the Joint WHO/FAO Food Standards Programme stressed that there was very good cooperation between the Codex and the UN/ECE secretariats and harmonization work was well progressing. The delegate of the US also noted that a spirit of avoiding duplication had been established. The Director of the Trade Division stressed that the cooperation between the two secretariats noting that standards should be clear and transparent.

Report on the Meeting of Experts on Co-ordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

The Chairman of the Meeting of Experts introduced the report of the forty-third session (AGRI/WP.1/GE.1/50) drawing attention to the on-going discussion on the Standards for Apples and Pears and for Citrus Fruit. He also introduced the revisions to the following Standards:

- Broccoli

The Working Party, having reviewed the proposed changes, agreed to adopt the amendments as stated in document TRADE/WP.7/1997/3.

- Tomatoes

Lengthy discussion took place on a proposal by the European Commission to change the proposed amendment to the Standard for Tomatoes, namely in I. Definition of Produce, i.e. proposed addition of a fourth indent. The proposal by the European Commission consisted in amending the second sentence of Chapter I to read: "Tomatoes including trusses of tomatoes may be classified into three commercial types according to shape or presentation." The Working Party finally agreed that the proposal by the European Commission was only an editorial change and that it was not necessary to send the revision back to the Meeting of Experts, and that it could be adopted.

The Working Party also adopted all proposed revisions, including the subsequent deletion throughout the Standard of the words: "tomatoes attached to the stalk". The proposed revisions contained in document TRADE/WP.7/1997/3, paras. 2.c, d and e would be revised accordingly. An editorial change was also introduced to the revision contained in paragraph 2.e.

- Table Grapes

The Working Party adopted the proposed amendment of the list of varieties as stated in document TRADE/WP.7/1997/3.

- Asparagus

The Chairman of the Meeting of Experts informed the Working Party that the amendment to the Standard for Asparagus had been introduced to accommodate the

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inclusion of slender asparagus varieties and had been presented to the seventh session of the Codex Committee for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. At that session, particularly following a proposal by the delegation of Thailand, it was suggested that revisions be made to the provisions concerning sizing as the sizing table was currently based on quality grades and not on size codes which would more accurately reflect all diameters and colour groups of asparagus currently marketed.

It was pointed out that several countries had agreed to a possible revision of the sizing provisions and it was felt that the issue should be taken up at the next session of the Meeting of Experts on Co-ordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to arrive at a truly harmonized UN/ECE and Codex standard. The representative of the Joint WHO/FAO Food Standards Programme promised to urge the delegate from Thailand to provide a written proposal for that session and, if possible, provide funds to have him attend the next session of the Meeting of Experts.

The representative of the COLEACP inquired about the possibility of elaborating a UN/ECE Standard for Pineapples, a request which had already been submitted in 1994 and which was supported by several West African countries especially Ivory Coast. It was also noted that the Codex Standard for Pineapples was currently being revised and in case this work would be taken up by the Meeting of Experts the proposed revisions should be presented to the UN/ECE Meeting of Experts. It was agreed that the issue of considering the elaboration of a UN/ECE Standard for Pineapples would be placed on the agenda of the next session of the Meeting of Experts.

In a general statement, the Chairman urged all delegates to submit revisions, editorial or substantial, to the relevant Meetings of Experts in order to avoid lengthy technical discussion at the sessions of the Working Party.

Programme of Work

The Working Party unanimously stated its support for the work of the Meetings of Experts on Co-ordination of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Dry and Dried Fruit, Meat, Seed Potatoes and Early and Ware Potatoes. It was stressed that the groups were unique in their composition (including the trade sector), expertise, practical application and approach (including the up-dating of standards), tradition and long experience. Their work was a reference and precedent for other international standardization bodies.

With reference to the Meetings of Experts on Cut Flowers and Eggs and Egg Products, it was agreed to adjourn them sine die. The work of the joint FAO/ECE Groups of Experts on Quick Frozen Foods and Fruit Juices could possibly be taken up by the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables, the representative of the WHO/FAO Codex Alimentarius secretariat explained. This request would be conveyed to the upcoming meeting of the above Committee in March 1998. He also noted that the two groups had been served by the UN/ECE and the Codex secretariats and not by a host country.

The Working Party adopted its programme of work (TRADE/WP.7/1997/9) with the addition of the following decisions: to adjourn the activities of the Meetings of Experts on Cut Flowers and Eggs and Egg Products sine die and to abolish the activities of the joint FAO/ECE Groups of Experts on Standardization of Fruit Juices and Quick Frozen Food.

REVISED WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY
AND ITS SUBSIDIARY MEETINGS OF EXPERTS

I. Background

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. The purpose of this work is to facilitate international trade through the establishment and maintenance of commercial quality criteria in the form of standards which are indicative of actual commercial practice. The UN/ECE standards on perishable produce represent a harmonization of existing national commercial standards to take into account common commercial quality and trade practices. It is not the aim of the Working Party to create new principles of commercial standardization.

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.

These 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.

The framework and basis of this work is the Geneva Protocol for the Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Produce. A Standard Layout has also been elaborated which serves as a format for the elements included in commercial quality standards. These documents are found in ECE/AGRI/55/Rev.2.

As the purpose of commercial standardization is trade facilitation, the work has been greatly benefitted by the active participation of a wide range of member, including the European Union (Commission) representative, and non-member countries representing producers, exporters and importers of perishable produce. It should be noted that any member country of the United Nations may participate in the standardization activities of the UN/ECE under Article 11 of the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Non-member governments participating under Article 11 may

- fully participate in all discussions without prejudice to their Article 11 status;
- 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;
- objections to the decisions of the Working Party or in the same manner as member countries, its Meeting of Experts by non-member delegations may be expressed by formal reservations, or as viewpoints noted in the reports of the Meeting of Experts, the Working Party or the Committee on Agriculture.

International and regional trade organizations also actively participate, such as the Confederation of Importers and Marketing Organization in Europe of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CIMO).

Work on a commercial standard for a particular item 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. The secretariat may be requested to provide further background information on this aspect of trade to assist the Working Party in reaching a decision on whether an international commercial standard would be warranted.

Specialized agencies of the UN as Food and Agriculture Organization, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, are normally represented. (Close cooperation is maintained between the two Standards setting bodies)

Also, representatives of non-governmental organizations, such as CLAM (Comité de Liaison de l'Agrumiculture Méditerranéenne) and COLEACP (Comité de Liaison - Europe - Africa - Caraïbes - Pacifique - pour la promotion des fruits tropicaux, légumes de contre-saison, fleurs, plantes ornementales et épices), usually participate.

At the invitation of the secretariat, a representative of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, regularly participates in the session; and others can be invited.

Any country participating in the work of the Working Party can propose a product for which it feels a UN/ECE Standard should be elaborated. 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 UN/ECE countries on the basis of import and export volume, or both; the importance of one or several national commercial standards among UN/ECE member countries; and, the quality characteristics of the item.

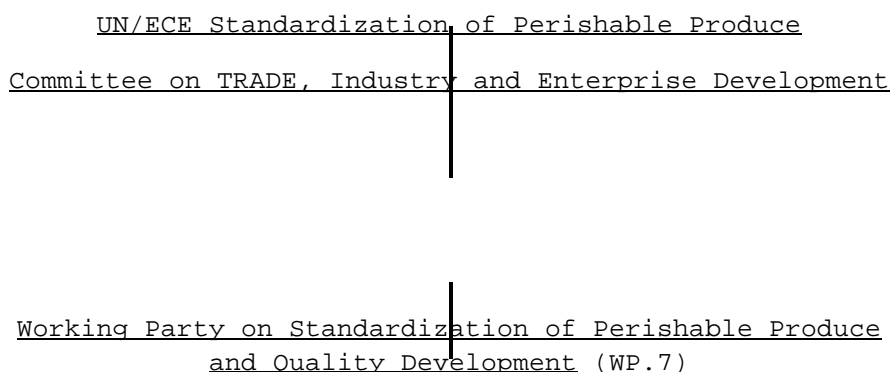
The work of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables on occasion leads to the need to revise or update a standard to align it more closely with current marketing practices. The OECD Scheme elaborations explanatory brochures to interpret and illustrate the standards with the aim of uniform application of the standards.

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The Working Party and its subsidiary Meetings of Experts also work in cooperation with the European Community (Meeting of Governmental Experts on Standardization) to maintain harmonization of UN/ECE and EC standards to promote trade facilitation. The UN/ECE standards in many instances have served as the basis of European Community standards which are mandatory at all levels of marketing from producer to the retail level. The European Community has in the past proposed revisions of UN/ECE Standards to maintain a close harmonization of commercial quality requirements within Europe.

II. Organization of the Standardization Activities

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



Meetings of Experts on Standardization

- Co-ordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (GE.1)
- Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit) (Vegetables) (GE.2)
- Meat (Porcine, Bovine and Poultry) (GE.11)
- Potatoes (Seed) (Early and Ware) (GE.6 and GE.5)
- Eggs and Egg Products (GE.8) - adjourned sine die
- Cut Flowers (GE.9) - adjourned sine die

III. Process of Elaborating UN/ECE Standards for Perishable Produce

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

1. Process in the Meetings of Experts

- 1.1 Proposal by an interested party, or selection by the Meeting of Experts 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 Meeting of Experts or an informal Meeting of Rapporteurs is established (Seed Potatoes, Porcine Meat, Bovine Meat, Dry and Dried Fruit).
- 1.3 Draft Standard or Draft Revision presented by Rapporteur(s) or an interested party for consideration by Meeting of Experts. 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 10 weeks prior to the following session or at a deadline set by the secretariat and the Chairman, in order to allow translation, preparation and circulation of the working documents for the consideration of all participants.
- 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 Meeting of Experts, 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 Meeting of Experts 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 Meeting of Experts for further study. Reservations may be entered by countries having specific or general reservations. Meeting of Experts would study the returned draft and address reservations to the extent possible. Once the Meeting of Experts 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 Meeting of Experts

- 3.1 Meeting of Experts agrees that the Recommendation performed successfully in its trial period and recommends adoption by the Working Party as a new

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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 Meeting of Experts 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 Meeting of Experts. 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 Meeting of Experts to extend the trial period of the Recommendation to allow further study by experts.
 - 4.3 refuse the proposal of the Meeting of Experts to adopt and instead rejects the Recommendation noting the reasons for rejection. The Recommendation then returns for further consideration in the Meeting of Experts.
5. Report of the Working Party is forwarded to the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development for endorsement of its decisions and adoption of its proposed programme of work.

IV. Methods of Work for the Working Party and its Subsidiary Meetings of Experts

The Working Party agreed to the following method of work for its subsidiary Meetings of Experts.

- Provisional agendas will be prepared by the Secretariat and reviewed and approved by the chairman.
- Documents for Meetings will be sent to the secretariat by electronic mail or computer diskette (Word Perfect 5.2) when possible. Coordination of the word processing programmes for documents will be agreed between the author and the secretariat.
- 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 Meetings of Experts, in English and if possible in French, distributed to delegations at the end of the meeting and annexed to the final report; and
- based on the Chairman's summaries of each item, the secretariat prepares a short concise summary report for formal adoption by the Meeting of Experts before the end of the Meeting.
- The format of reports will remain as at present; background to the topic; report of the discussion; decision taken (as adopted in the meeting and not to be changed).

V. Rules for Adoption of Agreements

The rule for adoption of agreements in the Working Party and its subsidiary Meetings of Experts is the unanimous consensus. For this reason some technical discussions in the Meetings of Experts 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 by means of reservations.

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

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 Meeting of Experts. 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 Meeting of Experts. 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 Meeting of Experts) confirm the decisions to accept the Recommendation or Revised Standard.

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