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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Fifty-third session  
Geneva, 21-25 May 2007

**REPORT OF THE SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION  
OF FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES ON ITS FIFTY-THIRD SESSION**

**Summary**

The Specialized Section revised the text of the Standard Layout and recommended that the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards adopt it for a trial period of one year. It submitted to the Working Party the amended texts on cherries, table grapes, ceps and apples for approval as revised/new UNECE standards. It also recommended that the Working Party adopt the revised texts on apricots, cucumbers and peaches and nectarines as recommendations for trial use until the end of 2008.

The UNECE cooperation task force and the OECD exploratory task force met jointly during the meeting to advance work on concentrating activities in agricultural quality standards within UNECE. They established working groups to prepare documents on various transition-related issues for consideration by the Working Party at its November 2007 meeting.

All documents discussed as well as any agreed revisions can be found on the UNECE website at: [www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/ge.01/2007-in-session.htm](http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/ge.01/2007-in-session.htm)

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The meeting was opened by Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director of the UNECE Trade and Timber Division. It was chaired by Ms. Ulrike Bickelman (Germany).
2. Representatives of the following countries attended: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
3. The European Commission (EC) was also represented.
4. The following States attended under Article 11 of the Commission: Mexico, Morocco and New Zealand.
5. The following specialized agencies/programmes participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.
6. A representatives of the following intergovernmental organization participated in the session: OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables (hereafter referred to as the "OECD Scheme").
7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the session: COPA/COGECA (Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations / General Confederation of Agricultural Co-operatives in the European Union) and EUROPATAT.

### **I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Agenda item 1)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/1

8. The delegations adopted the provisional and revised agenda with proposed changes and amendments.

### **II. MATTERS OF INTEREST SINCE THE LAST SESSION (Agenda item 2)**

#### **A. UNECE and subsidiary bodies (Agenda item 2a)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/2006/18  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/20

9. The secretariat informed delegations about the decisions of relevance to the work of the Specialized Section taken by the June 2006 session of the Committee on Trade (document ECE/TRADE/C/2006/18, paras. 25-27) and by the November 2006 session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/20, paras. 10-13, 20-28, 42-45).

**B. Other organizations (Agenda item 2b)**

10. The OECD representative informed the meeting about the activities that OECD had carried out or planned in the period since the 2006 session of the Specialized Section. The OECD Scheme has published the explanatory brochures on commercial types of melons and on table grapes. The brochures on kiwifruit and cucumbers were adopted at the end of 2006 and are expected to be published in 2007. Work continues on brochures for apples, citrus fruits, potatoes, melons, hazelnuts, pears, peaches and nectarines, apricots and prunes. Electronic versions of brochures can be downloaded free of charge from the OECD website ([www.oecd.org/agr/fv](http://www.oecd.org/agr/fv)).

11. The OECD Scheme set up working groups on Guidelines for Inspector Training and for Inspections. It also adopted Guidelines on Risk Analysis and a document on the implementation of peer reviews. The first peer review will be undertaken on the Hungarian quality inspection system in the third quarter of 2007.

12. A revised OECD Council Decision was adopted (document C(2006)95). This document includes, as Annex II, the operating rules for conformity checks of produce exported under the Scheme.

13. The sixty-sixth Plenary Meeting of the OECD Scheme will take place in Paris from 11 to 12 December 2007.

14. The representative of the European Commission provided information on new EC regulations, on the reform of the Common Market organization of Fruit and Vegetables, and on the database on notifications of non-conformity with the standards on the European Union market.

15. The representative of the Codex secretariat informed the meeting about the next meeting of the CODEX Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to be held from 5 to 9 May 2008.

**C. Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in the UNECE (Agenda item 2c)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/2006/18/Add.1

16. The draft transition plan was discussed at the May 2006 session of the Specialized Section and revised to take into account that discussion. It was then approved by the June 2006 session of the Committee on Trade (ECE/TRADE/C/2006/18/Add.1) and submitted to the OECD Scheme for consideration at its meeting from 30 November to 1 December 2006.

17. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards also considered the draft transition plan at its November 2006 session and set up a cooperation task force composed of representatives of Slovakia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the European Commission and the UNECE secretariat.

18. At the 2006 plenary meeting of the OECD Scheme, a number of countries raised concerns about the transfer of activities to the UNECE and requested additional time to examine

the draft transition plan. The meeting invited delegations to submit questions on this topic to the OECD and UNECE secretariats. As a result, two rounds of questions and answers took place in the first quarter of 2007.

19. The OECD Scheme met at a special session in April 2007 to revisit the issue of transferring its activities to the UNECE on the basis of the draft transition plan and the clarifications received during the exchange of questions and answers. The delegations decided to establish an exploratory task force to examine all aspects of a possible transfer. The OECD Committee on Agriculture will be informed about the establishment of this group.

20. An exploratory task force was then established with participants from the OECD Scheme (from Germany, Switzerland, New Zealand, Netherlands and Morocco) plus the OECD secretariat. The OECD task force was advised to work closely with its counterpart, the cooperation task force set up by the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. The OECD exploratory task force is expected to provide a final report to the 2009 meeting of the OECD Scheme with a clear recommendation regarding the possible transfer of activities to the UNECE.

21. The UNECE and OECD task forces met jointly during the week of the Specialized Section meeting. The representative of Sweden was elected as Chairperson of the UNECE task force and the representative of the Netherlands was elected as Chairperson of the OECD task force. The task forces established working groups to advance transition-related work and prepare documents on the following issues for consideration by the November 2007 meeting of the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards:

- (a) Legal aspects (UNECE and OECD). This group will prepare draft terms of reference and working procedures of the Working Party and its specialized sections, as well as recommendations for future work on the Geneva Protocol;
- (b) Explanatory brochures (Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom and OECD). This group will explore new approaches to presenting the standards and interpretative material and will estimate the time and other resources needed to implement such approaches;
- (c) Financing (UNECE, European Commission and OECD). Taking into consideration work from group (b) above, this group will estimate the amount of and ways of obtaining resources, both financial and in kind, to bridge any gap between the cost of producing one or two brochures per year and the resources available at the UNECE;
- (d) Organization of meetings. Switzerland will propose ways of organizing the annual sessions of the Working Party and its specialized sections on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and on Dry and Dried Produce in order to incorporate effectively the work on brochures;
- (e) Other activities (Slovakia, Morocco, OECD). This group will propose how to incorporate other activities of the OECD (heads of inspection services meetings, peer reviews and preparation of various guidelines) into the future UNECE programme of work.

22. The chairpersons of the task forces will draw up a project plan to monitor progress in the work of the above groups.

23. The Specialized Section agreed that the UNECE secretariat should start work on brochures on sweet peppers and walnut kernels. Countries interested in taking part in this work were invited to inform the secretariat before the end of July.

### **III. PROPOSALS TO REVISE UNECE STANDARDS (Agenda item 3)**

#### **A. Early and Ware Potatoes (Agenda item 3a)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/2  
Informal documentation: INF.1; INF.9; INF.10

24. The delegation of France proposed to include two quality classes of potatoes in the Standard, reword provisions concerning minimum requirements and quality tolerances, and amend the text with two annexes describing the defects allowed in Class I and Class II for ware potatoes and for early potatoes (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/2).

25. The Secretary General of EUROPATAT (the European Union of the Potato Trade) presented the official position of his organization on the UNECE Standard for Early and Ware Potatoes (documents INF.9 and INF.10). Europatat considers the UNECE Standard a useful recommendation for the European potato market. However, in some European countries the market is ahead of the standard requirements; in other countries growing conditions may prevent them from being met. EUROPATAT did not support the French draft proposal on quality classes, but would be ready to contribute to its further consideration and development.

26. The Specialized Section decided to revisit the issue of introducing quality classes in the Standard at its 2008 meeting. The Working Group, composed of representatives of Belgium, France (rapporteur), Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, the United States, and EUROPATAT, was asked to review the French proposal, taking into consideration national approaches to quality classification in potato-producing and trading countries, as well as integrating producer, retailer and consumer interests.

#### **B. Apricots (Agenda item 2b)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/3

27. The Specialized Section discussed the proposals by the OECD Working Group on Apricots to amend the Standard, formulated in conjunction with the work on an explanatory brochure on apricots. The delegations recommended the amended text (in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/3) for approval by the Working Party as a recommendation for trial use through 2008.

28. The issues of russeting, single minimum size irrespective of quality class, maximum permissible ranges for uniformity in different classes, and possible reference to Brix levels in measuring maturity will be discussed at the next meeting of the Specialized Section.

### **C. Cucumbers (Agenda item 3c)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/4  
Informal documentation: INF.8; INF.12

29. The participants discussed the revision of the Standard on the basis of the proposals by the OECD Working Group on Cucumbers (document INF.12) following their work on an explanatory brochure, and of the Turkish suggestion not to make the sizing provision compulsory for cucumbers not meeting the minimum size requirements (document INF.8). The Working Group was asked to finalize provisions on sizing bearing in mind that size is not a quality-related parameter for cucumbers, and that sizing can be done by weight, length and diameter. The Specialized Section recommended the amended text in INF.12 for approval by the Working Party as a recommendation on trial through 2008.

## **IV. REVIEW OF UNECE RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda item 4)**

### **A. Cherries (Agenda item 4a)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/5  
Informal documentation: INF.6

30. The delegation of France proposed (document INF.6) that two commercial types of cherries be introduced in the Standard - "with stem" and "without stem (fruits of varieties that naturally lose the stem at harvest)". The discussion showed that, although the presence of a stem might be important for consumers in some countries, it should not be regarded as a quality parameter to be covered in the Standard. From the practical point of view, it might also be difficult to determine if the stems had been naturally lost or were lost due to cultivation and handling techniques. The Specialized Section agreed to submit the original text of the recommendation (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/5) to the Working Party for approval as a revised Standard for Cherries.

### **B. Peaches and Nectarines (Agenda item 4b)**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2004/25/Add.4  
Informal documentation: INF.2, INF.11

31. The Working Group, composed of representatives from Germany, Spain, United Kingdom and the United States, proposed (document INF.2) modifications to the Recommendation. These modifications took into account the results of the work on the OECD brochure for peaches and nectarines and the views expressed at the Guildford Harmonization Meeting in June 2004. The Specialized Section recommended to the Working Party that the amended text in INF.2 be approved as a recommendation on trial through 2008. The participants asked Italy (rapporteur) and other producing countries to do further work on provisions on sizing and maturity requirements and to report on the results at the 2008 session of the Specialized Section.

**C. Table Grapes (Agenda item 4c)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/4/Rev.1  
Informal documentation: INF.8

32. The delegations aligned the section on minimum maturity requirements of the UNECE Recommendation (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/4/Rev.1) with the draft CODEX Standard for Table Grapes. In addition, the section on sizing and related provisions on marking have been aligned to the Codex Standard. The new UNECE text will be submitted to the Working Party for adoption as a revised Standard. The delegation of the United States will send the text of its reservation concerning the maturity requirements to the secretariat by mid-August for inclusion in the Standard. The Specialized Section decided to revisit the minimum maturity requirements at its next session to better address the concerns of Israel, Turkey and the United States.

33. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to keep the list of varieties, excluded from the Standard, on the UNECE website.

**D. Ceps (Agenda item 4d)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/7

34. The Specialized Section recommended that the Working Party adopt the text in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/7 as a new Standard for Ceps.

**E. Apples (Agenda item 4e)**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2005/18/Add.2  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/6  
Informal documentation: INF.14; INF.15

35. The participants discussed provisions concerning minimum maturity requirements and sizing (document TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2005/18/Add.2) drawing on the Italian proposal (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/6) and similar ones by France and the European Commission to simplify the provisions on sizing. The delegations changed the provisions on sizing bearing in mind a sufficiently strong correlation shown by a number of research projects (for example, as reported in INF.14 from COPA/COGECA) between quality parameters and the size of apples, and considering the definition of a minimum Brix value for small fruit as a practical method for allowing small fruit in international trade. Both size measurements, by weight and diameter, were maintained in the Standard as being used by packers and inspectors. The Specialized Section agreed to submit the amended text of document TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2005/18/Add.2 to the Working Party for approval as a revised Standard for Apples.

36. The Specialized Section decided to revisit the issue of uniformity in size as well as the minimum requirements on colouring at its next session and asked the secretariat to put into one document the proposals by France and the European Commission for discussion in May 2008.

37. The delegation of the United States informed participants about the meeting of the CODEX Apple Working Group to be held in Washington D.C. from 4 to 7 September 2007.

**F. List of apple varieties (Agenda item 4f)**

Documentation: Informal documentation: INF.3

38. The delegations decided to set up a Working Group, with Italy serving as rapporteur, to make proposals to the 2008 session of the Specialized Section on the content of the list, on its relationship with the Standard and on the procedure for updating it. For the time being, the list of varieties should stay in the annex to the Standard.

**V. AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL TEXTS (Agenda item 5)**

**A. Conformity certificate (Agenda item 5a)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/17  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/7

39. The delegation of the United Kingdom presented the PEACH system (Procedure for the Electronic Application for Certificates from the Horticultural Marketing Inspectorate). Importers or agents in the United Kingdom must apply online for a certificate via this system. Their application passes through a risk process based on ten criteria, including product, origin, trader and consignment size. Following the risk analysis, the consignment is either given a “high risk” criterion, meaning that an inspector must decide whether to inspect, or a “low risk” one, meaning that a certificate is automatically available and may be printed off by the applicant. If an inspection is required, the inspector will sign and stamp the certificate, if the consignment passes inspection. If the consignment is low risk, the certificate that the trader prints off has a “signature” and “stamp” coded in a unique numeric identifier. More details on the PEACH system and its use can be found on the website at: <http://ehmipeach.defra.gov.uk/>

40. The delegation of France presented its national project on introducing electronic procedures for paperless issuance of control certificates (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/7).

41. The secretariat reported on the results of the survey of national procedures and techniques for electronic signature and stamping. Among the 14 countries that replied to the survey, none uses an electronic method for signing and stamping conformity certificates for commercial quality. A few countries use electronic methods for sanitary and phytosanitary certificates or envisage introducing them.



**B. Standard Layout (Agenda item 5b)**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/2002/9/Add.13/Rev.1  
TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2005/16  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/8  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/9  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/10  
Informal documentation: INF.12; INF.13

42. The delegations discussed and agreed on the changes to the Standard Layout (document TRADE/WP.7/2002/9/Add.13/Rev.1) concerning the point of application and provisions on tolerances and marking proposed by Germany (documents TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2005/16 and ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/10) and the United Kingdom (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2007/8). A number of changes were introduced following the work on the revision of the Standard for Cucumbers (document INF.12).

43. To facilitate uniform interpretation of standards and to prevent subjective terms such as “slight defects” becoming trade barriers, the delegation of the United States proposed to amend the Standard Layout with a table on maximum allowances for defects. The participants regarded such a table as a good tool for summarizing defects at all stages of drawing up and interpreting a standard, but preferred not to include it in the Standard Layout.

44. The Specialized Section decided to delete the sentence “The [produce] must be carefully picked” from all standards (document INF.13).

45. Some countries forbid the use of only code marks without the information required in the Standard Layout. Code marks alone make tracing the supplier difficult, which contradicts food safety requirements. The labeling requirements for code marks have been amended in the Standard Layout. The Specialized Section suggested that the “List of authorities” prepared by the secretariat (document INF.4) could be extended to include authorities entitled to recognize code marks at the national level.

46. The Specialized Section recommended that the Working Party adopt the amended text of the Standard Layout for a trial period of one year.

**C. Revision of the terms of reference (Geneva Protocol) (Agenda item 5c)**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/2005/9/Add.1

47. The delegations decided to consider the revision of the Geneva Protocol within the broader context of discussions on the possible concentration of work on agricultural quality standards in the UNECE.

## **VI. USE OF CODE MARKS (Agenda item 6)**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/2003/25

48. This agenda item was covered under item 5(b).

## **VII. LIST OF AUTHORITIES (Agenda item 7)**

Documentation: Informal documentation: INF.4

49. The delegations asked the secretariat to post the list of national authorities for inspection of commercial quality of fresh fruit and vegetables on its website and keep it regularly updated.

## **VIII. APPLICATION OF UNECE STANDARDS (Agenda item 8)**

Documentation: Informal documentation: INF.5

50. The participants asked the secretariat to revise the draft questionnaire on the practical use of UNECE standards, taking into account the comments made by the Specialized Section, and present it to the 2008 session of the Working Party.

## **IX. CAPACITY-BUILDING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES (Agenda item 9)**

51. The Specialized Section took note of the capacity-building, training, promotional and other activities that have taken place since its May 2006 session or are planned for the near future (see annex).

52. The secretariat provided information on the United Nations Development Account project to promote international standards for commercial agricultural products worldwide. The project proposal, drawn up by the secretariat, has been shortlisted for financing for 2008-2009.

## **X. STRENGTHENING THE WORK OF THE SECTION (Agenda item 10)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/19/Rev.1

53. The delegations took note of the results of the 2005 survey on the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections, as summarized in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/19/Rev.1.

54. The Specialized Section agreed to publish on the UNECE website all new and revised standards with the new cover page proposed by the secretariat.

55. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to reorganize the presentation of information on standards and related activities on the website as discussed at the meeting.

## **XI. OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda item 11)**

Documentation: Informal documentation: INF.7, INF.8, INF.16

56. The delegations of France, Mexico and Turkey proposed to start work on UNECE standards for chanterelles (document INF.7), fresh chili peppers (document INF.16) and bananas (document INF.16). Since similar standards either already exist or are on the priority list for standardization of horticultural products in the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, the Specialized Section asked the UNECE transition task force and the UNECE and Codex secretariats to suggest ways of cooperating and avoiding duplication of work. The delegation of Mexico informed the Specialized Section that they had submitted a similar proposal on chili peppers to the Codex Committee.

57. The Specialized Section asked the Working Party to approve the initiation of work on two new UNECE standards for chanterelles and fresh chili peppers. The Specialized Section requested the delegation of Turkey to examine the existing Codex Standard for Bananas and advise the Codex Committee and the Specialized Section at its next meeting on how to improve it.

## **XII. FUTURE WORK (Agenda item 12)**

58. The delegations suggested the following items for future work:

- Standard Layout
- Recommendations for early and ware potatoes, apricots, cucumbers, peaches and nectarines
- Standards for apples, sweet peppers and table grapes
- List of apple varieties
- New standards for chanterelles and fresh chili peppers
- Sharing information on national systems of application of agricultural quality standards
- Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in the UNECE
- Capacity-building activities

## **XIII. ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Agenda item 13)**

59. The Specialized Section re-elected Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany) as Chair and Ms. Kristina Mattsson (Sweden) as Vice-Chair.

## **XIV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT (Agenda item 14)**

60. The Specialized Section adopted its report.

**Annex****Meetings since the May 2006 session of the Specialized Section**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Joint Slovakia/OECD/UNECE International Training Course	19-21 June 2006, Mojmírovce, Slovakia
Joint OECD/UNECE/EC Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables Standards	3-7 July 2006, Tbilisi, Georgia
Meeting on Harmonizing Interpretation of Standards	13-15 September 2006, Guildford, United Kingdom
Joint Slovakia/OECD/UNECE Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables Standards	December 2006, Chisinau, Moldova
Twenty-sixth International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables	5-7 March 2007, Bonn, Germany
Joint Slovakia/OECD/UNECE International Training Course	18-20 June 2007, Mojmírovce, Slovakia
Promotion of the standards for seed potatoes and early and ware potatoes at the "Potato Russia 2007" congress	21-23 August 2007, Moscow, Russian Federation
Meeting of the CODEX Apple Working Group	4-7 September 2007, Washington D.C., United States
Workshop on international commercial quality standards for agricultural produce	24-26 September 2007, Ragusa, Sicily, Italy
Thirteenth meeting of Heads of National Inspection Services	17-19 October 2007, Izmir, Turkey
Sixty-sixth OECD Scheme Plenary Meeting	11-12 December 2007, Paris, France
Meeting of the CODEX Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	5-9 May 2008
Meeting on Harmonizing Interpretation of Standards	June 2008, United Kingdom