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COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

Fifty-sixth session
Geneva, 2-4 November 2009

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

Summary

The Specialized Section:

- revised the text of the Standard Layout and recommended that the Working Party adopt it as a new Standard Layout, and decided to align the old standards with the 2009 Standard Layout;

- submitted to the Working Party for approval the revised/new texts of standards for apples (including the list of varieties), citrus fruit, sweet peppers, apricots, chanterelles, lettuces, tomatoes, pears, potatoes, and peaches and nectarines;

- approved the layout of the explanatory brochure for sweet peppers;

- decided to discuss at its next session the standards for citrus fruit, fresh chilli peppers, berry fruit, lambs lettuce, shallots, bilberries and blueberries, root vegetables, leaf vegetables and others on request, and to discuss whether it would include in its programme of work the glossary of terms for UNECE standards.

Texts of documents with the revisions made by delegations are available at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/ge.01/2009Nov-in-session.htm

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was chaired by Mrs. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany).

II. ATTENDANCE

2. Representatives of the following countries attended: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Israel, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovenia, 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 specialized agency/programme participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme (Codex Alimentarius).

5. A representative of the following intergovernmental organization participated in the session: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables.

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2009/5

6. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda, with proposed changes and amendments.

7. Texts of documents with the revisions introduced by the delegations can be found as post-session documents at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/ge.01Nov2009-in-session.htm.

IV. MATTERS OF INTEREST SINCE THE LAST SESSION

A. UNECE and subsidiary bodies

8. The secretariat informed the delegates that no decisions had been taken at the UNECE level having an impact on the work of the Specialized Section.

B. Other organizations

9. The representative of OECD informed the meeting about the activities by his organization in 2009. The number of the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme Member Countries had increased to 25, as Kenya and Serbia had joined the Scheme in 2008. The OECD Peer Review on the Slovak Quality Inspection System was undertaken in 2008 and published in April 2009. The OECD Peer Review on the Moroccan Fruit and Vegetables Quality Inspection System was undertaken in 2009 and will be discussed at the 2009 Plenary Meeting.

10. The explanatory brochures on potatoes and pears had been published, and the electronic versions of the brochures on citrus fruits on inshell hazelnuts had been made available in 2009. Hard copies of these two brochures were expected in 2010. All brochures were available on the OECD Scheme's website: www.oecd.org/tad/fv. Good progress had been made on the brochures for apples, apricots and peaches and nectarines. The final adoption of these brochures was expected at the 2009 Plenary Meeting.

11. The Scheme had initiated work on distance learning tools and the OECD Secretariat was examining the possibility of developing a common project on this issue with the FAO.

12. The OECD Meeting of the Heads of National Inspection Services was held in Finland from 2 to 4 June 2009. The Proceedings of the Meeting had been prepared and would be available at the 2009 Plenary Meeting.

13. The OECD-sponsored International Training Course had taken place in Slovakia on 30 June -2 July 2009. An OECD-Slovakia-United States-sponsored Workshop on Fruit and Vegetables Quality and Safety took place in Albania from 11 to 15 May 2009.

14. At the 67th Plenary Meeting of the Scheme, CLAM gave an economic evaluation of the market situation for citrus fruits. The presentation offered an overview of the four main products and forecast of trade for the 2008-2009 season. At the 2009 Plenary Meeting, Member Countries would be informed about the economic evaluation of the market situation for apples.

15. The work on the guidelines on inspection and inspector's training, as well as the work on sampling, continued in 2009. The guidelines would be discussed and possibly adopted at the 2009 Plenary Meeting.

16. The representative of the secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the meeting on the outcome of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables held in Mexico from 19 to 23 October 2009. The Committee considered the following matters and made the following decisions:

(a) Draft Standard for Bitter Cassava (Section 6 – Marking or Labelling). The Committee amended the labelling section and forwarded the revised section for endorsement by the Committee on Food Labelling and final adoption of the Standard by the Commission in 2010.

(b) Draft Standard for Apples. The Committee forwarded the draft Standard to the Commission for final adoption in 2010. The Standard is aligned with the corresponding UNECE Standard with regard to quality provisions. Differences mainly reflect the need to accommodate needs of Codex member who do not participate in the work of the UNECE, as well as the decision of the Committee to avoid to the extent possible the development and maintenance of the lists of varieties in Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables, and the fact that the Committee does not develop interpretative brochures for the application of Codex standards for fresh fruit and vegetables.

(c) Draft Standard for Avocados. The Committee advanced the revised proposed draft to the Commission for preliminary adoption in 2010 and further consideration at its next session. The main issue for discussion is the inclusion of new varieties traded internationally, particularly with regard to sizing and maturity requirements, which should allow harmonization with the corresponding UNECE Standard.

(d) Proposed draft Standard for Chilli Peppers. The Committee discussed a number of issues relating to the scope, quality classes and sizing especially in relation to the identification of commercial types. Based on the discussions at the plenary session, the Committee agreed to prepare a revised version for further comments and consideration at its next session.

(e) Proposed draft Standard for Tree ("Tamarillo") Tomatoes. The Committee advanced the proposed draft Standard to the Commission for preliminary adoption in 2010 and further consideration at its next session.

(f) Proposed Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and the glossary of terms used in the proposed Layout. The Committee had a general discussion on the approach that should be taken on the development of a Layout for Codex Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, in particular as to what provisions should be taken up in a worldwide Codex standard for fresh fruits and vegetables and how such provisions should be addressed. The Committee agreed to attach the proposed Layout to the report for further consideration at its next session and to suspend the development of the glossary pending further developments and eventual finalization of the provisions in the Layout.

(g) Proposals for amendments to the Priority List for the Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. The Committee requested the Commission to approve new work on a Standard for Pomegranate, while noting that proposals for new work would continuously be requested by means of a Circular Letter attached to its session report. In addition, the Committee requested the FAO/WHO Coordinating Committee for Europe to consider the need for converting the Codex Standard for Fresh Fungus "Chanterelle" (European Regional Standard CODEX STAN 40-1981) into a worldwide Codex standard so that the Committee could take up this work at its next session.

(h) Other considerations. The Committee agreed to request the Codex Secretariat to explore the implications of the decision of the UNECE Working Party to change the reference "UNECE" to "UN" standards and to also inform the Commission, through the Executive Committee, of this situation in order to obtain guidance on appropriate follow-up on this matter.

(i) The report of the fifteenth session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetable will be available at:
http://www.codexalimentarius.net/web/archives.jsp?lang=en

17. The representative of the European Commission explained that in August the Regulation (EC) No 771/2009 was published, amending Regulation (EC) No. 1580/2007. This Regulation updates marketing standards on lettuces, tomatoes and pears, bringing them into line with the corresponding UNECE standards adopted in November 2008. The Regulation also clarifies the wording used for exempted non-cultivated mushrooms to comply with the general marketing standard.

18. To facilitate the implementation of the new Regulation on marketing standards (applicable from 1 July 2009), a document on frequently asked questions was placed on the Agriculture Directorate website in September 2009: http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/markets/fruitveg/standards/index_en.pdf.

19. A study would be conducted on marketing standards, aiming at determining, first to what extent specific standards for fruit and vegetables in the EU were useful for the producers, traders and packers, retailers and consumers, and second to assess the validity of the arguments against or in favour of the repealing specific marketing standards. This study should start in January 2010 and first results are expected for October/November 2010.

C. Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in the UNECE

Documentation: Report on the transfer (INF.25, Informal document)
Commercial quality standards by UNECE (INF.26, Informal document)

20. The UNECE and OECD task forces presented their report on the transfer of the OECD Scheme activities to UNECE. The report recommends the transfer of all activities of the OECD Scheme to UNECE. Should the OECD member countries decide positively on the transfer, the OECD and UNECE secretariats would have to agree on what should be done with the existing explanatory material and what the procedures for the transfer should be.

21. The Chairperson proposed a round-table discussion to elicit the views of each of the delegations present. The results were as follows: in favour - 12; neutral or decision postponed - 10.

22. The delegation of the European Commission was in favour of the transfer.

23. Many delegations stated that they would make the decision on the occasion of the OECD Plenary meeting in December.

24. For many delegations the issues of efficiency and maintaining the high quality of the explanatory material were of paramount importance in deciding on the transfer. The delegation of France pointed out that bilingual (English and French) brochures were more practical, particularly for dispute resolution between traders.

25. The Specialized Section decided to report the above results to the Working Party.

V. REVISION OF THE STANDARD LAYOUT

Documentation: Standard Layout (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/2)
Proposals by France on mixing varieties (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2009/8)
Proposals by France on tolerances for rotting (INF.31)

26. The Specialized Section agreed on the following new wording for tolerances:

> For Class I: "A total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of {name of produce} not satisfying the requirements of the class but meeting those of Class II is allowed. Within this tolerance not more than 1 per cent in total may consist of produce satisfying neither the requirements of Class II quality nor the minimum requirements, or of produce affected by decay."
>
> For Class II: "A total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of {name of produce} satisfying neither the requirements of the class nor the minimum requirements is allowed. Within this tolerance not more than 2 per cent in total may consist of produce affected by decay."

27. The English term "decay" is translated into French as "degradation". The French delegation has pointed out that it is a non-progressive defect and does not include rotting.

28. The delegation of the Netherlands expressed its concern about the low percentage of tolerance for decay in Class I.

29. The Specialized Section decided to align with the 2009 Standard Layout all the standards to be submitted to the Working Party for approval.

30. The Specialized Section forwarded the revised Standard Layout to the Working Party for approval.

31. The delegations welcomed the French document on the products for which provisions on mixtures could be applied. The document would be consulted each time the issue of mixing varieties was discussed.

VI. REVISION OF UNECE STANDARDS

A. Apples

Documentation: The Standard (FFV-50: Apples)
Proposals by OECD Working Group (INF.38)
List of apple varieties (INF.39)
Proposals by United States on sizing and tolerances (INF.33)
Proposals by Poland on the revised standard (INF.37)

32. The delegations decided to:

(a) Add the following provision on watercore to the minimum requirements section: “free from serious watercore, with the exception of Fuji and their mutants”, and to delete the footnote referring to Fuji watercore from the section on minimum maturity requirements. The intensity of the watercore will be illustrated in the explanatory brochure by means of photographs related to different quality classes.

(b) Transfer the minimum requirements on surface colour from the annex to the classification section to read for:
“Extra” class: “Apples must express the following minimum surface colour characteristic of the variety:

– 3/4 of total surface red coloured in case of colour group A
– 1/2 of total surface mixed red coloured in case of colour group B
– 1/3 of total surface slightly red coloured, blushed or striped in case of colour group C.”

Class I: “Apples must express the following minimum surface colour characteristic of the variety:

– 1/2 of total surface red coloured in case of colour group A
– 1/3 of total surface mixed red coloured in case of colour group B
– 1/10 of total surface slightly red coloured, blushed or striped in case of colour group C.”

The minimum requirements on surface colour for Class II were deleted.

(c) Transfer the minimum requirements on russeting from the classification section to read:
For “Extra” class:

– very slight skin defects
– very slight russeting such as

  - brown patches that may not go outside the stem cavity and may not be rough and/or
  - slight isolated traces of russeting.

For Class I:

– slight russeting such as

  - brown patches that may go slightly beyond the stem or pistil cavities but may not be rough and/or
  - thin net-like russeting not exceeding 1/5 of the total fruit surface and not contrasting strongly with the general colouring of the fruit and/or
  - dense russeting not exceeding 1/20 of the total fruit surface, while
  - thin net-like russeting and dense russeting taken together may not exceed a maximum of 1/5 of the total surface of the fruit.

For Class II:

– slight russeting such as

- brown patches that may go beyond the stem or pistil cavities and may be slightly rough and/or
- thin net-like russeting not exceeding 1/2 of the total fruit surface and not contrasting strongly with the general colouring of the fruit and/or
- dense russeting not exceeding 1/3 of the total fruit surface, while
- thin net-like russeting and dense russeting taken together may not exceed a maximum of 1/2 of the total surface of the fruit.

The delegations decided not to harmonize the provisions on skin defects with those in the Codex Standard. More precise definitions of the surface of skin defects in the Codex Standard need to be tested in practice before including them in the UNECE Standard.

(d) Decided not to change the provisions on size differences for sizing by diameter to align with the wording in the Codex Standard, which allows less uniformity in sizing than the UNECE Standard.

(e) Did not accept the OECD Working Group proposal to change the section on size tolerances.

(f) Decided to align the wording on mixtures of varieties with the Standard Layout to read: "However, a mixture of apples of distinctly different varieties may be packed together in a sales unit, provided they are uniform in quality and, for each variety concerned, in origin." An explanatory note on "sales unit" ("unité de vente" in French) will be given in a glossary of terms and/or in the explanatory brochure.

(g) Decided to add to the section on the nature of produce the following provision: "The name of the variety can be replaced by a synonym. The name of the mutant or a trade name can only be given in addition to the variety or the synonym."

33. The delegation of the United States made reservations on colour characteristics in the classification section and on uniformity by diameter in the section on sizing.

34. The delegations confirmed the new concept for the list of varieties agreed upon at the May session of the Specialized Section.

35. The Specialized Section submitted the revised Standard and the list of varieties to the Working Party for approval.

B. Citrus fruit

Documentation: Revised Standard for Citrus Fruit (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/5)
The Standard (FFV-14: Citrus fruit)
Proposals by Spain on the revised standard (INF.29)

Position of France on the revised standard (INF.34)
Proposals by Morocco on the revised standard (INF.36)
Proposals by South Africa on average diameter (INF.42)

36. The Specialized Section reviewed the text of the Standard discussed at its May session and decided to:

(a) Amend the section on the definition of produce
(b) Reintroduce from the 2004 version of the Standard the parameter and descriptions for colouring in the section on the minimum maturity requirements.

The following provision, not included in the revised text of the Standard, will be considered at the next session of the Specialized Section: "With respect to colouring, fruit may be marketed in their natural colour provided they meet the limits as set out for juice content, minimum sugar content and minimum sugar/acid ratio, as specified for the species concerned and the fruit is labelled "Natural colour"".

(c) Changed the minimum sugar/acid ratio for oranges from 7.0:1 to 6.5:1
(d) Slightly modified provisions concerning sizing by count
(e) Simplified the marking of the nature of produce for mandarins.

37. The Specialized Section recommended the revised Standard to the Working Party for approval and asked the secretariat to contact the delegation of Chile to find out if they would be prepared to withdraw their reservation on post-harvest treatment.

C. Sweet peppers and UNECE explanatory brochure for sweet peppers

Documentation: Revised Standard for Sweet Peppers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/6)
Draft brochure (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/13)

38. The delegations confirmed their recommendation to the Working Party to adopt the amended text of the Standard as a revised Standard for Sweet Peppers.

39. The Specialized Section approved the layout of the brochure. It asked the secretariat to change the background colour of the photographs from light grey to light blue. It asked the rapporteur, the Bureau, interested delegations (Hungary, Netherlands, Spain, the United States) and the secretariat to finalize the brochure and to publish it for the OECD Scheme meeting in December 2009. The three language versions of the brochure would be published separately.

D. Apricots

Documentation: Revised Standard for Apricots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/7)
Position of France on size and colouration (INF.32)

40. The delegations decided not to change the provision on the minimum size of apricots. The Specialized Section recommended the text to the Working Party for approval as a revised Standard for Apricots.

E. Fresh chilli peppers

Documentation: Revised draft Standard for Fresh Chilli Peppers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/8)

41. The Specialized Section postponed the consideration of the revised text of the draft standard until its next session.

F. Chanterelles

Documentation: Revised draft Standard for Chanterelles (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/9)

42. No proposals for changes were received from countries after consideration of the Standard at the May 2009 session. The Specialized Section decided to recommend the text to the Working Party for approval as a new Standard for Chanterelles.

G. Shallots

Documentation: Revised Standard for Shallots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/10)

43. The Specialized Section could not reach an agreement on the methods of production, “Seed grown “ and “Traditional”, to be indicated as obligatory in the section on the nature of produce.

H. Berry fruit

Documentation: Proposals by Germany on berry fruit (INF.40)

44. The delegations agreed that the text of the draft standard for berry fruit should be amended to include specific provisions for different species. Countries were invited to send their comments to the delegation of Germany, who would draw up a consolidated document for the next session of the Specialized Section. Bilberries/blueberries could also be covered by this standard.

45. The delegation of the United States indicated its concern that this standard would include berries with dissimilar characteristics and, as such, did not support it.

I. Lambs lettuce

Documentation: Proposals by Germany on lambs lettuce (INF.41)
Position of France on lambs lettuce (INF.27)

46. The Specialized Section reviewed the standard and decided to return to it at its next session on the basis of the text reflecting the proposals made during the discussion.

J. Lettuces

Documentation: Proposals by Spain (INF.30)

47. The delegations amended the provisions on mixtures of species in packages as well as in sales units. The Specialized Section agreed to the proposal by the delegation of Spain to delete provisions on minimum weight in the section on sizing and submitted the revised text to the Working Party for approval.

VII. ALIGNMENT OF STANDARDS WITH THE REVISED STANDARD LAYOUT AND OTHER NON-SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES TO STANDARDS

Documentation: Tomatoes (FFV-36: Tomatoes)
Pears (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/11)
Potatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/12)
Bilberries/blueberries (INF.28)

48. The Specialized Section introduced minor changes to the standards for tomatoes, pears and potatoes and recommended the revised texts for approval by the Working Party.

49. The delegations reviewed the proposed changes to the Standard for Bilberries and Blueberries. It was decided to revisit the Standard at the next session of the Specialized Section in the context of its possible incorporation into the new standard for berry fruit.

VIII. REVIEW OF UNECE RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Peaches and nectarines

Documentation: The Recommendation (FFV-26: Peaches and nectarines)

50. The Specialized Section reviewed the Recommendation on Peaches and Nectarines and submitted it to the Working Party for approval as a revised Standard.

51. The delegation of the United States expressed its concern with regard to the provisions on minimum maturity requirements, minimum sizing and size ranges.

IX. FUTURE WORK

52. At its next session, planned for the week of 25-28 May, the Specialized Section decided to discuss the standards for citrus fruit, fresh chilli peppers, berry fruit, lambs lettuce, shallots, bilberries and blueberries, root vegetables, leaf vegetables and others on request. A number of standards would be aligned with the 2009 Standard Layout. It also decided to discuss whether it would include in its programme of work the Glossary of Terms for UNECE standards.

X. OTHER BUSINESS

53. The delegation of the Russian Federation made a presentation on the development of standards in their country and offered to host a joint UNECE/Russian Federation international seminar on agricultural quality standards and the use of standards in technical regulations from 4 to 7 October 2010 in Anapa.

54. The delegation of Germany (Rapporteur) will reflect the position of France on carrots and other root vegetables in the draft standard for root vegetables.

XI. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

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

XII. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

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