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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
Fifty-seventh session
Geneva, 25-28 May 2010

Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables on its fifty-seventh session

Summary

The Specialized Section decided to:

- Submit the revised texts of the standards for apples, pears (list of varieties) and cherries to the Working Party for approval
- Submit the new standard for root and tubercle vegetables to the Working Party for approval and to withdraw the standards for scorzoneras (FFV-32), horse radish (FFV-20) and radishes (FFV-43)
- Submit the decision to start work on the UNECE Brochure for Pineapples in parallel with revising the Standard to the Working Party for approval
- Submit the revised amendment to the Working Party's working procedures to the other Specialized Sections for consultation and to the Working Party for approval
- Correct the informal list on common names for the different species covered by the standard for bilberries and blueberries
- Hold its next session in November 2010 back-to-back with the session of the Working Party
- Revisit (a) the English and French versions of the 2009 Standard Layout to check for the correct use of the English term "package" in the French translation and (b) the paragraph on mixed packages in section V of the Standard for Lettuces

- Review the texts of the standards for citrus fruit, fresh chilli peppers, shallots, berry fruits, broccoli, leafy vegetables, mangoes, beans, carrots, cucumbers, kiwifruit, plums, strawberries and table grapes with a view to recommending them to the Working Party for approval
- Continue aligning the texts of standards with the 2009 Standard Layout
- Reconsider the provisions on russeting and sizing in the Standard for Pears
- Discuss its position on starting work on a glossary of terms used in UNECE standards

I. Introduction

1. The meeting was opened by the Director of the Trade and Timber Division. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany).

II. Attendance

2. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.

3. The European Union was also represented.

4. The following specialized agencies/programmes participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

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

6. A representative of the following non-governmental organization participated in the session: COLEACP (Europe-Africa-Caribbean-Pacific Liaison Committee).

III. Adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2010/1

7. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with proposed changes and amendments. The delegation of France proposed discussing the draft text for bilberries and blueberries under item 3(e) "Berry fruits", and the texts of standards for pineapples, mangoes and table grapes under items 4 and 5, as had been suggested in the e-mail to the secretariat on 20 May 2010. The Specialized Section took note of the intention of the delegation of France to make proposals on formal adoption of documents under item 6 "Working procedures", and under item 8 "Other business", on the definitions of "packages" and "sales units" as well as on setting up a working group on a glossary of terms used in UNECE standards. The delegation of France also proposed to further formalize the adoption of documents discussed by the Working Party.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

Documentation: Interoffice memorandum (INF.1, Informal document)

8. The delegations took note of the advice from the Senior Adviser of the United Nations Office at Geneva to restore the term "UNECE" in the titles of the standards. It was the Adviser's "… considered opinion that the legal advice offered by OLA in 1998 would be very similar if not identical if sought and provided at the present time. In particular, point (b) of OLA's opinion [Member countries having agreed on standards at a global level, in the framework, for example, of FAO, which are not necessarily identical with UNECE Standards may oppose the renaming of UNECE Standards] could be invoked in the present situation. It was the CODEX Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, an expert body which is affiliated with FAO, which formulated a request to examine the implications of the WP's proposed change in the title of UNECE Standards to UN Standards. This implies that the CODEX Committee and by extension, FAO and its Legal Counsel, had some doubts about the practicality of the WP's proposal. In that particular constellation, it is difficult to see how OLA could come to a different conclusion than in 1998, i.e. that a change in the name of UNECE Standards to UN Standard would unlikely be approved by ECOSOC."

9. The Specialized Section decided to revisit, at its next session, the option of keeping or removing the reference to “United Nations Economic Commission for Europe” at the top of the cover page of the standards, as several delegations needed time to decide on this issue.

(b) Other organizations

10. The representative of FAO/WHO Standards Programme reported that the next session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission would take place in July 2010 in Geneva. She noted that her report given at the November 2009 session of the Specialized Section remained valid.

11. The representative of the European Commission explained that the updating of the marketing standards following the adoption of the corresponding UNECE standards in November 2009 had been postponed to the end of 2010 (due to the alignment with the 2009 Standard Layout carried out after the WP.7 meeting) and would take into account new revisions adopted in November 2010.

12. There was currently a proposal to recast Regulation (EC) 1580/2007, which should be completed in autumn 2010. Some changes had been proposed for the parts of the Regulation that related to the marketing standards. These modifications would have to be adopted by Member States.

13. The document on "frequently asked questions" related to the new Regulation on marketing standards was available on the Agriculture Directorate website in all Community languages.

14. The study on marketing standards launched in January 2009 was in progress and first results were expected in Autumn 2010.

15. The representative of the OECD Scheme reported that the Plenary Meeting had recently adopted the explanatory brochures on apricots, peaches and nectarines, apples and

citrus fruits. The OECD Brochures on Apricots, Peaches and Nectarines had been published and distributed with a USB key containing hyperlinked, high-quality electronic versions of the publications. The publication of the OECD Brochure on Apples was expected in June followed by the Brochure on Citrus Fruits as soon as the Plenary Meeting made the final decision on the publication. The Scheme was currently working on the brochures for melons and hazelnuts and had launched work on the brochures on watermelons, garlic and onions. The Scheme had also made progress on the Guidelines on Quality Inspections and Inspector's Training.

16. The OECD Scheme had carried out a peer review of the Moroccan fruit and vegetables quality inspection system and had published the report with an agreement from Morocco. The Scheme would undertake a peer review on the Turkish quality inspection system in 2010. The secretariat provided a market analysis of apples to the members at the 2009 Plenary Meeting, presented by Freshfel.

17. The OECD secretariat had discussed with the Codex Alimentarius secretariat possible areas of cooperation, such as work on brochures, guidelines, capacity building activities and the development of distance learning tools.

18. The OECD Scheme had organized a Workshop in Kenya in April 2010 to facilitate the harmonization of their export quality inspection systems with the OECD rules. On 20 September 2010, the OECD secretariat would hold a meeting to address the implications of the implementation of the latest European Commission Regulation for the fruit and vegetables sector. The meeting would take place in Slovakia, back-to-back with the OECD-sponsored International Training Course.

(c) Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in UNECE

Documentation: UNECE Executive Committee decision on the UNECE work on brochures (INF.32, Informal document)

19. The representative of the OECD informed the Specialized Section about the decision by the Scheme to reject the proposal to transfer all of the activities of the Scheme to UNECE owing to the lack of consensus. Because the decision had been made in a confidential, closed session, he was not able to provide any further information about the details of the discussion of the Task Force report. He explained that the OECD Scheme wished to cooperate with UNECE and that the OECD secretariat had initiated a meeting with the UNECE Executive Secretary. He emphasized that duplication of the activities of the two organizations should be avoided. He further explained that the OECD Scheme would need time to react to the decision of the UNECE Executive Committee. He suggested that the draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) drawn up by the OECD in 2006 be used as a starting point.

20. The Director of the UNECE Trade and Timber Division presented the conclusions from the 31 March 2010 session of the UNECE Executive Committee, which, in view of the interest of UNECE member countries to continue work on explanatory brochures, "requested the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to suggest how the work on these brochures could be continued by ECE in close cooperation and coordination with OECD. The secretariat was also requested to keep the EXCOM informed of further developments in this matter."

21. The delegations were in favour of UNECE and OECD agreeing on an MoU that would define cooperation.

22. The Specialized Section decided to set up a support group that would help the UNECE secretariat advance work on the MoU by looking into the following areas which it was agreed should be included in the MoU:

- The definition of (a) areas for cooperation and (b) where cooperation was not currently needed
- A harmonized layout of the UNECE and OECD brochures
- The legal aspects, including copyright, of eventual joint publication of brochures
- The decision-making process for brochures
- Drawing up brochures in English, French and Russian
- Financial issues, including those related to the sales of future brochures
- Cooperation on capacity-building and promotion.

23. It was understood that the above might take time given the need to make decisions and to coordinate between two intergovernmental bodies, which meet at different times. The UNECE secretariat urged the delegations to approach these issues in a pragmatic way so as to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the cooperation process.

24. The delegations of France, Germany, Slovakia, Sweden, United States and the European Union volunteered to participate in the support group.

V. Revision of UNECE standards

(a) Citrus fruit

Documentation: Citrus fruit (INF.2, Informal document)

Comments by United States (INF.29, Informal document)

Presentation by United States on grapefruit blemishes

Presentation by United States on orange blemishes

25. The delegation of the United States expressed its reservation to the minimum sugar/acid ratio for oranges of 6.5:1. The value of 6.5:1 was first approved at the November 2009 session of the Working Party. The Specialized Section agreed to leave the ratio at 6.5:1 for the present and discuss this issue at a later stage.

26. The delegation of France proposed to lower the minimum juice content for Mexican limes from 40 to 20-25 per cent. This proposal would be discussed at the next session of the Specialized Section

27. The colouring was discussed in conjunction with the willingness of several countries to include provisions that would allow for non-degreened fruit to be sold on the market. The delegates found it difficult to find the right wording for marking naturally green but mature fruit without confusing consumers who might think that green was the real natural colour. The Specialized Section agreed to replace “natural colour” with “green-skinned fruit” in the draft paragraph on colouring in the maturity requirements section, provided that all other maturity requirements were met, and to consult further with the industry. The indication “Green-skinned fruit, where appropriate” would have to be added to the section on commercial specification in case of agreement.

28. The Specialized Section also (a) added the 35 per cent minimum juice content for Oroblanco in the maturity requirements table, (b) aligned size tolerances with those in the Codex standard to read: Persian limes “40mm” and Mexican and Indian limes “Not applicable”, and (c) inversed the order of the “pamplemousse” and “pomello” sections in the uniformity table of the French version of the standard.

(b) Apples

Documentation: Apples (INF.3, Informal document)

29. The Specialized Section agreed to reintroduce the following provisions for defects in development in Classes I and II, erroneously omitted during the revision of the standard in 2009:

In Class I: "- a slight defect in development"

In Class II: "- defects in development".

30. The missing "R" was added for the Dalinbel variety in the list of apple varieties.

31. The Specialized Section decided to submit the amended text to the Working Party for approval.

(c) Fresh chilli peppers

Documentation: Revised draft Standard for Fresh Chilli Peppers (INF.4, Informal document)

Comments by Germany (INF.31, Informal document)

32. The delegation of Mexico presented the reviewed text of the standard and noted that there were still open issues for his country’s and UNECE experts to solve. One of the issues noted by several delegations was the very detailed sizing requirements. A proposal was put forward to have a more general sizing requirement, leaving the use of more specific sizing requirements to the industry.

33. It was indicated that the list of commercial types of chilli peppers mentioned in the draft standard was not exhaustive. The delegations were in favour of removing any reference to commercial types in the standard and of defining them in the explanatory brochure. The reference to commercial types in the section on pungency should also be moved to the brochure. The Specialized Section corrected a technical matter, under C. Pungency, to read “high-performance liquid chromatography” method.

34. The delegations decided to consult their industry experts on a possible merge of the Standard for Sweet Peppers and the Standard for Fresh Chilli Peppers, noting that there should be a clear demarcation between hot and sweet peppers.

(d) Shallots

Documentation: Revised Standard for Shallots (INF.5, Informal document)

35. The delegations revisited the November 2009 post-session text of the draft standard and (a) suggested to make the indication of the production method optional in the marking section, (b) replaced the term “semi-long” with “demi-long”, and (c) decided not to allow for root tufts for round shallots in Class I.

36. The delegations will check the above changes with industry experts with a view to further considering the draft standard at the next session of the Specialized Section.

(e) Berry fruits

Documentation: Berry fruits (INF.6, Informal document)

37. The Specialized Section discussed different possible ways of grouping berry fruits, using for example such criteria as clustered or single-berry fruits, cultivated or wild, cooked or not cooked before consumption. However, the decision was taken not to split them into groups but present them all in a single list in the section on the definition of produce.

38. The delegations reviewed the text of the draft standard. The introduced changes and amendments can be found in INF.6, which will be posted on the website as a post-session document. At its next session, the Specialized Section will revisit the percentages for tolerances in Classes I and II, which might be slightly increased in view of the fragile character of most berry fruits, particularly raspberries, blackberries and loganberries.

39. If the standard for berry fruits, including bilberries and blueberries, would be approved by the Working Party, the Specialized Section would withdraw the current Standard for Bilberries and Blueberries (FFV-07). Otherwise the amended text of the Standard for Bilberries and Blueberries, as in document INF.28 (2009), would have to be adopted by the Working Party. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to correct the list of common names of the species covered by that Standard.

(g) Broccoli

Documentation: Broccoli (INF.8, Informal document)

Proposals by Sweden (INF.28, Informal document)

40. The delegations reviewed the text of the Standard for Broccoli, which had been aligned with the Standard Layout. Changes to the text would be reflected in the post-session document INF.8.

41. The Specialized Section agreed to the proposal by the delegation of Sweden to add to the sizing section the following provision on mini-broccoli:

> "The size requirements shall not apply to miniature produce. Miniature broccoli refers to broccoli that has been cultivated with the specific aim of obtaining broccoli of a small size. Broccoli that is not fully developed shall be excluded. All other requirements of the standard must be met."

42. Deleting the provision on the minimum size and amending the provisions on uniformity could be another option for incorporating mini-broccoli into the Standard. The delegation of Sweden would prepare a text reflecting this second option and would circulate it to countries for consultation with the industry.

43. At its next session, the Specialized Section would decide on including a provision on mixtures of broccoli of distinctly different colours in sales units.

(h) and (i) Standards for root and tubercle vegetables and leafy vegetables

Documentation: Root and tubercle vegetables (INF.9, Informal document)

Leafy vegetables (INF.10, Informal document)

44. The changes introduced by the delegations to the draft Standard for Root and Tubercle Vegetables were reflected in the post-session document INF.9. The Specialized Section decided to:

- amend the quality tolerances to allow for an additional 10 and 25 per cent, by weight, of broken roots in Classes I and II, respectively;

- allow for a mixture of root and tubercle vegetables of distinctly different species or different colours of the same species in a sales unit.

45. The Specialized Section decided to submit the text to the Working Party for approval as a new Standard for Root and Tubercle Vegetables. Should the Standard be approved, the Specialized Section would recommend withdrawing the current UNECE Standards for Scorzonera (FFV-33), for Horse-Radish (FFV-20) and Radishes (FFV-43), as these products would be covered by the new Standard.

46. The changes introduced by the Specialized Section to the draft Standard for Leafy Vegetables were reflected in the post-session document INF.10. It was decided to omit lambs lettuce from of this Standard. The delegation of Sweden was hesitant about including dandelions in the Standard.

47. The Specialized Section asked the delegation of France to check with their industry why the new Standard could not be also used for lambs lettuce.

48. The Specialized Section decided to submit the text to the Working Party for approval as a new Standard for Leafy Vegetables. Should the Standard be approved, the Specialized Section would recommend withdrawing the current UNECE Standard for Spinach (FFV-34), as this product would be covered by the new Standard.

(j) Pears

Documentation: Pears (INF.26, Informal document)

Amended standard (INF.33, Informal document)

49. The Specialized Section discussed the proposals of the United Kingdom on revising the Standard for Pears. The proposed inclusion of a new summer pear variety “Bambinella” in the list of varieties was approved and would be submitted to the Working Party at its next session for adoption.

50. The Specialized Section decided to discuss, at its next session, sizing of pears by weight in view of a possible introduction of one minimum size for all varieties and classes. The delegation of Poland preferred not to change the existing provisions on sizing by diameter and to add an option on size by weight. It was also decided to revisit the issue of rough russeting, taking into consideration the OECD brochure on pears.

VI. Alignment of standards with the 2009 Standard Layout and their revision in view of starting work on new explanatory brochures

(e) Pineapples

Documentation: Pineapples (INF.15, Informal document)

51. The delegations worked on the text of the Standard for Pineapples reviewed by the Working Group at its meeting in South Africa. The changes introduced to the text can be found in the post-session document INF.15. The Specialized Section decided to continue revising the Standard at its next session to explore the possibility of: (a) introducing a lower Brix level and defining the area where to measure Brix; (b) establishing a maximum length of the crown without limiting its minimum length; and (c) withdrawing the minimum weight parameter provided the minimum maturity requirements had been met.

52. The Specialized Section decided to start work on an explanatory brochure for pineapples and asked the Working Party to approve this decision.

53. The delegations of Germany, Kenya, Mexico (subject to confirmation), South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States volunteered to work on the brochure. This working group is open to all interested countries and organizations. The representative of COLEACP would coordinate the contribution of his organization's member countries to the development of the brochure. The delegation of the United States would contact major producers of pineapples in Latin America to involve them in this work.

54. The Specialized Section decided to use the layout of the sweet peppers brochure for the brochure on pineapples, as well as for all other future UNECE brochures until an agreement on a harmonized layout of UNECE and OECD brochures was reached.

55. Concerning the revision of the UNECE Standard for Pineapples, the representative of the FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme drew the attention of the Specialized Section to the need for working collaboratively, in view of the existing Codex Standard for Pineapples. This would assist both parties in making progress not only in revising the technical provisions but also in keeping both texts harmonized, so as to avoid potential problems in international trade that might arise from two different standards for the same commodity.

56. The Specialized Section would inform the Codex Committee on the progress in revising the Standard for Pineapples.

VII. Alignment of standards with the 2009 Standard Layout in view of updating the existing explanatory brochures

Documentation: Comments by Germany (INF.31, Informal document)

Mangoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2010/2)

Beans (INF.17, Informal document)

Carrots (INF.18, Informal document)

Cucumbers (INF.19, Informal document)

Kiwifruit (INF.21, Informal document)

Plums (INF.22, Informal document)

Strawberries (INF.23, Informal document)

Table grapes (INF.24, Informal document)

57. At its informal session, the Specialized Section aligned the texts of the standards for mangoes, beans, carrots, cucumbers, cultivated mushrooms, kiwifruit, plums, strawberries and tables grapes with the 2009 Standard Layout and submitted them to the next session of the Specialized Section. Substantive changes related to this alignment may be discussed if requested by countries.

VIII. Revision of the working procedures

Documentation: Working procedures (INF.25, Informal document)

58. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to circulate the following amendment to the Working Party's working procedures for consultation and submit it to the Working Party for approval:

"19. When the Bureau considers that a draft decision, recommendation, standard or other output of the Specialized Section or the Working Party needs to be approved in between the annual meetings, it may submit the draft to the heads of delegation for decision or adoption in an intersessional procedure, as follows:

(a) The Bureau submits the document to the secretariat.

(b) The secretariat publishes the draft document on the UNECE website and circulates it to all Heads of Delegation through the listserver, clearly indicating that the draft document is for approval.

(c) In the absence of comments or substantive change requests after a two-month comment period, with a reminder from the secretariat two weeks before the deadline, the document will be considered as approved. The absence of any response from a Head of Delegation will be considered as support for the document. The two-month comment period will take effect from the date of the first publication on the UNECE website. Comments on the draft document should be submitted to the secretariat.

(d) Editorial comments by Heads of Delegation and editorial changes by the United Nations editorial services are approved by the Bureau before final publication.

(e) If substantive comments or objections are made in writing, the document shall be withdrawn from publication and the comments transmitted to the Bureau.

20. In cases where the Specialized Section develops a new standard or revises an existing one in one language version only, the secretariat circulates this text together with the translation in one or two other official languages to all Heads of Delegation through the listserver, clearly indicating that the translations are for approval. A two-week period will take effect from the date of circulation. In the absence of linguistic comments after a two-week comment period, the translations will be considered as approved. In case of comments, these will be taken into consideration by the secretariat. The secretariat will publish the approved original document on the website simultaneously with the translations."

X. Other business

Documentation: Cherries (INF.27, Informal document)

Lettuces (Standard FFV-22)

59. The Specialized Section agreed on the text of the Standard for Cherries (post-session document INF.27) aligned with the 2009 Standard Layout and submitted it to the Working Party for approval.

60. The Specialized Section confirmed the following paragraph on the mixture of produce in the uniformity section of the Standard for Lettuces:

> "However, a mixture of produce of distinctly different colours, varieties and/or commercial types may be packed together in a package and/or sales unit, provided they are uniform in quality and, for each colour, variety and/or commercial type concerned, in origin."

Most delegations agreed that the wording "package and/or sales unit" correctly reflected the existing trading practices. The delegation of France requested to replace this term by “sales package”, as defined in Regulation (EC) No. 1580/2007, and also to revisit this paragraph in the 2009 Standard Layout.

61. The representative of the FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme explained that in Codex standards for fresh fruits and vegetables the English terms "packaging", "packages" and "consumer packages" are translated into French as "conditionnement", "emballages" and "emballages destinés au consommateur final", respectively.

62. The Specialized Section decided to revisit, at its next session, the relevant paragraph in the Standard for Lettuces.

63. The delegation of France suggested changing Brix level from 16º to 14º in the maturity requirements section in the Standard for Table Grapes and deleting the sugar/acid ratio requirement.

64. The representative of Chile made a presentation on the use and promotion of standards and good agricultural practices in her country to support production of high quality fruits and vegetables for export. Chile would host a regional workshop in 2011 to promote UNECE standards in countries of Latin America.

65. The representative of the Republic of Moldova made a presentation on the use and promotion of the UNECE standards, and on the new legislation in her country to support production of high-quality fruit and vegetables and on the problems they faced.

66. The delegation of the Russian Federation confirmed that a regional workshop on the use of agricultural quality standards would be held in Anapa from 4 to 7 October 2010 and invited countries to take part.

XI. Future work

67. The Specialized Section decided to hold its next session, two days and a half long, in November 2010, back-to-back with the sixty-sixth session of the Working Party. The Specialized Section would:

(a) revisit the English and French versions of the 2009 Standard Layout to check how the English term "package" should be translated into French each time it appears in the text of the Standard Layout. The document on the definitions of different types of packaging,

which had been considered by the Specialized Section some time ago, should be used for discussion;

(b) review the texts of the standards (aligned with the 2009 Standard Layout) for citrus fruit, fresh chilli peppers, shallots, berry fruits, broccoli, root and tubercle vegetables, leafy vegetables, mangoes, beans, carrots, cucumbers, kiwifruit, plums, strawberries and table grapes with a view to recommending them to the Working Party for approval. The Specialized Section may decide to introduce substantive changes to the texts of these standards;

(c) continue aligning the texts of standards with the 2009 Standard Layout. The delegation of Poland has offered to help in finishing this work in 2010;

(d) reconsider the provisions on russeting and sizing in the Standard for Pears;

(e) continue revising the Standard for Pineapples together with the work on the UNECE Brochure for Pineapples;

(f) decide on its recommendation to the Working Party on starting work on a glossary of terms used in UNECE standards.

XII. Election of officers

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

XIII. Adoption of the report

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