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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Early and Ware Potatoes

1-2 February 1999, Geneva

REPORT OF ITS FOURTEENTH SESSION

Executive summary

- Delegations were informed on the status of the UN/ECE reform and discussions in WP.7 and the Committee for Trade Industry and Enterprise Development. (para. 1).
- UN/ECE standards FFV-30, 31 on early and ware potatoes were reviewed. No amendments were deemed necessary (para. 7).
- It was decided not to include a list of varieties in the standards (paras. 7-11).
- Each delegation present indicated the use of the UN/ECE standards in their national legislation (paras. 12-22).
- The definition of long varieties was discussed and proposals for an amelioration were invited (paras. 23-25).
- An indicative list of long varieties of irregular shape was established (“Stella”, “Ratte”, “Corne de Gate”). Reactions from the trade will be reported at the next session (paras. 26-32).
- Proposals for the harmonization of the definition and marking of the cooking type were invited (paras. 33-36).
- The delegation gave a practical demonstration of the method used for the inspection of a sample (paras. 38-40).
- It was decided to await the publication of RUCIP 2000 before deciding whether to revise the UN/ECE General Conditions of Sale for Potatoes (paras. 41-46).

Opening of the session

1. The Specialized Section held its fourteenth session in Geneva on 1 and 2 February 1999. The session was opened by the Director of the UN/ECE Trade Division, Mrs. Carol Cosgrove-Sacks, who welcomed the delegates to Geneva. She informed delegations about the completion of the UN/ECE reform. She referred to results of the reform and other events which, in her view, clearly showed the importance that UN/ECE was giving to the work on agricultural standards:

- The work of WP.7 and related groups is now serviced by the Trade Facilitation Section of the Trade Division and reports to the newly created Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development.
- At its first session (December 1997), the new Committee elected the Chairman of WP.7, Mr. Vilchez-Barros (Spain), as its Vice-Chairman.
- At its second session (June 1998), the Committee accorded the highest priority to the work of WP.7 among its subsidiary bodies.
- In spring 1998, the Economic Commission for Europe confirmed the permanent mandate of the meetings of experts working under the auspices of WP.7. At the same time these groups were renamed "specialized sections".
- The new post in the secretariat allocated to the service of WP.7 and its specialized sections was filled on a permanent basis as of 1 July 1998.
- An Internet homepage has been created, containing most of the standards elaborated by WP.7 and relevant information about meetings (<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm>).

Participation

2. The session was attended by delegations of the following countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. A representative of the following non-governmental organization participated in the session: European Union of the Potato Trade (EUROPATAT).

Adoption of the agenda

Documents: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/1999/1

4. The provisional agenda as contained in TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/1999/1 was adopted with the deletion of documents TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/1999/3, 4 and 5, and the addition of TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/CRP.2, containing a contribution from Denmark concerning agenda item 5.

Election of officers

5. The Specialized Section was informed that Mr. Caban (Poland) was no longer available as Vice-Chairman and re-elected Mr. Debaveye (Belgium) as its Chairman and elected Ms. Zgorska (Poland) as Vice-Chairman.

Matters of interest arising since the thirteenth session

6. The Meeting took note of document TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/1999/2 summing up the relevant events since the thirteenth session.

UN/ECE standards on Early and Ware Potatoes (FFV 30, 31)

Review of the standards

7. The Specialized Section reviewed the standards but no proposals for amendments were made.

List of varieties

8. The delegation of Italy proposed to introduce a list of varieties as an orientation into the standards including the cooking type which they considered useful for traders and consumers. The delegation of France supported this proposal.

9. The representative of EUROPATAT said that this question had been discussed in a recent meeting of his organisation and that the majority had been against establishing a list of varieties. He said it would be helpful if countries harmonised the labelling methods they used to mark the cooking type.

10. The Chairman said that the standards already contained provisions for the optional labelling of the cooking type.

11. The majority of delegations were of the opinion that a list of varieties would be long and difficult to maintain as new varieties regularly appeared on the market regularly. Even if a list was given only as an orientation, it might confuse the trade and be seen as an obstacle for new varieties.

Application of UN/ECE standards

12. Delegations indicated the use of the standards in their national legislation as follows:

United Kingdom: There is no national legislation on quality of early and ware potatoes. The market is seen as self-regulatory. The main supermarket chains have their own quality rules.

Switzerland: There is no national legislation on quality of early and ware potatoes. The trade uses its own standards based on UN/ECE standards. UN/ECE standards are used for export.

Spain: UN/ECE standards have been adopted in the national legislation.

Romania: UN/ECE standards have been adopted in national standards.

Poland: The national standard differs slightly from the UN/ECE standard concerning sizing and definition of long varieties.

Italy: An old (1940) national standard exists. Supermarket chains use their own quality rules.

Israel: For the local market an existing old national standard is used which is currently being revised. For export UN/ECE standards are used, adapted to trade demands which are stricter.

France: A new decree was issued in 1997 and two quality classes for potatoes were introduced. The classes have been accepted by the trade and an explanatory brochure to facilitate the application has been developed. The legislation applies to trade within France and to imports from non-EU countries.

Germany: National legislation is in force since the 1970s and is applied in all stages of trading. Two quality classes exist (Extra and I) that differ in the quality tolerances allowed. 95% of trade is in Class I.

Belgium: National legislation is up to 95% harmonized with the UN/ECE standards and will be further harmonized this year.

Definition of long varieties

13. The Chairman raised the question of how to treat varieties that were traditionally considered as long but fell just short of conforming to the existing definition in the standard (average length at least twice its average width), e.g. "Charlotte" or "Nicola". Should they be excluded from the long varieties or should the definition be changed?

14. The delegation of Israel mentioned that some varieties if grown under different conditions can in some cases fulfil the definition and in others not.

15. It was decided to return to this problem later. Delegations were invited to make proposals for a solution.

Long varieties of irregular shape

16. Long varieties of irregular shape are excluded from the sizing provisions of the standards. The problem was raised of how to clarify better in the standards what is meant by "irregular shape". Two different solutions were proposed: to draft a definition for these varieties or an indicative list.

17. The delegate of EUROPATAT said that he found a list too restrictive and that in his organization varieties that were not round or long had been defined as irregular.

18. Some delegations considered this definition to be too open and also not quite correct because in the standard the irregular shaped potatoes were seen as an exception to the long varieties.

19. Other delegations felt that a complete list of these varieties might be difficult to establish especially because of the many local or traditional names that existed for these varieties in different countries.

20. The delegation of Spain proposed to have a definition based on the planes of symmetry of a potato considering that tubers with no planes of symmetry were irregular in shape.

21. It was mentioned that there was not much trade in these irregular varieties and that the problem might also be solved with a photograph in an explanatory brochure to be elaborated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

22. The Chairman concluded that in the discussion only the varieties "Stella", "Ratte" and "Corne de Gate" had been mentioned. Delegations should confront their trade with this list, explaining that it was only indicative and meant to explain what is meant by "irregular shape". The reaction of the trade should be reported at the next session.

Harmonization of marking of the cooking type

23. Different methods of marking of the cooking type are currently used in some countries. The question was raised whether it would be useful to have a harmonized system, e.g. a colour scheme as an option in the UN/ECE standard.
24. It was mentioned that a letter code had already been defined by the European Association for Potato Research (EAPR) consisting of four letters: (a) firm cooking, (b) medium firm, (c) floury and (d) very floury.
25. The delegation of Germany said that in Germany potatoes of cooking type (d) were only used for industrial processing.
26. It was decided that proposals should be made to the next session for a definition of the different cooking types which could be mentioned in the standard. The usefulness of a colour scheme for the marking of consumer packages should be discussed on the basis of this definition.

Comparison of inspection methods, sizing methods, sampling methods and control of "washed" potatoes

27. The Specialized Section took note of a document from Denmark describing Denmark's inspection and sampling methods.
28. The delegation of Switzerland gave a short introduction into the organization of the Swiss Potato Commission followed by a practical demonstration of the method used for inspection of a sample.
29. The method is simple and effective and can be applied with a minimum number of tools (baskets, thermometer, knife and a peeling and measuring tool). The principle is to test 5 potatoes of a sample for a possible hidden defect and, if one is affected, to test 10 others to see if the whole lot is affected. Washed and un-washed potatoes are treated in the same way but the tolerances for superficial defects are higher for washed potatoes (10% instead of 4%). The temperature of the tubers is measured because the lower their temperature the more susceptible they are to damage.
30. The Chairman thanked the delegation of Switzerland for the interesting demonstration. The delegation of France offered to present their methods at the next session.

Revision of the UN/ECE General Conditions of Sale for Potatoes

31. The UN/ECE General Conditions of Sale for Potatoes were adopted in 1973 and last revised in 1979 to facilitate trade in the ECE region. Application of the conditions is voluntary. Today, the UN/ECE rules are outdated and rarely used.
32. Widely used in trade is RUCIP (Règles et Usages du Commerce Intereuropéen des Pommes de Terre et les Règlements d'Expertise et d'Arbitrage du Comité Européen), developed by EUROPATAT in cooperation with CEA (Confédération Européenne de l'Agriculture) and UITP (Union Européenne des Industries de Transformation de la Pomme de Terre). RUCIP exists since 1956 and was last updated in 1993. It is currently being revised and simplified to appear under the name RUCIP 2000 at the beginning of the year 2000.
33. In the light of the revision of RUCIP, the question had been raised whether the UN/ECE General Conditions should be revised as well.

34. It was decided that in order to avoid duplication of work it would be preferable to await the finalization of RUCIP 2000, discuss the text at the next session and maybe to consider adopt it as new UN/ECE Conditions of Sale for Potatoes.

35. Regarding a question from Germany, the delegate of EUROPATAT said that the quality rules contained in RUCIP still differed in several aspects from the UN/ECE standards but efforts towards harmonization had been made. A list of differences would be presented at the next session.

36. The Chairman said that RUCIP created a framework and that it was possible to apply only parts of it and make reference to a different quality standard.

Future work

37. The following items will be placed on the agenda of the next session:

- Review of the UN/ECE standards FFV-30, 31
- Definition of cooking types and eventually a colour scheme for marking of cooking types on consumer packages
- Review of the definition for long varieties
- Review of reactions from the trade to the indicative list of long varieties of an irregular shape
- Each delegation was invited to provide their national legislation to the secretariat
- Review of RUCIP 2000 and a list of differences to the UN/ECE standards
- Information on the progress of the OECD explanatory brochure for Early and Ware potatoes
- Presentation by France on methods used for inspection and sampling
- Presentation by Belgium of charts used to indicate washability

Date and place of the next session

38. The fifteenth session of the Specialized Section will be held in Geneva in the beginning of 2001.

Adoption of the report

39. The Specialized Section adopted the report on its fourteenth session.
