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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

19-21 March 2001, Geneva

**REPORT ON ITS FIFTEENTH SESSION**

**Summary**

The tolerance for sizing was discussed. Delegations will verify the existing tolerance (5%) and report to the next session.

The definition of cooking types was discussed. It was decided not to pursue this topic further for the time being because there seems to be no wish in trade for a harmonization of this definition.

The delegation of France gave a presentation of their inspection system.

The delegation of Belgium presented charts indicating washability.

It was agreed to replace the definition of long varieties in the standard by a reference to the national list of varieties where the variety in question has been bred.

It was agreed to include the indicative list of long varieties of an irregular shape into the standard. The delegation of Europatat gave a presentation on RUCIP 2000.

The future of the existing UN/ECE conditions of sale for potatoes was discussed. It was decided that delegations should review if the UN/ECE text was still used in their countries and which attitude trade was taking towards the RUCIP rules.

It was agreed that there was an urgent need to update the OECD Explanatory Brochure for "Early and Ware Potatoes".

## Opening of the session

1. The session was opened by the Deputy Director of the UN/ECE Trade Division, Mr. Hans Hansell, who welcomed the delegations to Geneva for their 15th session. He said that this was the second meeting on Potatoes held by UN/ECE this month. The previous week, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes had held its 31<sup>st</sup> session. He said that it was an expression of the importance of the international trade of potatoes that UN/ECE has two specialized sections dedicated to different aspects of this commodity: GE.6 being closer to the producer and you in GE.5 closer to the consumer.

2. He recalled that when the UN/ECE members prioritized the work items a couple of years ago, the standardization of perishable produce had been given the highest priority of all, which was an appreciation of the work done by these groups.

3. He wished the delegations success for their work, namely, the review of the existing standards, the definition of cooking types, the comparison of inspection methods with presentations, the review of the definition of long varieties and the discussion of the RUCIP\* 2000 rules on the conditions of sale for potatoes.

## Participation

4. The session was attended by delegations of the following countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain and Switzerland.

5. On the invitation of the secretariat, a representative of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables participated in the session.

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

### Item 1: Adoption of the agenda

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/1

7. The provisional agenda as contained in TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/1 was adopted with the following changes:

- TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/4 and 5 were deleted.
- TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/6 was replaced by ../GE.5/2001/INF.1.
- TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/INF.2 (France) was added to item 5 (b).
- TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/7/Add.1 (Germany) was added to item 9.

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\* Règles et usages du commerce intereuropéen des pommes de terre et les règlements d'expertise et d'arbitrage du comité européen.

**Item 2: Matters of interest arising since the fourteenth session**

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/2

8. The Meeting took note of document TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/2 summing up the relevant outcome of the third and fourth sessions of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development.

**Item 3: Review of the UN/ECE standards on Early and Ware Potatoes (FFV 30, 31)**

Discussion at the last session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/6, para 7

Document for this session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/3 (Israel)

9. The delegation of Israel proposed to increase the tolerances for sizing from 5% to 10% because research in their country had shown that:

- 5% was very difficult to reach;
- there was a connection between sizing accuracy and damage (in particular for early potatoes).

10. He said that the quality of the potato should be more important than the sizing tolerance and that in most other UN/ECE standards the sizing tolerance was at 10%. He said that 8% was possible to reach but 10% was even more realistic.

11. It was suggested to compare the provisions in the national legislation of the countries present:

- Switzerland: has no legislation on this matter but a voluntary trade standard which foresees 6%.
- Romania: tolerances are established in the standards which are fully harmonized with the UN/ECE Standards as a consensus at national level between buyer and seller;
- France: prefers to stay with the status quo;
- Germany: has 4% in their standard;
- Belgium: has 6% because it was noticed that 5% was not easy to reach.
- Poland: 3% for early and 2% for ware potatoes.

12. The delegation of Europatat said that one of the problems with the tolerances was that consumer packages had become smaller, which meant that 1 or 2 potatoes made a difference. He said that the tolerance in RUCIP 2000 is 3% for big packages for early and ware potatoes and for early potatoes there is a minimum size of 22mm.

13. It was decided that delegations would research in their countries if the prescribed tolerances were reached and then report to the next session.

**Item 4: Definition of cooking types and eventually a colour scheme for marking of cooking types on consumer packages**

Discussion at the last session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/6, para 23-26

Document for this session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/3 (Israel)

14. Different methods of defining and marking of the cooking type are currently used in some countries. At the last session the question was raised whether it would be useful to have a harmonized system. 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.

15. The question was discussed in depth. In its document Israel proposes to approach breeders to use the existing European Association for Potato Research (EAPR) code in their potato variety descriptions. If this was achieved the EAPR scale could be adopted by the Specialized Section and an obligation to mark the cooking type could be included in the standard. Then discussions on a colour scheme could be held.

16. The results of the discussions were as follows:

- different countries use different systems for defining and marking the cooking type;
- different methods of communicating the cooking type to the customer are used (either a description of the use of the potatoes or just a name for the cooking type)
- colours are sometimes used in different ways to describe the cooking types;
- varieties can be of a different cooking type depending on the soil, climate etc.
- there does not seem to be the wish for harmonization in trade at the moment.

17. It was decided to close the discussion on this item for the time being.

#### **Item 5 Comparison of inspection methods, sizing methods, sampling methods and control of "washed" potatoes**

Discussion at the last session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/6, para 27-30

(a) Presentation by France on methods used for inspection and sampling

18. The delegation of France showed a video presentation of the control system used in France which is coordinated by the Direction Générale de la Concurrence, Consommation et Répression des fraudes in all stages of the production and trade of potatoes. They control the quality as well as the safety of the products in cooperation with other administrations such as the Service de la production des végétaux for the phyto-sanitary control but also with organizations of the profession like the Comité national interprofessionnel de la pomme de terre.

19. The French system is based on an auto-control in all stages organized by the interprofessional organizations and a control plan effected by quality inspectors.

(b) Presentation by Belgium of charts used to indicate washability

20. The delegation of Belgium presented charts used in Belgium to indicated washability of potatoes. The chart is based on the principle that the washability of potatoes decreases with the amount of defects/damage that the potatoes have. The photos show from top to bottom an increasing percentage of potatoes affected by various defects. The chart is compared with a sample (10kg for each 30 tonnes). There is no degree of washability prescribed in the legislation. The chart is meant as a visual aid to establish and control contracts.

**Item 6 Proposals for a definition for long varieties and reactions from the trade to the indicative list of long varieties of an irregular shape**

Discussion at the last session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/6, para 13-22

Document for this session: TRADE/WP.7/GE.5/2001/3 (Israel)

*Definition for long varieties*

21. At the last session no progress was made on this question. Delegations were invited to send proposals for a solution.

22. In its document, the delegation of Israel proposes to replace the definition contained in the standard at the moment (potatoes are considered as long if they are on average twice as long as wide) with a reference to the national catalogue of potato varieties of the country in which the variety had been bred.

23. The problem with the existing definition according to Israel is that for the same variety the ratio can vary (e.g. from 1.7 - 2.4 as have been observed in the case of Nicola). If the existing definition was maintained, each lot would have to be controlled and might have to be treated differently in the sizing.

24. It was suggested to solve the problem by introducing a tolerance but after some discussion it was decided to accept the proposal from Israel and to change the standards as follows:

25. Under III. Provisions concerning sizing, the last but one paragraph is replaced by the following:

“A variety is considered as long if it is listed as long or long oval in the national list of varieties of the country where it has been bred.”

26. The amendment will be transmitted to the Working Party for adoption.

*List of varieties of long varieties of irregular shape*

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

28. Delegations reported no problems with the approach. The delegation of Europatat said that “Corne de Gate” was not listed as an official variety but was the name used in France and Belgium for the variety “Pink Fir Apple”.

29. It was decided to include the list in the standards.

30. In III. Provisions concerning sizing, add at the end of the last paragraph:  
“(e.g. Stella, Ratte or Pink Fir Apple)”

31. The amendment will be transmitted to the Working Party for adoption.

**Item 7            Revision of the UN/ECE General Conditions of Sale for Potatoes: Review of RUCIP 2000 and a list of differences to the UN/ECE text**

Discussion at the last session:    TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/6, para 31-36

32.     The UN/ECE General Conditions of Sale for Potatoes were adopted in 1973 based on the existing RUCIP rules and last revised in 1979 to facilitate the establishment of trade contracts especially between Eastern and Western Europe. Application of the conditions is voluntary. The rules would need to be updated to take account of the present situation in Europe.

33.     RUCIP developed by EUROPATAT in cooperation with other organizations, is widely used in trade. RUCIP was recently revised and published under the name RUCIP 2000.

34.     The Specialized Section discussed at the last session if the UN/ECE General Conditions should be revised as well. It was decided to await the finalization of RUCIP 2000, discuss the text and maybe consider adopting it as new UN/ECE Conditions of Sale for Potatoes.

35.     The delegation of Europatat gave an extensive presentation on RUCIP 2000 stressing several important points:

- the application of RUCIP is voluntary; it offers a framework for establishing a contract between two parties;
- RUCIP has been created by the trade for the trade;
- it contains a “clause compromissoire”, which means that the parties are bound to resolve disputes within the framework of the contract rules i.e. those of RUCIP 2000 and renounce recourse to civil law;
- national law prevails e.g. products have to be labelled according to the legislation in force;
- it includes the principle of subsidiarity: provisions can be exchanged if both parties agree e.g. instead of the quality provisions in RUCIP, the UN/ECE Standards could be used;
- according to the RUCIP rules, the seller can unilaterally change the conditions of payment.

36.     The delegation of Europatat also presented a comparison between the UN/ECE Standards and the quality rules contained in RUCIP 2000 which have not been amended since the last version. They serve as an indication for the trade between traders. They are very different from the UN/ECE standards, which go into more detail and take into account the consumer. The delegation of Europatat said that in practice the quality rules are very often supplemented or replaced with special provisions.

37.     The Chairman asked the delegations whether the UN/ECE conditions of sale should be kept and updated or if in some way reference should be made to the RUCIP rules.

38.     The secretariat said that if an updating of the UN/ECE conditions of sale was wanted then a request had to be made to the Working Party but the updating would have to be done mainly by rapporteurs as there were not enough resources in the secretariat to work on this question.

39.     The positions of the individual delegations were as follows:

- France: cannot take a position now, needs to consult with trade;

- Germany: German traders make reference to the RUCIP rules; it will have to be checked whether the UN/ECE text is used at all and if not it could be deleted and possibly reference could be made to the RUCIP rules;
- Israel: does not have an official position at the moment; has to check with trade if UN/ECE rules are used;
- Poland: no official position towards RUCIP;
- Romania: stresses the importance of internationally harmonized standards for trade facilitation;
- Switzerland: cannot give a definitive reply yet, but stresses that all duplication of work should be avoided and before any reference could be made to RUCIP the compatibility with legislation should be checked;
- Belgium: states that it makes a difference if rules are established by an intergovernmental or a private organization; feels that the UN/ECE document is still valuable even though dated and that it could continue to exist, and reference could be made to the RUCIP rules for information.

40. The delegation of Europatat explained that in its opinion the existing UN/ECE document is no longer valid because it is difficult to obtain, not well known and the addresses contained in the annex are no longer valid. It should be updated or replaced by a reference to rules currently used in trade.

41. He said further that the UN/ECE document states that it can be updated on request from the trade through the Governments. He said he would put this question to the members of his organization. He said further that information about RUCIP can be consulted on the Europatat web site at [www.europatat.org](http://www.europatat.org).

42. It was decided that delegations should examine the UN/ECE Conditions of Sale and consult with their trade to obtain a firm position for the next session.

#### **Item 8 Information on the progress of the OECD explanatory brochure for Early and Ware Potatoes**

43. The representative of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables informed the meeting that the last edition of the OECD Explanatory Brochure on the "Early and Ware Potatoes" standard was published in 1977. The UN/ECE Standard was revised in 1997. Publishing a new edition of the explanatory brochure would give the opportunity of taking into account the revised standard. Furthermore, this would also allow for an electronic version, as nowadays all OECD explanatory brochures were published both electronically and on paper.

44. She said further that the next Plenary Meeting of the Scheme would take place in October 2001, during which its programme of work would be discussed. It would, in particular, define the list of future explanatory brochures to be published. In this decision the Plenary Meeting would take into account the volume of international trade of the products in question.

45. She said that it was obvious that early and ware potatoes met this criterion and, if the Specialized Section wished the OECD Scheme to proceed with the revision, she would transmit this request to the Plenary Meeting.

46. It was stressed that, if the Plenary Meeting decided to develop a revised OECD Explanatory Brochure for "Early and Ware Potatoes", one or two countries would need to volunteer as rapporteurs for this brochure.

47. The group agreed that there was an urgent need to update this Explanatory Brochure. Poland and Belgium indicated that they would study the possibility of becoming rapporteurs for this brochure.

**Item 9 National legislation for early and ware potatoes**

48. At the last session delegations were invited to provide their national legislation to the UN/ECE secretariat. Documents were received from Poland and Germany. The request to provide the national legislations to the secretariat was reiterated and if more documents are received, they will be distributed by the secretariat for the next session.

**Item 10 Preparation of the next session**

**(a) Future work**

49. It was decided that the following items should be included on the agenda of the next meeting:

- presentation of quality control: Germany will possibly prepare a presentation;
- tolerance for sizing (all delegations should report about their experiences with the 5% tolerance);
- review of the definition of long varieties;
- discussion on the UN/ECE Conditions of Sale and RUCIP 2000;
- discussion on the progress of the OECD Explanatory Brochure;
- report on national provisions for traceability (all delegations).

50. The last item was proposed by the delegation of Europatat who said that traceability requirements of different countries should be accepted in international trade in order to avoid that these requirements turned into barriers to trade.

**(b) Date and place of the next session**

51. It was decided that the next session will be held in March 2003.

**(c) Preparation of the 57th session of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development**

52. The secretariat will transmit the agreed amendments to the standards to the Working Party for adoption, as well as the opinion of the Specialized Section that there is an urgent need to ask the OECD Scheme to develop a revised explanatory brochure for Early and Ware Potatoes.

**Item 11 Other business**

53. The delegation of Europatat provided the secretariat with a list of countries who have ratified the Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Arbitral Awards (New York 1958) which was an important basis for the RUCIP "clause compromissoire". Interested delegations can obtain a copy of this list from the secretariat.

**Item 12 Election of officers**

54. The Specialized Section re-elected Mr. Debaveye (Belgium) as its Chairman and Ms. Zgorska (Poland) as Vice-Chairperson.

**Item 13 Adoption of the report**

55. The Specialized Section adopted the report on its fifteenth session on the basis of a draft prepared by the secretariat.