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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Thirty-seventh session  
Geneva, 19-21 March 2007

**REPORT OF THE SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION  
OF SEED POTATOES ON ITS THIRTY-SEVENTH SESSION**

**Summary**

The Specialized Section took the following major decisions:

Agreed on the assessment key for common and netted scab, and powdery scab.

Changed the text on the purpose of comparative trials.

Amended provisions concerning sampling and homogeneity of the lot.

Decided to develop procedures for assessment of non-compliance at destination.

Defined its common position on potato virus Y (PVY):

- New strains and variants of PVY are occurring worldwide and seem to be more readily transmissible than earlier strains.
- Strains and variants differ in their ability to cause leaf and/or tuber symptoms.
- Control of PVY is still only possible through strict PVY tolerances within a seed potato certification scheme, through breeding and through adoption of best crop management practices.
- An option to control PTNRD (Potato Tuber Necrotic Ringspot Disease) on susceptible varieties may be a specific certification tolerance for superficial necrosis, until an appropriate detection method becomes available.
- Applying a zero tolerance for widely distributed viruses, such as PVY, is not effective, practical or feasible.

Decided to complement the List of Diseases and Pests with images.

Asked the Bureau and the secretariat to promote the Standard at the "POTATO RUSSIA 2007" congress.

Agreed on its future work.

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## INTRODUCTION

1. Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy), the Chairman of the Specialized Section, opened the meeting.
2. Representatives of the following UNECE member countries attended the meeting: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
3. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the session: Europatat.

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

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/1

4. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.
5. The secretariat updated the delegations on documentation available for the session. The following documents were added to the agenda:
  - INF.3: Meeting of the Bureau of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Changins, Switzerland, 11 January 2007 (E)
  - INF.4: Sampling Practices for Lot Inspection in Seed Potato Certification (E)
  - INF.5: List of Diseases and Pests (E/F/R)
  - INF.5\_PICTURES: List of Diseases and Pests (E)
  - INF.6: Implementation of UNECE standards at national level (E)
  - INF.7: Prototype for a Training Course (E/F/R)
  - INF.8: RUCIP Rules for Seed Potatoes (Secretariat) (E/F)
  - INF.9: Exchange of practices for taking samples for tuber inspection (E)

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

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/20  
ECE/TRADE/C/2006/18  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/19/Rev.1

6. The delegations took note of the decisions taken by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards at its November 2006 session concerning the work of the Specialized Section (paras. 33, 34, 44 and 45 of document ECE/TRADE//C/WP.7/2006/20). The Chairman also explained that the Standard has been considerably renewed over the past several years, it has become more practical and its implementation now needs to be actively promoted.

### **III. INFORMATION ON THE RESULTS OF THE MEETINGS OF THE BUREAU (Agenda item 3)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2  
INF.3

7. The Chairman informed the participants about the results of the meetings of the Bureau in Arras (France) in October 2006 (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2) and in Changins (Switzerland) in January 2007 (INF.3). The Specialized Sections expressed its gratitude to colleagues from France and Switzerland for having prepared and hosted these meetings.

### **IV. REVIEW OF THE UNECE STANDARD FOR SEED POTATOES (Agenda item 4)**

Documentation: INF.1  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2  
ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/3

8. The Specialized Section noted that Belgium, Greece and Sweden have withdrawn their reservations in the Standard.

#### **A. Further development of Annex VIII: Assessment key for common and netted scab, and powdery scab (Agenda item 4a)**

9. The delegations accepted the proposal by the Extended Bureau to complete Annex VIII with photos of common and netted scab, and powdery scab as presented in annex II of document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2. Photos for common and netted scab can also be applied for pitted scab. It should be made clear that the percentages in the titles of the photos are estimates.

10. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to explore how the size of the surface area attained by diseases could be calculated in a precise way. It was suggested to use the same background colour for all photos.

#### **B. Further development of Annex VI: Discussion on the aim of comparative trials (Agenda item 4b)**

11. The delegations agreed that comparative trials should be dealt with within the context of the Standard, particularly with reference to annex IV. The Specialized Section changed the text of annex VI (I. Purpose of the comparative trials) proposed at the meeting of the Extended Bureau in Arras (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2, para. 7) to read:  
“The examination of seed potatoes in plots enables the assessment of the conditions specified in annex IV for randomly selected seed lots put on the market.”

12. Several delegations pointed out that “vigour” is an important characteristic of seed potatoes. However, comparative trials cannot be used to measure it, because there are no tolerances for this characteristic in the Standard. The Specialized Section agreed that this issue may be worth revisiting at future meetings.

**C. Amendment of the provision concerning quality with reference to sampling and homogeneity of the lot (Agenda item 4c)**

13. The delegations discussed this agenda item on the basis of: (i) the amendments to section III (D. Sampling) formulated at the Bureau meeting in Arras (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/2, para. 9), and (ii) the proposals by the United Kingdom (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/3). The Specialized Section agreed to change the wording of section III (D. Sampling) to read:

“Sampling of seed potatoes for certification purposes shall be carried out officially or under official supervision. To assess compliance with Annex III, tuber samples, representative of the lot, shall be taken at a minimum rate of 20 kg for each 10000 kg and may be collected either during grading or from at least 2 containers. More samples may be taken if one of the initial samples is close to tolerance.”

14. The Specialized Section agreed to amend section VI (C. Nature of contents of containers, second paragraph) to read:

“A lot should be sufficiently homogeneous which means that seed potatoes within different containers are as uniform as is practical and will not vary excessively in composition and appearance.”

**V. ARBITRATION RULES/DISPUTE SETTLEMENT (Agenda item 5)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/4

15. The participants took note of the recommendation by the Working Party not to develop binding rules for dispute resolution or to duplicate work by other organizations in this area. The Specialized Section agreed that useful work could be done in drawing up a list of procedural steps to be followed by the importing and exporting authorities when inspection by the importing authority finds non-conformity with the Standard (what official service to contact, what kind of information to collect, what proofs to present, etc.). Such a list would be within the scope of the Standard and would help promote its practical use worldwide. The representatives of Canada, France (rapporteur) and United States volunteered to prepare a first draft of the list for consideration by the Specialized Section.

## **VI. EXCHANGE OF PRACTICES FOR TAKING SAMPLES FOR TUBER INSPECTION (Agenda item 6)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/5  
INF.4  
INF.9

16. The survey of national practices for taking samples for tuber inspection showed that these practices vary considerably across countries. The amount of information collected by the survey provided a good basis for further discussions on what could be a generally acceptable sampling procedure for inclusion in the Standard. The Specialized Section decided that the Extended Bureau revisit the issue of sampling at its future meetings drawing on the results of the survey and on the proposals made by United Kingdom in document INF.4.

## **VII. SUPERFICIAL NECROSIS CAUSED BY VIRUS (PTNRD – POTATO TUBER NECROTIC RINGSPOT DISEASE) (Agenda item 7)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/6

17. In view of the rapidly changing nature of viruses and of the damage they cause to potatoes, the delegations stressed the importance of monitoring scientific developments in this area and discussing how new virus detection methodologies can be used within the framework of national certification schemes.

18. The Specialized Section drew up the following text as its common position on the subject.

- (a) New strains and variants of PVY are occurring worldwide and seem to be more readily transmissible than earlier strains.
- (b) Strains and variants differ in their ability to cause leaf and/or tuber symptoms.
- (c) Control of PVY is still only possible through strict PVY tolerances within a seed potato certification scheme, through breeding and through adoption of best crop management practices.
- (d) An option to control PTNRD (Potato Tuber Necrotic Ringspot Disease) on susceptible varieties may be a specific certification tolerance for superficial necrosis, until an appropriate detection method becomes available.
- (e) Applying a zero tolerance for widely distributed viruses, such as PVY, is not effective, practical or feasible.

19. To promote this text, the Specialized Section asked the secretariat to include it in the executive summary of the report and to place it on the UNECE website.

## **VIII. IMAGES TO COMPLEMENT THE LIST OF DISEASES AND PESTS (Agenda item 8)**

Documentation: INF.5  
INF.5\_PICTURES

20. The delegations accepted the updated bibliography to the list of diseases and pests (INF.5) with minor corrections.
21. The participants agreed that the photos illustrating the diseases and pests may not necessarily be exhaustive, but should serve the purpose of quick reference for users of the Standard. The Specialized Section will reflect on whether photos of symptoms of physiological disorders could be added to the list to help distinguish them from the symptoms of damage caused by pests.
22. To be included in the list, individual photos will have to be agreed upon by the Specialized Section. France has agreed to play the coordinating role in collecting and selecting the pictures for the list. The delegations were invited to send photos to France.

## **IX. INFORMATION ON NATIONAL CATALOGUES AND DESIGNATED AUTHORITIES (Agenda item 9)**

Documentation: INF.2

23. The delegations asked the secretariat to place on the UNECE website and keep regularly updated: (i) the list of links to websites on potato varieties and (ii) the list of the national seed potato certification authorities (Designated Authorities). Direct link to the EU catalogue of potato varieties should be added to the first list.

## **X. PREPARATION OF 2007 SESSION OF WORKING PARTY ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS (Agenda item 10)**

Documentation: INF.6

24. The Specialized Section decided to submit the report, the list of diseases and pests and the amendments to the Standard, discussed and agreed upon under item 4, to the forthcoming session of the Working Party for approval.
25. The delegations discussed the draft questionnaire on the implementation of UNECE standards at national level and asked the secretariat to: (i) include a column to allow respondents to indicate if UNECE standards are used as reference in national or regional (e.g. EU) legislation; (ii) provide space for comments to indicate whether the main participants in the supply chain are aware of the UNECE standards, if they find them useful and important, and how the standards are applied. It would also be helpful to use the questionnaire to find out what

provisions of the UNECE standards are not used or are modified, and why, in the national or regional legislation.

## **XI. PROMOTION OF THE STANDARD (Agenda item 11)**

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2007/7  
INF.7

26. The Specialized Section supported the efforts by the Bureau and the secretariat to promote the Standard at the "POTATO RUSSIA 2007" congress. The participants were asked to assist the Bureau and the secretariat in preparing a paper, a PowerPoint presentation and a handout (in English and Russian) for the congress.

27. 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 short-listed for financing for 2008-2009.

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

28. The delegation suggested the following items for future work:

- (a) procedures for assessment of non-compliance at destination (Canada, France (rapporteur), United States)
- (b) sampling procedure for inclusion in the Standard (Extended Bureau)
- (c) PTNRD (Extended Bureau organizers)
- (d) *Erwinia* (Extended Bureau organizers)
- (e) PCN (potato cyst nematode) (Extended Bureau organizers)
- (f) images for the list of diseases and pests (France, request to all participants to send photos)
- (g) exchange of information on crop inspection practices (United Kingdom to prepare draft questionnaire)
- (h) control under official supervision and accreditation systems (for secretariat to circulate the existing standards)
- (i) promotion of the Standard and prototype for the training course (Bureau and secretariat)
- (j) electronic certification (for secretariat to organize a presentation by UN/CEFACT to the Specialized Section)

- (k) exchange of information on post-harvest tests (for France to prepare a draft questionnaire)
- (l) vigour (Switzerland)

It would be helpful to have researchers/experts available for discussion on (iii) (iv) and (v) to advise the certification authorities on how to improve certification measures to better control these pests.

29. The Specialized Section has planned to hold a Bureau meeting in August 2007 in the framework of the Moscow congress; its next annual session in March 2008 in Geneva; an Extended Bureau meeting in October/November 2008 in Holland; and its subsequent session in March 2009 in Geneva.

30. Belgium and Canada offered to host Extended Bureau meetings in the autumn of 2009 and 2010, respectively.

### **XIII. OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda item 13)**

Documentation: INF.8

31. The Specialized Section invited Europatat to explore the possibility of harmonizing the table of tolerances in the RUCIP rules for seed potatoes with the tolerances in the UNECE Standard. The representative of Europatat explained that this will be discussed at the Europatat congress to be held in Bratislava in June 2007, and the results will be reported back to the Specialized Section.

### **XIV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Agenda item 14)**

32. The Specialized Sections re-elected Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy) as Chairperson and Mr. Willem Schrage (United States) as Vice-Chairperson.

### **XV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT (Agenda item 15)**

33. The Specialized Section adopted its report.

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