



**Economic and Social  
Council**

Distr.  
GENERAL

TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/2  
22 November 1999

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

---

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 Seed Potatoes  
31 January - 3 February 2000, Geneva

Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING SINCE THE TWENTY-NINTH SESSION

Note by the secretariat

This document sums up the relevant outcome of the second and third sessions of the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the fifty-fourth and fifty-fifth sessions of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development.

## **SECOND SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

### **Discussion of the work of the Working Party**

1. The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Committee (ECE/TRADE/222, paragraphs 27 to 32):

“27. The Chairman of the Working Party (WP.7), Mr. M. Vilchez-Barros (Spain), informed the Committee that the Working Party had not met since the last session of the Committee in December. Several meetings of rapporteurs and experts had been held but their decisions would still have to be endorsed by WP.7 at its next session (2-4 November 1998).

28. The Chairman of the Working Party and other delegations expressed their satisfaction with the fact that the post dealing with agricultural standards had now been filled on a permanent basis and also thanked Ms. L. Annovazzi Jakab who had been acting as Secretary to WP.7 and its Meetings of Experts for her excellent work and support during the past years.

29. The Chairman of the Working Party gave a presentation on commercial quality standards for perishable produce and the role of UN/ECE and other international organizations (OECD Scheme, European Union, Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables) in the development of these standards. He also explained the efforts undertaken to harmonize the work of the different bodies.

30. The delegation of the European Community confirmed its continued support for the work of UN/ECE in this area. It noted that EU legislation and UN/ECE standards were already well harmonized and that the European Community advocated that all activities by other international bodies in this area should reinforce UN/ECE standards.

31. The EU representative asked further, if, in view of the uncertainty surrounding the continuation of the OECD scheme for the application of international standards for fruit and vegetables, the Committee could request the Working Party on Perishable Produce and Quality Development to consider if some of the OECD work should be transferred to UN/ECE. The delegation of Turkey said that if additional tasks were taken on by WP.7, additional resources would also be required. In an answer to these remarks, the Director of the Trade Division said that until more information was received from OECD, and before the next session of WP.7, it would be premature for the Committee to discuss this subject in depth. When more information was available, this would be reported to the Committee at its next session in June 1999, which could then, through a reassignment of priorities, decide on the allocation of resources to this work area.

32. The delegate from the Russian Federation announced that he would submit a proposal for a standard on marking of food products to the November session of WP.7.”

### **Prioritization of the work of the Working Party**

3. At the Committee session the work of WP.7 was given an overall “HIGHER” priority and its individual tasks were prioritized as follows (ECE/TRADE/222, annex II, programme activity 04, B.):

**“Higher:** Setting of new standards and revisions, enlarging participation of both public and private sectors.

Broadening the application of UN/ECE standards and recommendations and the implementation of controls at private and public levels.

Disseminating the texts of UN/ECE standards and recommendations for perishable produce among supplying countries to UN/ECE markets and diffusion among users at different levels: producers, traders, control services, consumers.

**Medium:** Interpretation and harmonization of standards and control procedures among UN/ECE member countries.

**Lower:** Cooperation with other international standardization organizations.”

### **THIRD SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Committee (ECE/TRADE/231, paragraphs 34 to 37):

#### **6(b) Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development**

Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/1998/9 Report of the Fifty-Fourth Session of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development

TRADE/1999/3 Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development: Note by the secretariat

34. The Vice-Chair of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7), Mr. David Priester (United States), gave an overview of the results of its November 1998 session, as well as of the sessions of its specialized sections on early and ware potatoes and meat which had taken place since then. In addition, he reported on cooperation with the European Union and various international organizations (the OECD and the WHO/FAO Codex Alimentarius Commission) and informed the Committee of the new Internet World Wide Web site created by the secretariat, which contains the texts of the standards, as well as information on meetings (<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm>). The Committee then endorsed this report of the fifty-fourth session of the Working Party.

35. The Chair of the Committee, Mr. Vilchez-Barros, who also serves as Chair of the Working Party, informed the Committee of the efforts being undertaken to promote UN/ECE commercial produce standards internationally to increase their use and avoid duplication which can occur when existing work is not known:

- Spain would provide unofficial translations of UN/ECE standards into Spanish to promote their dissemination in Latin America.
- The Working Party had been represented at an expert group meeting on agricultural standards organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). For this meeting, ESCWA had translated 25 UN/ECE standards into Arabic and these were currently being examined by Governments for adoption as ESCWA standards.
- Contacts had also been established with the other United Nations regional commissions (for Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia and the Pacific).

36. The delegation of the European Community, speaking also on behalf of the 15 EU Member States, stated that the Community continued to place high priority on UN/ECE work on agricultural standards. The European Community further proposed that the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development consider a possible transfer to the UN/ECE of the work being done by the OECD on interpretative brochures for UN/ECE standards. The delegation invited the secretariat to prepare a working document to define the modalities for undertaking this work, including a clear description of the costs (extra personnel, production of the brochures) and how these costs might be financed. This document should be prepared in time for discussion at the next session of the Specialized Section on Coordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables from 25 to 28 October 1999 and for consequent consideration by the Working Party, which will meet from 3 to 5 November 1999. The delegation of the United States supported this request. The Committee then approved the request for this study.

37. The Director of the Trade Division said that the secretariat would undertake the study requested but that it was of the highest importance to the UN/ECE not to jeopardize its excellent institutional relationship with the OECD. She then invited member States to keep the OECD and its secretariat informed of their requests to the UN/ECE, as well as of further developments. The delegation of the European Community noted that they had already, repeatedly, stated their opinion on this matter in OECD meetings and would continue to do so. The delegation of the United States said that they would keep the OECD secretariat informed on this issue.

## **FIFTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON STANDARDIZATION OF PERISHABLE PRODUCE AND QUALITY DEVELOPMENT**

The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Working Party (TRADE/WP.7/1998/9, paragraphs 23 to 32):

### **Meeting of Experts on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

Document: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/9  
TRADE/WP.7/1998/6

23. The chairman of the group, Mr. B. Borrel (Canada), explained the proposed revisions to the UN/ECE standard on Seed Potatoes. He gave a short introduction on the classification of seed potatoes into three classes: certified seed, basic seed and pre-basic seed. The last category had been added recently which was the reason for several amendments. In the definition of basic seed the word "maintenance programme" had

been changed to “certification programme” which was thought to better reflect the current practice of producing basic seed.

24. The EU and France reserved their position on this change. In this context it was mentioned that the EU had adopted the text of the UN/ECE standard in directive 66/403.

25. Mr. Borrel said that in excess of 1 million tonnes of seed potatoes were traded annually internationally which means that more than 1 million acres are planted with imported potatoes. This high volume increases the risk of disseminating plant diseases with the result that seed potatoes received more attention from people dealing with plant health than those dealing with quality. In some countries diseases or pests mentioned in the UN/ECE standard are considered under plant quarantine legislation.

26. He said that there was agreement in his group that the discussion forum offered by UN/ECE was unique and useful (facilities, secretariat assistance, composition of the group) but that the standard produced by the group was not widely recognized. One of the reasons given for this was that the provisions of the standard were not strict enough.

27. It was mentioned that the term “regulated non-quarantine pests” (quality pests) has been approved by IPPC. This means that countries can apply measures to prevent the introduction of these pests if they regulate the same pests for their domestic produce. Therefore the introduction of stricter measures against these pests in the UN/ECE standard would be possible without creating a problem with the WTO TBT, which might make the standard more attractive. Mr. Borrel emphasized that the standard needed to be more actively promoted by the secretariat and others involved in the development of the standard.

28. The Director of the UN/ECE Trade Division said that she agreed with Mr. Borrel but that active promotion of the standard would be difficult because of the present staffing situation. However, an additional post had been requested for this work.

29. Mr. Borrel said he was pleased that at this years’ Meeting of Experts a delegate from the United States had participated for the first time who had consequently written a favourable report on the UN/ECE meeting and encouraged the United States to participate on a regular basis. He had invited the rapporteurs to hold their meeting in Seattle. This invitation has been accepted. The meeting of rapporteurs will take place from 29 November to 2 December, followed by a symposium on seed potato standardization on 2 December and the annual National Potato Council seed seminar from 3 to 5 December.

30. Finally Mr. Borrel raised the general question of how much regulation was needed in a standard and how much should be left to the individual country (e.g. in the present standard, countries are free to subdivide the three categories defined in the standard into classes).

31. The delegation of Switzerland proposed that countries should consult their experts on seed potatoes to prepare a more detailed discussion at the next session and to give further guidance to the group. This was agreed by the Working Party.

32. The Working Party adopted the revision to the UN/ECE standard on seed potatoes. The revised standard will be published in an addendum to this report.

**FIFTY-FIFTH SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON STANDARDIZATION OF PERISHABLE PRODUCE AND QUALITY DEVELOPMENT**

The following excerpt is taken from the report of the Working Party (TRADE/WP.7/1999/7, paragraph 27):

**Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

27. There was no meeting of this Specialized Section since the last session of the Working Party. The Secretariat informed the Working Party that two meetings of rapporteurs had been held (Seattle, December 1998, Milan September 1999) where the future direction of the work of the Specialized Section and the UN/ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes were discussed. These proposals will be finalized at the Specialized Section to be held 31 January to 3 February 2000 and presented to the next session of the Working Party.

---