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ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of  
Seed Potatoes

Thirty-third session, 26-28 March 2003, Geneva

Item 4(a) of the Provisional Agenda

PROPOSAL FOR A NEW INTRODUCTION TO THE UNECE STANDARD  
FOR SEED POTATOES

**Note by the secretariat :** This document contains a proposal for a new introduction for the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes which has been discussed at several bureau meetings. It explains the goals and purpose of the standard and what it means to apply it as well as its relation to texts of other organizations. It is submitted to the Specialized Section for adoption for inclusion in the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes. It is also proposed to insert a table of contents at the beginning of the standard.

**I. Replace the present introduction with the following text:**

**“1 About UNECE**

UNECE was set up in 1947 by ECOSOC. It is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations.

Its primary *goal* is to encourage greater economic cooperation among its member States.

It *focuses* on economic analysis, environment and human settlements, statistics, sustainable energy, trade, industry and enterprise development, timber and transport.

UNECE *activities* include policy analysis, development of conventions, regulations and standards, and technical assistance.

UNECE has *55 member States*. However, all interested UN member States may participate in its work. Over 70 international professional organizations and other non-governmental organizations take part in UNECE activities.

**2 History and goals of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**

*2.1 History*

In October 1949, the Economic Commission for Europe's Committee on Agricultural Problems established the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Foodstuffs to determine common standards for perishable foodstuffs" and to study steps to be taken on the international level in order to secure the general adoption of standards and control systems". Later, the responsibility of the Working Party was extended to cover non-edible horticultural produce and quality development which is reflected in its present name.

The activities have led to the elaboration of a wide range of UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat and cut flowers. Standards for fruit juices and quick frozen foods have been elaborated in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts and are now further developed in the relevant Codex bodies.

*2.2 Goals*

UNECE standards harmonize existing national commercial quality standards for perishable produce to:

- Facilitate fair international trade and prevent technical barriers to trade
- Improve producers' profitability and encourage production of high quality produce
- Protect consumers' interest

With the Working Party and five Specialized Sections UNECE groups provide a forum where countries can discuss all issues of commercial quality that may arise from their domestic markets and which have an implication on international trade. The groups offer assistance to countries in transition by organizing workshops on the harmonization of national standards with international commercial standards.

**3 History, goals and scope of the UNECE standard for seed potatoes**

### 3.1 *History*

Work on the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes began in 1958.

At the 9<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party:

Some disagreements were raised concerning the nomenclature of the different categories of seed potatoes. The Group of Experts (from the Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands and United Kingdom) was charged of preparing an analysis of existing national regulations and drafting recommendations for international standardization.

Provisional recommendations were adopted in 1960 at the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Working Party in order to try them out and revise them according to the experience.

The first version of the text was adopted by the Working Party in 1963 at its 16<sup>th</sup> session. The standard has been regularly updated since then.

### 3.2 *Goals and scope*

The goal of the Standard is to act as world reference to facilitate fair international trade by:

- creating a harmonized certification system
- promoting its use and
- defining harmonized quality requirements for seed potatoes

To reach this goal the Standard covers the following requirements controlled by certification:

- varietal identity and purity;
- genealogy and traceability;
- diseases and pests;
- external quality and physiology;
- sizing and labelling;

As a consequence, the Standard considers issues falling the WTO-TBT agreement under as well as the WTO-SPS agreement.

## **4 Application of the Standard**

4.1 The Standard adopted by the Working Party is recommended to countries for application as defined below.

4.2 Countries applying this Standard should notify the UNECE Secretariat of their National Designated Authority (NDA) responsible for its implementation.

4.3 Application means the use of the UNECE Standard for export and import. This means for

*Export:* All seed potatoes certified and labelled for export by the NDA should from the country meet at least the requirements of the Standard.

*Import:* Seed potatoes certified and labelled according to the UNECE Standard should be accepted for import by the NDA for parameters covered by the Standard except where additional or more stringent requirements are applied by the country in respect to diseases and pests if:

- the same requirement is applied to domestic production AND
- these requirements are justified, to prevent introduction or spread of these diseases and pests which do not exist there or which seem particularly injurious to the crops in that country or in any part of its territory.

4.4 The NDA shall notify the UNECE secretariat of each additional or more stringent requirements together technical or scientific justification.

4.5 The application of the Standard is without prejudice of any other legislation concerning industrial of commercial property, protection of crops, and health of persons and animals.

## **5 Development of the standard**

For the development of the standard and the work of the Specialized Section, the Working Procedures as revised in document TRADE/WP.7/2002/9/Add.19 apply. In this section some of these are reproduced in a shortened form.

### *5.1 Meetings*

The Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes meets once a year, usually in Geneva. Between the sessions extended meetings of the bureau are held to work on follow-up items or preparation of the next session. All members of the Specialized Section can attend these meetings.

The meetings are held in Geneva or at the invitation of a host country. This offers the possibility for other experts to attend who would not normally attend the formal sessions and also for technical visits, which help the groups to achieve their goals. The UNECE secretariat will service these meetings provided that adequate travel funds are available.

### *5.2 Attendance*

The rules for attendance have been designed to allow participation or consultation of all interested parties concerned:

All members of the United Nations can attend the meetings as participants.

The European Community traditionally participates in the meetings regarding areas within its competence.

Intergovernmental organizations are welcome to attend the meetings as observers. They should address a letter to the secretariat informing them about their intention.

Non-governmental organizations with an international membership and an interest in the work on commercial standardization of seed potatoes can apply for observer status to sessions of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections. This status can be granted by the chairperson.

### 5.3 *Decision taking*

The rule for decision taking in the Working Party and its subsidiary specialized sections is the unanimous consensus among the participants present at the session.

Participants have the possibility to disagree with the group without preventing a decision being taken.

Their disagreement can be reflected:

- either in the report,
- or in the standard by means of reservations which should be restricted to specific technical points.

## **6 Cooperation with other international organisations**

### 6.1 *European Union*

In July 1966 the Council of the European Union adopted a Council Directive on the marketing of seed potatoes, applicable to the production with a view to marketing, and to the marketing of seed potatoes within the Community (Directive 2002/56/EC-OJ L 193, 20.07.2002 former 66/403/EEC).

Within its recitals, it was stated "it is desirable to establish a uniform certification scheme for the Community based on the experience gained in the application of the scheme of the Economic Commission for Europe".

The above Directive envisaged that provisions should be made for authorizing the marketing within the Community of seed potatoes harvested in third country where they afford the same assurances as seed potatoes officially certified within the Community and complying with the Community rules. Currently a Council Decision is in force (Council Decision 95/513/EC, OJ L 296, 9.12.1995, p. 31, as last amended by Decision 2000/36/EC, OJ 114, 13.5.2000, p. 30) on the equivalence of seed potatoes produced in third countries. According to such a Decision in seed potatoes harvested in the countries as specified and officially controlled by the relevant Authorities and which belong to the categories specified therein are equivalent to seed potatoes harvested within the Community. Seed potatoes shall be certified and their containers officially marketed and sealed in accordance with the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes recommended by the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development of the UNECE. The Decision does not affect the requirements which member states establish under Council Directive 2000/29/EC (former 77/93/EEC) on protective measures against the introduction into the Member States organisms harmful to plants or plant products (OJ L 169, 10.7.2000, p.1)

### 6.2 *EPPO*

In 1999, the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation (EPPO/OEPP) published a recommended certification scheme for seed potatoes. This scheme focussed on micro- propagation as the recommended method of initial seed production (nuclear stock) and detailed the organisms which should be tested for and the appropriate test procedures. Conditions and tolerances for the production of Pre-basic TC (mini-tubers) were also defined. The requirements for the certification of Pre-basic, Basic and Certified category seed potatoes were aligned, as far as possible, with those of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes.

### 6.3 *NAPPO*

In 1995, the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO) approved a potato standard. The standard identified federal or state/provincial seed potato certification as the basis for a potato risk mitigation system. Also, it established common criteria for limited generation certification systems and diagnostics. It included lists of quarantine pests and "quality" pests of concern to member countries in order to harmonize their status. Some of the "quality" pests listed were then categorized into examples of regulated non-quarantine pests. The standard also included an appendix describing Potato virus Y, N strain (PVY<sup>N</sup>) diagnostics.

A major revision is in-progress with the objective that the standard will be: NAPPO Regional Standard for Phytosanitary Measures (RSPM#3), "Requirements for the Importation of potatoes into a NAPPO member country."

## **7 Editorial comments concerning this revision of the standard**

...(relevant text to be included)"

### **II. Consequential amendments**

As a consequence the following provisions in the standard could be deleted:

"The provisions of this standard do not hinder national legislation provisions justified by reasons of the protection of the health of persons and animals or the protection of crops or industrial or commercial property.

However, each producer country for the marketing of seed potatoes in the whole or any part of its territory, take more vigorous measures than those provided for in annexes III and V against the introduction of certain regulated non- quarantine pests which do not exist there or which seem particularly injurious to the crops in that country or in any part of its territory".

### **III. Table of contents**

Insert the following table of contents at the beginning of the standard:

#### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction

- I. DEFINITION OF PRODUCE
- II. PROVISIONS CONCERNING QUALITY
  - A. Minimum requirements
  - B. Classification
    - (i) Pre-basic Category Seed
    - (ii) Basic Category Seed
    - (iii) Certified Category Seed
    - (iv) Field generation:

- C. National Classification
- D. Sampling
- E. National phyto-sanitary provisions
- F. Comparative tests

III. PROVISIONS CONCERNING SIZING

IV. PROVISIONS CONCERNING TOLERANCES FOR SIZING

V. PROVISIONS CONCERNING PRESENTATION

VI. PROVISIONS CONCERNING MARKING

**Annex I:** Minimum conditions to be satisfied in the production of Pre-Basic TC Seed Potatoes

**Annex II:** Minimum conditions to be satisfied by the crop

**Annex III:** Minimum quality conditions for lots of seed potatoes

**Annex IV:** Minimum conditions to be satisfied by direct progeny of seed potatoes

**Annex V:** Label

**Annex VI:** Organizing the inspection of crops grown from sample lots of seed potatoes (certified according to the Standard)

**Annex VII:** Definitions of terms applicable to the Standard

**Annex VIII:** Assessment key for percentage tuber surface area coverage of blemish diseases

**Annex IX:** Sampling tubers for virus testing