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COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes

Thirty-fourth session, 22-24 March 2004, Geneva

Item 2 of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS OF INTEREST ARISING SINCE THE THIRTY-THIRD SESSION

Note by the secretariat: This document contains in part A. the discussion on the work of the Specialized Section in the Working Party and in part B the report of the meeting of the bureau of the Specialized Section in Edinburgh.

A. Excerpt from the report of the Working Party (TRADE/WP.7/2003/6, paras. 100 to 104)**Item 6: Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

100. The Chairman of the Specialized Section, Mr. Giacomo Bianchi (Italy), introduced the report of the 33rd session held in Geneva from 26 to 27 March 2003 (see. TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2003/10) and informed in detail about the proposals for the revision of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes, other initiatives of the Specialized Section, the extended bureau meetings in 2003 and the programme of work for 2004. The session was attended by 12 countries and a representative of the European Community.

Proposals of the Specialized Section to amend the standard

- New introduction: The objective of the new text is to explain the goals and purpose of the standard, what it means to apply it, as well as its relationship to texts of other organizations.
- Provisions concerning the variety: This was considered a priority issue by the Specialized Section, to allow maximum security in managing a certification scheme, more and more with current development of micro-propagation technique and to face, with reference to varietal identity and purity, the problem of GMO.
- National classes: The proposed amendment to the title of Section C will reflect that national classes are still allowed but on a derogation basis.
- Inclusion of a list of pests to be checked on the initial stock.
- Field tolerances were introduced for each of the international classes.
- Assessment key for percentage tuber surface area coverage of blemish diseases was amended for Rhizoctonia and is now showing a better representation of the percentage of coverage provided for by the Standard (1 and 10%).
- A summary table of tolerances was included.

Future topics/activities

- Destination tolerances: The Standard describes quality standards for the produce at the export control point. Nevertheless, importing countries also expect these tolerances to apply at the point of import. Such an expectation may not be achievable in some cases with progressive disease such as tuber rots, which can develop between export and delivery.
- Superficial necrosis caused by PVY^{ntn} : A strain of potato virus Y (PVY^{ntn}) may cause necrotic symptoms (PTNRD) on potato tubers. These symptoms make tubers unattractive for sale in the pre-packaged market.
- In order to deal with GMO issues in the standard it will be necessary to start from a common understanding of terminology and it will be considered whether the definition of Living Modified Organism (LMO) by the Cartagena Protocol could help in this discussion.
- Sizing: the present provisions are no longer in line with current practices and will be revised.
- Shrivelled Tubers: Rules concerning shrivelled tubers will be discussed as a way to regulate blemish disease such as silver scurf.
- Virus symptoms: A paper will be prepared in order to clarify in the glossary which are the viruses taken into account by the Standard, while talking about mild and severe viruses.
- Development of a prototype seminar is being discussed to offer to countries that want to improve their seed potato production or to importing countries that want to be more informed about ordering seed from other countries.
- Pest list: This list is further developed and will serve to identify future work for the group by identifying those which can be considered an obstacle to the international trade. A common understanding of methodologies and tests will also be desirable.
- The establishment of a recognizable UNECE label is considered as important for the Standard.

Publications

101. As a result of a questionnaire sent in 2001 to some 75 countries around the world interested in potato cultivation, an overview of domestic standards implemented by countries will be published on the UNECE website. The Specialized Section attaches great importance to this project because it helps to promote the standard and to identify further areas of work.

102. The bureau recommended that the results of the questionnaire on national certification schemes for seed potatoes should be published on the UNECE homepage. A paper publication, as had been originally intended, would be quickly out of date, whereas the electronic publication would enable rapid changes and extensions.

103. The Working Party took note of this decision.

Meetings of the bureau

104. Mr. Bianchi thanked delegates and the secretariat for their active support of the Specialized Section and their participation at the extended bureau meetings held in Como, Italy (8 - 10 July) and Edinburgh, United Kingdom (7-10 October) and especially the Scottish colleagues for the excellent organization. The next extended bureau meeting is scheduled for mid-December 2003 in Geneva, to prepare the next session of the Specialized Section. An invitation to hold an Extended Bureau meeting in Dublin in the first half of 2004 has been received from the Irish authorities.

B. Report of the Meeting of the extended bureau of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Edinburgh, 7 to 10 October 2003

Participants:

Henk van de Haar (Netherlands)
Stuart Carnegie (United Kingdom)
Günther Erbe (Germany)
Giacomo Bianchi (Italy)
Pierre Miauton (Switzerland)
Tom Heilandt (UNECE)

RESERVATIONS IN THE UNECE STANDARD

A reply from Mr. Freudenstein concerning the reservation from Germany was received by the secretariat. The reservation was withdrawn.

PUBLICATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON NATIONAL CERTIFICATION SCHEMES

It was decided that this document should be published on the website of the Agricultural Standards Unit in English with a Russian and French introduction. The extended bureau decided against a paper publication at the moment because any paper publication would quickly be out of date.

It was therefore deemed preferable to have the information as a live document on the Internet with a note, inviting countries to correct any errors or in case of countries who have not sent the information to contribute.

The UNECE secretariat will send an official letter to all Missions saying where the document can be found and ask for corrections and additions.

DESTINATION TOLERANCES

Background

The standard describes the produce at the export control point. Importing countries expect these tolerances also at point of import. For tuber rots this could be an invalid expectation because they are progressive diseases.

Discussion

Germany: Have only one tolerance. Standard should apply at all stages of marketing. Wrong handling and storage can contribute a lot to the deterioration. Gave example of complaints about bad seed vigour because of storing at too high temperature.

United Kingdom: Prefers lowering of tolerances for rots as the best way to avoid progression. Make the standard stricter but be conscious that these tolerances might not be met at import.

Netherlands: Agree to lower the tolerances for rots. But that does not mean that these will be reached at destination. Not realistic to define transport conditions that will prevent any progressing of diseases. Irrespective of the level of the tolerance the problem of destination will always remain. If the tolerance is not met at destination the certification agency is not responsible for that. It is a joint responsibility.

They suggest lowering the tolerances at export and putting in a statement that even under optimal transport conditions some deterioration can occur.

There should be a minimum quality level at delivery. Should we clarify the relation to the destination tolerance? In practice buyers will expect the tolerances to be as in the UNECE standard.

Proposal to Specialized Section

It was agreed to propose several options to the Specialized Section:

Option 1: To introduce a destination tolerance in the standard, which might reasonably be, achieved from a specific export tolerances (e.g. put 1% at export to reach 2% at import).

Option 2: To introduce a sentence similar to other UNECE Standards that the condition at export has to be such that the produce can withstand transport and handling and arrive in satisfactory condition at its destination.

Option 3: Lower current tolerance from 1% to 0.5 % and include a sentence that for progressive diseases this is only an indication, which might not be reached at import.

Option 4: Keep current tolerance at 1% and include the same sentence as under 3 with an addition that for progressive diseases “Producing countries should apply a lower tolerance at the point of export sufficient to comply with the 1% tolerance at the point of delivery”

The extended bureau meeting preferred option 2 + 3 or 2 + 4.

See paper 2004/4 for the proposal.

SUPERFICIAL TUBER NECROSIS - PVY^{NTN}

A strain of potato virus Y (PVY^{NTN}) may cause necrotic symptoms on potato tubers. These symptoms make tubers unattractive for sale in the pre-pack market.

The discussion took place on the basis of a revised document on tuber necrosis.

The problem is that if one bases rejection of a lot only on symptoms on 0.1 % of tubers than if one tuber in 1000 would show symptoms the lot would be rejected. Other lots where tubers show no symptoms but the virus is present would be accepted.

The adoption of a specific tolerance for PTNRD would, therefore, require a rapid and accurate confirmatory diagnostic test for PVY that could be used by the inspectors at the time of inspection.

Such a method does not exist at the moment.

The revised document will be presented to the specialized section (see 2004/12)

GMO

At the last specialized section a proposal from Switzerland on the concept of the variety included provisions for varieties with “novel traits”. Nothing was accepted because of differences on opinion concerning the naming of such varieties (“novel traits” or GMO).

The Chairman proposed to study the terminology used in the Cartagena protocol on biodiversity (LMO – living modified organisms) to find a new definition that would allow the European Union and United States to use the same language, as it is already included in an international protocol signed by both.

Once the concept of LMO is included in the standard it would be possible to include provisions concerning conditions of movement and thus countries following the UNECE Standard would also have fulfilled their obligations according to the Cartagena Protocol (article 18)

Conclusion:

Italy and Switzerland will prepare a document, which would propose to include in the standard additions to Chapter II and Annex V as follows:

Chapter II

For varieties, which are LMO in accordance with the Cartagena Protocol the official description should provide information on its identity and relevant traits and/or characteristics.

Annex V

Point 6: “Variety and where appropriate, designation as an LMO”

LAYOUT FOR NOTIFICATION OF VARIETIES

Maintaining a global list of varieties had been rejected because of the workload that this would cause to the secretariat. For example the OECD list needed a lot of work to build and maintain.

It was decided to have links to the catalogues of different countries on the web site.

When informing the missions concerning the publication on the Internet of the document on national certification schemes, the UNECE secretariat will ask to indicate the web addresses of their national catalogue of potato varieties, which comply with the provision in the standard:

“Varieties shall be accepted into the Standard only if an official description and a reference sample are available from the NDA.

The variety should be distinct, uniform and stable according to the guidelines of UPOV and have a denomination allowing its identification.”

SIZING ISSUES

Minimum size/ long shaped varieties

Some of the UNECE rules are no longer in line with the EU rules. Should we align with the EU? The difference concerning minimum size was introduced when the common market began.

A tolerance of 3% by weight smaller and larger is difficult to reach for long shaped varieties which are difficult to grade.

It was decided to propose to change the present text in provisions concerning sizing as follows:

“Pre-basic TC are exempt from the minimum sizing requirements.

The minimum size of tubers must be such that they do not pass through a square gauge of ~~28~~ 25 mm; ~~for varieties having, on average, a length of at least twice the greatest width, the square gauge must not be less than 25 mm. ...”~~

See proposal in 2004/8 from the Netherlands.

Tuber counts

Should tuber counts be included?

United Kingdom: Counts would replace weight but not sizing. Tuber counts would be additional information.

Netherlands: At this moment do not print tuber numbers on the label.

Sizing of larger tubers

The present text in the standard requires that

..... “In the case of tubers, which are too large to pass through a square gauge of 35 mm, the difference between the maximum and minimum limits of size should be expressed in multiples of 5.

The maximum variation in size between tubers in a lot must be such that the difference between the dimensions of the two square gauges used does not exceed 20 mm unless the buyer and seller agree to deviate from this requirement.”

The delegation of the Netherlands said that this could lead to difficulties because of different interpretations of where to size for example tubers that are between 35 and 52 mm.

The Netherlands will prepare a document (see 2004/8).

Pest list

The pest list was reviewed in detail, especially those pests that are at present not regulated in the UNECE Standard.

It was decided that the symptom columns should be replaced with a general description of the diseases and information about good textbooks should be added.

It was felt that the inclusion of tolerances for shrivelled kernels could be a way to regulate blemish diseases such as silver scurf.

Include in Annex III, A a new 4.:

Shrivelled tubers

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|------------------------|
| - | pre-basic TC | 0 per cent by weight |
| - | pre-basic | 0.5 per cent by weight |
| - | basic and certified | 1 per cent by weight |

Viruses

Only Severe Mosaic, Mild Mosaic, Leaf roll and Ring spot should be mentioned here.

The standard should clarify the which viruses are regulated and which aren't and also the usage of severe/mild virus /mosaic. Amendment to the glossary (see 2004/7 from Germany)

Other amendments

Some consistency amendments concerning where certain bacteria and nematodes (see 2004/7 from Germany)

The secretariat will ask the delegation of France to prepare a concept paper on Mop Top and Rattle (see 2004/15).

The revised pest list will be presented in a paper.

Test methods

It was felt that concerning test methods a mention could be included in the text that the thrust of testing necessary is visual testing.

For other methods it could be possible to include references of possible recommended tests.

Visual aids

Delete 33.3 percent from the new pictures because it is not necessary in the standard.

The secretariat will ask the delegation of France to prepare visual aids for common scab (see 2004/6).

Seminar on seed potato certification – assistance to the implementation standard

The group discussed the possibilities to develop a 2-day prototype seminar to offer to countries that want to improve their seed potato production or to importing countries that want to be more informed about ordering seed from other countries.

The seminar should combine implementation of the standard with elements of seed production.

There is demand for such seminars, which are at the moment already held by exporting countries e.g. the Netherlands organise a refresher course for countries that have attended seed training courses – to discuss the resources you need to set up seed potato certification in Sub-Saharan Africa.

A problem of the UNECE Standard is that it covers only one part of the process: the non-quarantine aspect and not the quarantine aspects.

Italy will prepare a concept paper for a seminar (see 2004/14).

Status of the UNECE Standard

Present use of the standard

The ECE Standard has provided the basis for the EU marketing directive in 1966. The UNECE Standard is used when sending seed to have a common language (e.g. South America). Countries use parts of the standard and its terminology (Scotland). Switzerland is considering to adopt the standard.

Challenges

The UNECE and EU texts have developed in slightly different directions (more new parts have been added to the UNECE Standard; there are some differences in tolerances). The UNECE Standard cannot be a “one window scheme” because it cannot address SPS measures. Even the colours of labels are not harmonized.

Future work

The modernisation of the standard has to be completed we have to work on the scheme to make it more modern so that countries are interested and start implementing it on a broader basis. The link between UNECE Standard and European Union Directive should be strengthened. The specialized section should discuss regulated non-quality pests. The concept for these diseases originates in South American countries.

Technical visits – presentation

During the meeting a presentation of the Scottish seed potato production scheme was held and there were visits to the companies GenTech Propagation Ltd., MBM and CYCNET PB.