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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Seed Potatoes
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Item 4(b) of the Provisional Agenda

PROPOSAL FOR DESTINATION TOLERANCES

Submitted by the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States

Note by the secretariat: In this paper proposals are made for the inclusion of destination tolerances in the standard for progressive diseases.

DISCUSSION PAPER ON DESTINATION TOLERANCES AND PROGRESSIVE DISEASES

Introduction

The UNECE Seed Potato Standard defines quality tolerances at the export control point. However, there is a perception by the importing country that these are the quality standards to be applied at the point of import. This expectation is achievable for most of the diseases and defects listed in Annex III. However, a number of potato pathogens cause diseases which can progress during storage, and hence during shipment, so although a lot may meet the tolerance for a specific disease at the point of export, it may fail to comply with that tolerance at the point of import, especially if the transportation of the seed potatoes has been subject to poor handling and holding conditions. Among the diseases which can develop during this period are dry rot, gangrene, bacterial rots, late blight, silver scurf and skin spot. The only group in the UNECE Standard which would be regarded as containing progressive diseases is 2 of Annex III, covering dry and wet rots. The development of a range of rot diseases may be initiated by damage during the preparation of the lot and by conditions favourable for disease development during transit. At present there are no provisions or conditions in the Seed Potato Standard which acknowledge such potential disease development and thus potential differences in quality between export and import.

Possible Proposals

Option 1: The first approach could be the introduction of a destination tolerance which would specify a quality standard which should be reasonably achieved at the point of import from a specific export tolerance. The adoption of a destination tolerance would not be consistent with the approach in other UNECE Agricultural Standards. This introduction might require a consequential amendment of the current tolerances for such diseases. For example, the tolerance for rots in the Standard for basic and certified seed potatoes is 1%. However, it is unlikely that importing countries would accept a higher minimum tolerance for seed potatoes at delivery of 2%. While destination tolerances may be appropriate for progressive diseases, they are less appropriate for other diseases such as common scab.

Option 2: The second approach could be to continue to maintain the current tolerances for rots at the point of export and insert a statement covering potential deterioration similar to that used in other UNECE Agricultural Standards. The following statement could be inserted at II.A. Minimum requirements:

The condition of the seed potatoes at point of export, particularly with regard to progressive diseases e.g. tuber rots (Annex III), should be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transport and handling
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination

Option 3: A third approach could be to lower the current tolerance for rots from 1 % to 0.5% and add a statement under 2 of Annex III: “ For progressive diseases such as rots, inspection at the point of export may only give an indication of the quality at the place of delivery as an unpredictable increase in disease may occur, on occasions, on lots which complied with the minimum export tolerance.” This should have the effect of improving the quality of the lot delivered while making the importer aware of the progressive nature of such diseases.

Option 4: A fourth option would be to retain the current tolerance of 1% and add a statement under 2 of Annex III: “ For progressive diseases such as rots, inspection at the point of export may only give an indication of the quality at the the place of delivery as an unpredictable increase in disease may occur, on occasions, on lots which complied with the minimum export tolerance. 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 effect of this is to treat the 1% tolerance as destination tolerance without using that terminology.

Following discussion at the Extended Bureau meeting in Edinburgh, the Group favoured the inclusion of option 2 together with either 3 or 4.