



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2006/19
13 October 2006

Original: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-second session
Geneva, 6–9 November 2006
Item 8 c) of the provisional agenda

REVIEW OF THE WORK OF THE WORKING PARTY

Results of the 2005 Survey

Note by the secretariat ^(*)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This note summarizes the replies to the questionnaire circulated in 2005 to participants in the 2004-2005 meetings of Working Party 7 (WP.7) and its specialized sections. The survey was carried out following the decision of the Working Party, taken at its sixtieth session, to review the work area and the standard-setting process (TRADE/WP.7/2004/10). The secretariat received 28 individual and group replies from Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States, the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the International Nut Council.

^(*) The present document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline by the Trade and Timber Division due to resource constraints.

2. The structure of the note follows that of the questionnaire (TRADE/WP.7/2004/10/Add.1). The numbers in the tables are cumulative replies. Individual replies in all Sections, except Section II, were kept confidential.

II. PARTICIPATION IN UNECE MEETINGS

3. Two thirds of the experts who replied to the questionnaire took part in the meetings of WP.7 and/or specialized sections on standardization of fresh fruit and vegetables (FFV) and dry and dried produce (DDP). Practically none of the experts who participated in the meetings of the specialized sections on seed potatoes and meat came to WP.7 meetings. The WP.7 meetings are thus largely composed of experts in FFV and DDP. However, they have also to deal with standards for seed potatoes and meat.

Meetings	Number of participants replied
WP.7 + GE.1 (FFV) + GE.2 (DDP)	10
WP.7 + GE.1 (FFV)	3
WP.7 + GE.6 (Seed Potatoes)	1
GE.1 (FFV)	6
GE.2 (DDP)	1
GE.6 (Seed Potatoes)	5
GE.11 (Meat)	5

III. USE OF UNECE STANDARDS

4. There are 53 UNECE standards for FFV and 19 for DDP. Thirty-four European Union (EU) standards for FFV and two for DDP are harmonized with UNECE standards and are mandatory in all EU countries at export, import and retail stages. Those UNECE standards not reflected in EU regulations are used in the EU countries on a voluntary basis, mostly at the export/import stage. Very few countries have these standards referenced in their national legislation.

5. The EU mandatory marketing directive for seed potatoes is an application of the UNECE standard, which is the only international reference covering all the aspects related to seed certification (varietal identity and purity, genealogy and traceability, diseases and pests, external quality and sizing and labelling).

6. For FFV and DDP, the table below shows the extent to which standards for these products are implemented in the non-EU countries, which replied to the questionnaire. For seed potatoes and meat, the table reflects the replies from all respondent countries.

	Degree of implementation			Stage of trade			
	Mandatory	Voluntary as reference	Very little implemented	Export	Import	Retail	Don't know
FFV (GE.1)	Romania, Switzerland	Chile, Switzerland, United States		Chile, Romania, Switzerland, United States	Romania, Switzerland (voluntary)	Romania	Russia
DDP (GE.2)	Switzerland	Switzerland, United States		Switzerland United States	Switzerland (voluntary)		Chile, Romania, Russia
Seed Potatoes (GE.6)	Belgium	Italy, Poland, Switzerland, United Kingdom	Finland, Germany, United States	Italy, Germany, United Kingdom	Italy, Switzerland (voluntary)	Italy	Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, United States
Meat (GE.11)		Poland, Russia, United States		Poland, United States	Poland, Russia, United States	Russia	Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland United Kingdom

7. Comments by respondents:

(a) Chile does not have an official mandatory quality control system. Each fruit and vegetable export company adapts to the needs of its buyers, import country official standards, and buyer requirements. Chilean fruit production is mainly oriented towards export. UNECE, EU and United States Department of Agriculture standards have been considered as reference for the development of voluntary national standards.

(b) In Switzerland, EU regulations for FFV and DDP have been implemented in national legislation for those products, which are exported from Switzerland to EU. The standards not reflected in the EU regulations are used as a reference by buyers and sellers at the import stage and, for some products in the internal market, often completed with more restrictive

requirements. Meat standards may begin to receive more interest in Switzerland as meat imports to this country are likely to increase.

(c) In the United States, the agricultural industry uses UNECE standards for FFV and DDP upon request by its clients. Many producers are expressing concern that the UNECE standards are based too much on European consumer preferences, with little or no regard for product characteristics and demand preferences outside Europe. Meat standards, especially for chicken and turkey, are just starting to receive widespread interest from the US industry regarding the export of products. The standards for beef and pork hold great promise for future trade utilization.

IV. FUTURE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENT WORK AREAS

8. The summary of replies in the following table suggests that the work on FFV and DDP should be maintained as is. Experts in seed potatoes and meat standards feel strongly about the need to pay more attention to their areas of work.

9. Suggestions for “other” areas concerned: the transfer of work on explanatory brochures to UNECE from OECD; and development of standards for goose, duck, rabbit, lamb, goat, ostrich/emu, and guinea-fowl meat (medium importance for all).

Work area	More attention	Should be maintained as it is	Less attention	No opinion
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables	4	14	1	9
Dry and Dried Produce	4	10	-	14
Seed Potatoes	3	4	-	21
Meat	2	5	-	21
Other (please specify)	3	1	-	24

10. Comments by respondents:

(a) The current level of activity is fairly high and this may create a problem for any country seeking to adopt the standard as it is constantly changing, and it might be difficult for an exporting or importing country to say which version it is applying. Understanding of how to interpret the standard is also important: hence the need for workshops to explain this and the usefulness of interpretative brochures such as those of OECD.

(b) For UNECE standards for FFV and DDP to gain global acceptance, they should increasingly reflect world trading practices and not mainly those of Western Europe. The innate characteristics of the product and different consumer preferences due to geography and culture must be given higher priority when developing UNECE standards.

(c) Standards need to be revised to reflect changing technology and developments in industry and trade.

(d) UNECE should increase its activities in the area of electronic trade through greater cooperation with other international agencies. It should use its position to unify and coordinate the various international efforts and to seek greater private sector involvement and acceptance.

(e) The Specialized Section on Meat is at a critical juncture, just on the cusp of having widespread industry interest in the standards. An increased attention would be a great help in facilitating this upsurge in meat standards. If the meat standards are kept up-to-date, then these standards may become more visible in the global trading community and will result in more use in global trading.

(f) Printing promotional material and organizing training courses would be very useful.

(g) The use of trademarks and quality specifications by traders pre-empt the need for standards.

V. NEW WORK

11. The few opinions on new work in replies to the questionnaire showed a 50-50 split on the question of doing and not doing work on cut flowers. Some interest was expressed in UNECE becoming more active in developing standards for fish and eggs and egg products.

Work area	Should be done	Should not be done	No opinion
Pulses	1	2	25
Fish	3	1	24
Eggs and egg products	5	1	22
Cut flowers	6	6	16

12. Comments by respondents:

(a) Work should be started only if there is a real need for a new standard. Any requests for a new standard should be supported by the trade in several countries, and include a clear justification for the work needed to draw up and agree the standard.

(b) Standards for eggs and egg products would be very useful given the increase in trade of these commodities internationally.

(c) Global trade of fish is becoming more widespread and regulated. International standards are needed here.

(d) National legislations in these areas do not call for harmonization.

VI. OTHER NEW WORK

13. Comments by respondents:

- (a) UNECE should seek to expose standardization experts to the different agricultural practices and operation of inspection and standardization bodies and practices in member countries. This exposure would expedite the UNECE standardization process.
- (b) Promote the usefulness on UNECE standards outside the UNECE region, particularly in developing countries.
- (c) Dairy products could be of interest.

VII. USEFULNESS OF THE WORK

14. The overwhelming majority of experts in FFV and DDP rated the work in these areas as extremely or very useful. The respondents rated the activities in seed potatoes and meat standards as very useful or useful.

Work area	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Useful	Very useful	Extremely useful	No opinion
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables	1	-	2	8	9	8
Dry and Dried Produce	-	1	-	7	8	12
Seed Potatoes	-	-	5	4	1	18
Meat	-	-	3	3	1	21
Overall usefulness of the work area	-	-	1	5	5	17

15. Comments by respondents:

- (a) UNECE programmes offer a valuable opportunity for standardization and quality control technicians to interact, exchange information and take part in the establishment of international standards. It is important that we remain steadfast in the development of international standards, as they are designed to reflect consumer and industry demands of all nations, not the desires of a few.
- (b) The ability to interact with other countries engaged in the same line of work is an important benefit of participation with this group. The work of WP.7 and its specialized sections is very useful in the facilitation of international trade and consumer safety.

(c) Having an informative and practical standard with international support is very useful in facilitating trade.

(d) Broader participation from producing countries would make the meetings even better.

(e) We consider WP.7 to be a useful international forum where the diverse trade and production realities of the participating countries are reviewed while trying to reflect this in general standards covering all situations. For us, however, the Codex Committee on Fruit and Vegetables in Mexico City serves a similar purpose in a more universal way, as it gathers many more countries (from South and Central America, Asia, etc.) with different realities that are not represented at UNECE meetings.

(f) UNECE work on standards for FFV and DDP is important for the OECD work on explanatory brochures.

(g) Meetings of rapporteurs should precede the work on new UNECE meat standards.

VIII. WORK OF THE SECRETARIAT

16. The table below contains an estimate of how secretariat time has been spent since 2004. Most respondents considered that the time spent by the secretariat on servicing meetings, preparing seminars/workshops (including going on missions) and cooperating with the World Health Organization (WHO) should be maintained as it is. Web publishing and cooperation with OECD and Codex Alimentarius should perhaps receive more attention.

Work area	Time 2004 %	Should receive more attention	Should be maintained as it is	Should receive less attention	No opinion
Preparation/Service/Follow-up of official meetings (including time for various administrative tasks)	48	3	13	1	11
Web publishing	2	10	10	-	8
Cooperation with OECD	8	9	8	2	9
Cooperation with Codex	4	7	8	-	13
Preparation of seminars/workshops	13	5	12	-	11
Cooperation with WHO	6	2	12	1	13
Preparation of paper publications (meat)	13	3	4	2	19
Different missions	6	1	6	4	17

17. Comments by respondents:

- (a) It is difficult to correctly measure the activities of the UNECE due to the lack of detailed knowledge of its work programme, budget and staffing level.
- (b) If extra work is taken on, something else will suffer if extra resources are not provided.
- (c) Follow-up to meeting decisions should receive more attention to ensure that work is completed in due time.
- (d) Cooperation with the OECD should be reviewed in terms of the timeliness of delivery of explanatory brochures and the options of having non-OECD Scheme members prepare explanatory brochures.
- (e) Closer cooperation with OECD in capacity-building activities for transition countries is needed.
- (f) The website is not updated prior to meetings. In many instances, the documents needed are not made available in a timely enough manner to facilitate domestic discussion or debate. Getting information from the website (standards) is still too complicated.
- (g) The standards published on the website are not always up-to-date.
- (h) The secretariat should take more care to publish linguistically correct and harmonized English/French versions of standards. Delegates could help check these versions before publication.
- (i) Paper publications, being the best tool for promoting UNECE standards, should be prepared mainly for products international trade in which is particularly important.
- (j) The print publications on meat are very well done and useful in communicating the work of the Specialized Section.
- (k) The attendance by the secretariat of the Bureau meetings of the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes is very useful.
- (l) Missions should have a lower priority, as compared to servicing meetings and website publishing.

IX. OTHER WORK TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY THE SECRETARIAT

18. Comments by respondents:

- (a) UNECE should promote its work on standards and trade development outside the UNECE region. It should also develop relationships with as many non-European national standardization bodies as possible. Also, more promotion/encouragement of attendance from UNECE to member countries would be helpful.

X. THE STANDARD-SETTING PROCESS

19. The respondents largely agreed that the standard-setting process of UNECE is adequate, but perhaps should be quicker. There was a general agreement that it does take into account all relevant opinions, is transparent and is not too complicated.

The standard-setting process	Do not agree	Agree somewhat	Agree mainly	Agree	Agree completely	No opinion
Is adequate	1	5	4	10	3	5
Should be quicker	4	4	3	6	6	5
Takes into account all relevant opinions	-	3	4	9	6	6
Is too complicated	11	3	5	-	-	9
Is transparent	2	-	4	11	5	6

20. Comments by respondents:

(a) The standard-setting process should be quicker, more practical and less academic. UNECE should actively seek to improve direct participation in its proceedings by partners from the private agricultural sector (producers, trade associations, importers and retailers). UNECE should actively seek out participation from non-member nations, especially when developing standards for agricultural commodities not produced in Europe.

(b) The standard-setting process is generally about right, but for some products may be too slow and complicated.

(c) The standard-setting process seems to work well but is complicated by the changes being proposed by other standard-setting bodies such as EU and Codex Alimentarius. Maybe some standards are changed too often.

(d) Delegations should come to the meetings better prepared in order to speed up the process.

(e) Delays in revising standards slow down OECD work on explanatory brochures.

XI. IMPROVEMENTS TO THE STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

21. Comments by respondents:

(a) The standard-setting process needs to be quicker and needs more leadership from the secretariat to keep progress moving along. In trying to get a final agreement by consensus, at times minority views on minute issues are given too much consideration and can hold up progress on the greater needs of the group.

- (b) Though the discussion phase of the standards-setting process is needed to achieve agreement by all participants, the process is too slow and does not facilitate timely development of new or revision of old standards that meet the current needs of the industry and global trading community.
- (c) Some decisions could be discussed and agreed on via e-mail, leaving more time for general discussion at the meetings.
- (d) The secretariat should become more active between meetings of specialized sections regarding the resolution of the differences on standardization issues among member countries.
- (e) Delegates should be better prepared when coming to meetings. The secretariat should follow up with the delegates who promised to send documents.
- (f) The day for informal meeting of working groups should be well organized in advance.
- (g) UNECE should have more crop/commodity specialists/experts directly participating in the standard-setting process. The physiological characteristics of the commodities, along with the impact of climatic factors on the product, should be taken into consideration in the standardization process.
- (h) It would be helpful if the location of the meeting could be rotated to allow the members to see first-hand growing conditions, processing and handling methods of the various commodities regulated.
- (i) Work on the development of standards and their interpretation should be concentrated in one organization to increase synergy and effectiveness of the activities.