

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-third session

Geneva, 5-9 November 2007

Item 2(d) of the provisional agenda

Summary of Meeting Outcome
Informal Meeting Between Codex Alimentarius and UNECE Secretariats
29 October 2007

Participants:

- Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director UNECE Trade and Timber Division
- Mr. Ezzedine Boutrif, Director, Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- Mr. Kazuaki Miyagishima, Secretary, Codex Alimentarius Commission, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme
- Mr. Tom Heilandt, Senior Food Standards Officer, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme
- Ms. Gracia Brisco, Food Standards Officer, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme

The participants in the meeting recognised the importance of continuing and enhancing cooperation between their two organizations, in accordance with the working arrangements incorporated in the terms of reference of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. Possible benefits from further, enhanced cooperation include:

- ❑ A more effective use of resources including from reduced duplication of work (Codex and UNECE)
- ❑ Better programming of work which would support faster development times (Codex and UNECE)
- ❑ Wider availability of explanatory material to facilitate implementation of adopted standards (mainly UNECE and FAO)

The participants also recognized that while the “theoretical ideal” might be to have only one international standard for each product, there may be practical reasons why different practices in one or more regions might result in a worldwide Codex Standard that is different, in selected details, from a UNECE standard for the same product – and this even if the UNECE standard is used by countries outside of the UNECE region (for example, because they are important exporters to the UNECE region or because their own national practices are more closely aligned with those of the UNECE).

Nonetheless, a more workable target (“practical ideal”) would be to have standards that are as close to identical as is possible, with differences being clearly identified. This would assist exporters and importers that have to implement both Codex and UNECE agricultural standards and would facilitate the work of both organizations.

To create this enhanced cooperation and work toward the above mentioned “practical ideal” both secretariats invite the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards to consider that:

- 1) They request their respective secretariats to work together to explore possible options on how to best work toward this “practical ideal”, increase cooperation and make a better combined use of both organizations’ resources, and report their findings to the respective Bodies.
- 2) That both Bodies make efforts to completely align their respective standard layouts with the only exceptions being where, after discussion, one organization has identified reasons for differences (e.g. different trade practices among its Members, or differences arising from the scope and procedures of both Organizations)

One approach to accomplishing this objective could be to ask the secretariats to undertake a detailed comparison of the proposed revisions to the standard layouts and then to develop recommendations for the resolution or retention of these differences in consultation with liaison rapporteurs that would be appointed for this purpose by each body.

This recommendation is made after a brief review of the proposed new standard layouts for Codex and UNECE Fresh Fruit and Vegetables identified:

- ❑ Differences that are entirely related to presentation (for example, having the same information in a footnote in one standard layout and in the text in the other)
- ❑ Differences that are related to terminology like the use of different synonyms, or almost identical terms, (or for example the use of “whole” vs “intact” or the use of “excluding” vs “with the exception of”)
- ❑ Differences due to scope and procedures of both Organizations including trade practices among Member States.

In addition, further cooperation will be supported by improved information sharing between the two intergovernmental Bodies. This may be achieved through the secretariats regularly reporting to respective Bodies:

- ❑ A combined list of existing standards with publication dates/languages/etc.
- ❑ Lists of current and future work with status and contact information of rapporteur/working group leader
- ❑ A combined calendar of working meetings for both Bodies.