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COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-fourth session
Geneva, 3-6 November 2008
Item 2(a) of the provisional agenda

**MATTERS OF INTEREST SINCE THE LAST SESSION
REVISED TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Note by the secretariat

This note was prepared following discussions with member states and the OECD on the possible concentration of work on agricultural quality standards within the UNECE, as requested in the UNECE Reform Plan (document E/ECE/1434/Rev.1, para. 56). These discussions highlighted the need for new Terms of Reference for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. The text was drawn up in accordance with the “Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of working parties within UNECE”, approved by the Executive Committee in July 2006 (document ECE/EX/1).

The Working Party adopted its terms of reference (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2007/12) at its November 2007 session. They were then approved by the UNECE Committee on Trade in October 2008 and by the Executive Committee on 20 March 2008 (document ECE/EX/2008/L.8).

The current text contains amendments to para. 5(c) suggested by the delegation of the United States.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards develops, interprets and promotes the practical application of internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce. Given the global impact of its work, it takes into account the needs of Governments as well as the private sector (producers, traders and consumers) from all countries where the standards are, or might be, implemented.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (hereinafter referred to as WP.7), acting within the framework of the policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and subject to the general supervision of the UNECE Committee on Trade, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the UNECE Trade Subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards. The activities of WP.7 and its specialized sections are primarily of a technical nature and complement policy-related work undertaken by other international bodies.
2. The overall aim of its work is to:
 - Facilitate fair trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and provide a common trading language
 - Promote sustainable production of quality agricultural produce
 - Define minimum quality to keep unsatisfactory produce out of the market
 - Create market transparency for producers, traders and consumers.
3. In view of the global character of commercial agricultural quality standards, any member of the United Nations or of one of its specialized agencies can participate, on an equal footing, in the activities of WP.7 and its specialized sections. Any country desiring to participate in the work of WP.7 shall notify the Executive Secretary of the UNECE, indicating the national focal point for this work and the institution responsible for quality control and a contact person.
4. The Working Party may invite representatives of non-governmental organizations and of private sector enterprises to participate, in a consultative capacity and in compliance with the respective UN rules and practices, in its consideration of any matter of particular concern to these organizations and enterprises.
5. The Working Party shall:
 - (a) Draw up internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce based on existing national standards and industry and trade practices for: fresh fruit and vegetables (including early and ware potatoes); dry and dried produce; seed potatoes; meat; eggs; and cut flowers. The Working Party may develop standards for other agricultural products, as it considers necessary, subject to the availability of resources.

- (b) Harmonize the application of its standards internationally by developing and disseminating interpretative and explanatory material.
 - (c) Revise and amend existing standards to adapt them to changing production, trading and marketing conditions. All proposals must be substantiated by scientific, technical or economic data that supports the need for a revision or amendment.
 - (d) Cooperate with the WTO secretariat to ensure that the standard-setting process is consistent with WTO rules.
 - (e) Cooperate with other standard-setting bodies, particularly with the Codex Alimentarius Commission, to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards.
 - (f) Undertake research activities relevant to the development, implementation and promotion of its standards.
 - (g) Monitor the application of the standards through reports from public administrations and the private sector.
 - (h) Promote the standards and assist Governments with their practical application by organizing seminars, workshops and training courses.
 - (i) Define and promote uniform quality-control procedures and the use of the model quality conformity certificate. Cooperate with governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing standards to achieve uniformity of inspection methods and comparability of results.
 - (j) Carry out voluntary peer reviews of national quality-control systems.
 - (k) Convene meetings of heads of national quality control services.
 - (l) Develop the framework for and promote mutual recognition of inspections by countries.
 - (m) Promote communication between governmental, inter-governmental and other organisations implementing the standards and carrying out controls to make trading simpler, smoother and more convenient for traders.
6. The Working Party defines its working procedures and those of its specialized sections.
7. These terms of reference can be amended by the Working Party as necessary, subject to approval by the Committee on Trade and the Executive Committee of the UNECE.
8. The Working Party is a standing body whose mandate and extension shall be reviewed every five years by the Committee on Trade and the Executive Committee of the UNECE.

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