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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
WORKING PROCEDURES**

Note by the secretariat

This note was prepared following discussions with member States and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 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 working procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards.

The Working Party approved its working procedures (document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2007/13) at its November 2007 session.

The current text contains amendments to paragraph 11 and a new paragraph 16 suggested by the delegation of the United States.

WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS (WP.7) AND ITS SPECIALIZED SECTIONS

1. In accordance with Rule 20 of the UNECE Rules of Procedure¹, the following procedures are proposed for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. They update and supersede those agreed by the Working Party at its fifty-third session in November 1997.

I. MEETINGS

2. Unless otherwise decided by the Committee on Trade, the Working Party and its specialized sections shall meet annually.
3. The Working Party and the specialized sections can delegate tasks to their bureaux and to working groups/rapporteurs, who can hold informal meetings.
4. The main task of the bureaux meetings is to oversee the implementation of the decisions made at previous session(s) and to prepare the following official session. The chairperson, vice-chairperson(s), secretariat and other interested parties can attend these meetings.
5. Working groups/rapporteurs are formed to achieve specific tasks by agreed deadlines assigned to them by the parent body.
6. The formal and informal meetings are normally held in Geneva, or outside Geneva at the invitation of a host country. The UNECE secretariat will service external meetings subject to the availability of time and travel funds.

II. OFFICERS

7. The Working Party and the specialized sections elect their officers (a chairperson and an agreed number of vice-chairpersons), normally at the end of each session. The term of office is one year, with no limit on the number of times that an officer can be re-elected.
8. The chairperson:
 - (a) Chairs the meetings in a fair and open manner in accordance with the decision-taking procedure explained in chapter V below;
 - (b) Summarizes the decisions taken at the end of the discussion on each item;
 - (c) Encourages rapporteurs and informal working groups to make progress in the intersession period;
 - (d) Delegates tasks to the vice-chairperson(s), as appropriate;
 - (e) Calls, together with the secretariat, meetings of the bureau;

¹ Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe (E/ECE/778/Rev.6, 2006). Rule 20: "Subsidiary Bodies shall adopt their own rules of procedure unless otherwise decided by the Commission".

- (f) Presents reports to the relevant parent bodies, in the case of the Specialized Section to the Working Party, and of the Working Party to the Committee on Trade;
- (g) Presents the common position of the Working Party/Specialized Section at other organizations' meetings;
- (h) Promotes, together with the secretariat, the work of the Working Party/Specialized Section;
- (i) Works with the secretariat to ensure that all reporting and procedures required by the United Nations are completed in a timely manner.

9. The vice-chairperson(s):

- (a) Acts, upon request of the body, as chairperson in the case of absence of the latter;
- (b) Attends meetings of the bureau in the intersession period;
- (c) Carries out tasks delegated to her/him by the chairperson.

III. SECRETARIAT

10. The secretariat:

- (a) Draws up, together with the bureau, draft agendas for meetings;
- (b) Prepares meeting documentation and drafts meeting reports;
- (c) Presents papers and intervenes during the sessions, as necessary;
- (d) Prepares informal meetings on request from the bureaux;
- (e) Maintains the contact database;
- (f) Updates information on the work of WP.7 and its specialized sections on the UNECE website;
- (g) Publishes the standards and material used to support their implementation;
- (h) Works with other international organizations that develop and implement agricultural quality standards;
- (i) Promotes the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections;
- (j) Organizes seminars, workshops and training courses to assist countries in the application of standards;
- (k) Coordinates work across the specialized sections and in the context of UNECE cross-sectoral activities.

IV. MEETING DOCUMENTATION AND REGISTRATION DEADLINES

11. **14 weeks (before the session):** The secretariat, in consultation with the Chairperson, prepares a draft agenda and sends it out with a call for papers. Delegations inform the secretariat of what documents they intend to submit, indicating their subject, length and language. Proposals for new standards or amendments to existing standards must include a written justification presenting:

- (a) The purpose or the scope of the new standard or revision of a standard
- (b) Technical, scientific or economic data substantiating the need for a new standard or revision to a standard

- (c) Information on the relationship between the proposal and any other existing international standards
- (d) Evidence showing the proposal, for a new or revision to a standard will not result in a barrier to trade.

12. **12 weeks:** The secretariat finalizes the draft agenda, submits it to the Documents Management Section (DMS) and posts it on the UNECE website.

13. **10 weeks:** Documents submitted to DMS by this date will be translated and made available in English, French and Russian.

14. **6 weeks:** Documents submitted by this date will be distributed in the original language only. After this deadline papers will be available only as informal documents and will not have any official United Nations status or distribution.

15. **2 weeks:** Delegations submit registration forms to the secretariat.

V. THE DEVELOPMENT/REVISION PROCESS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCEDURE

16. The Working Party will review all the material submitted with the proposal, taking into account any economic impact the proposal may have on trade facilitation between countries before granting permission to begin work.

17. The process of developing/revising UNECE agricultural quality standards, interpretative material and guidelines is illustrated in the annex.

18. The procedure for decision-making within the specialized sections and the Working Party is described below and has as its objective the widest possible acceptance of the standards and related material. Consensus is sought among all participants, and if that cannot be reached, between those representing national standard-setting authorities.

19. The following procedure shall be applied:

- (i) The chairperson shall facilitate the discussion, striving to reach a consensus on the issue in question between all participants. The chairperson will summarize the discussion and will suggest the decision(s) to be taken by the meeting.

If there is consensus, a decision is taken and noted in the report of the session.

- (ii) If no consensus is reached in accordance with (i), the chairperson shall ask the dissenting participants if they agree to let the decision stand and have their position noted in the report.

If there is agreement on this, a decision is taken and noted with the dissenting views in the report.

- (iii) If the dissenting participants do not agree to the procedure under (ii), the chairperson shall ask all participants if they agree to delay a decision and continue to hold informal discussions during the intersessional period in a working group.

If there is consensus, the tasks for the working group are defined and the issue is put on the agenda for the next session.

- (iv) If no consensus is reached in accordance with (iii) the chairperson shall ask the governmental representatives present if there is consensus among them on the issue in question.

If there is consensus among governmental representatives, a decision is taken and noted in the report with the dissenting views of other participants (private sector/associations).

- (v) If there is no consensus in accordance with the procedure under (iv), the chairperson shall ask the dissenting countries if they agree to let the decision go forward and have their reservation noted in the report of the session and as a footnote to the standard, interpretative material or guideline².

- (vi) If the dissenting countries do not agree to the procedure under (v), the chairperson shall ask the participants mentioned in (iv) if they agree to delay a decision and continue informal discussions in a working group in the intersessional period.

If several participants agree to this, the tasks for the working group are defined and the issue is put on the agenda for the next session.

- (vii) If none of the dissenting countries agrees to the procedure under (vi) it is noted in the report that no decision could be reached on the issue in question. The item is considered as closed and the existing situation remains unchanged.

VI. PRESENTING THE WORK OF THE SPECIALIZED SECTIONS TO THE WORKING PARTY

20. The chairpersons of the specialized sections will report to the Working Party. If a chairperson cannot attend the meeting, he/she may delegate this responsibility to a vice-chairperson, another participant or the secretariat.

21. The Working Party may agree on introducing minor, mainly linguistic or editorial changes to the texts submitted by the specialized sections for approval. Texts requiring further substantive discussion will be returned to the specialized section concerned.

² Reservations should clearly indicate the reason. Preferably, an alternative wording/value should be suggested for inclusion in the text of the standard.

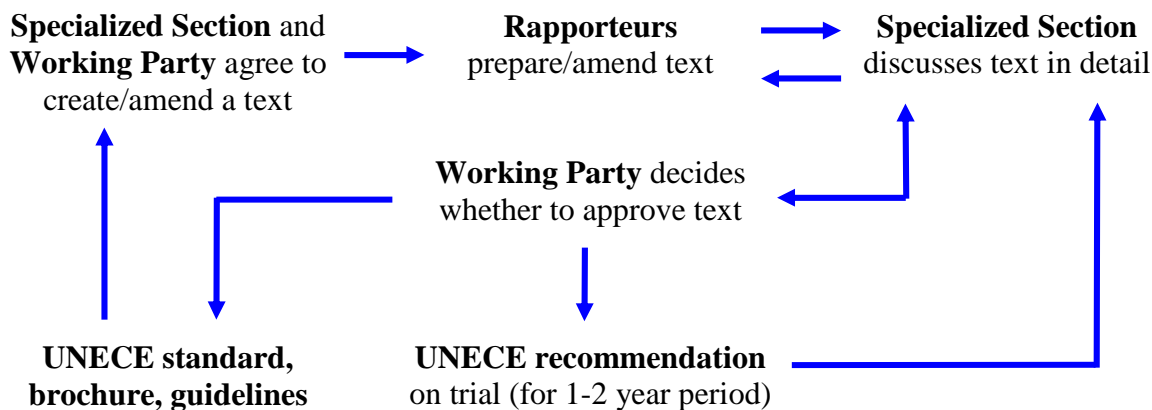
22. The texts approved by the Working Party become official. They are published on the UNECE website and can only be changed through the procedure for revising the text, as illustrated in the annex. Minor editorial corrections can be made by the secretariat, in consultation with the bureau of the specialized section concerned.

VII. MEETING REPORT

23. The secretariat will prepare a concise draft report, reflecting the discussion and decisions taken, for adoption by delegations before the end of the meeting. The final version of the report, also containing a draft agenda for the next session, will be posted on the UNECE website.

Annex

**PROCESS OF DEVELOPING/REVISING
 UNECE AGRICULTURAL QUALITY
 STANDARDS, INTERPRETATIVE MATERIAL AND GUIDELINES**



1. Any country can initiate work either on the creation of a new or the revision of an existing standard (brochure, guidelines). The proposal made to the relevant Specialized Section must contain a justification for why this new work or revision is necessary. If the Specialized Section agrees, work on a revision can begin; in the case of a new standard (brochure, guidelines), the proposal is transmitted to the Working Party for approval.
2. The task of drafting a revised text of an existing document or creating a new standard (brochure, guidelines) is normally assigned to a working group, led by a rapporteur and composed of several delegations. Certain tasks, like taking photographs for explanatory material, can be delegated to external individuals or organizations, however the decision about what to include in the final draft will be made by the working group. The rapporteur works on the text taking into account comments from the delegations, and presents the text to the Specialized Section for consideration. During the session, a standard (brochure, guidelines) may be revised on the basis of the proposed text or referred back to the rapporteur for further discussion.
3. In the intersession period, delegations can send proposals for amendments or comments on the draft to the rapporteur and the secretariat. Once the text is accepted by the Specialized Section, it is forwarded to the Working Party for adoption either as a new or revised UNECE standard (brochure, guidelines), or for adoption as a UNECE recommendation, with a trial period of one or two years for testing in actual application.
