



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

TRADE/WP.7/2001/7
23 August 2001

ORIGINAL : ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development
Fifty-seventh session, 12-14 November 2001, Geneva

Item 12 of the Provisional Agenda

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF
OTHER INTERNATIONAL BODIES

Note by the secretariat

The secretariat reproduces in this document the report of an informal meeting between the Secretariats and Chairpersons of the OECD Scheme, CCFFV and WP.7, a letter sent by the Mexican presidency of the CCFFV and an excerpt of the report of the 24th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission.

1. Summary record of the informal meeting between FAO/WHO, UNECE and OECD on fresh fruit and vegetable standardization and related activities held on 20 April 2001 in Paris

Attendance and Chair

Were present:

- Dr. Alan Randell (FAO/WHO Secretariat)
- Mr. David Priester (Chairman of the UNECE Specialised Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables)
- Mr. Tom Heilandt (UNECE Secretariat)
- Dr. Ulrike Bickelmann (Chairperson of the Plenary Meeting of the OECD Scheme)
- Mr. Loek Boonekamp (OECD Secretariat)
- Ms. Sylvie Poret (OECD Secretariat)
- Mr. Paul Manol (USDA, International Standards Coordinator)

The meeting was chaired by Dr. Bickelmann.

Discussions

It was stated that true international standards and explanatory brochures (i.e. which do not constitute any barrier to trade) are of a great value for facilitating trade.

Neither the representatives of UNECE nor the representative of FAO/WHO did have any mandate to discuss the value of a written agreement (memorandum of understanding) to improve the co-operation of the existing bodies and to avoid duplication of work in the future.

Conclusions

The following proposals to improve the co-operation between the three international standard setting bodies have been developed:

- It was decided that the members of the Secretariat of the 3 Organisations will meet during the third quarter of 2001 (detailed dates and location to be decided later) to compare the texts of Codex Alimentarius standards on one hand and UNECE and OECD standards on the other hand, in view of identifying the nature of the divergences between the 2 blocks of standards (which differences are of a linguistic nature only, which ones constitute potential barriers to trade). The standards to compare are the standards adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the UNECE Working Party and the OECD Council respectively (Mango, Avocado, Pummelo, Grapefruit, Oranges, Persian Limes, Asparagus) or by one of these organisations and being a draft standard in the other one (table grapes, tomatoes, apples, pineapples). For each standard reviewed, the results would be presented in the following way:

UNECE and OECD standards	Codex Alimentarius standard	Differences between the two types of standards
Text of the standard	Text of the standard	- linguistic differences - differences in substance

- To improve the compatibility of the standards elaborated by the three organisations it was proposed, that the scope of the standards could be harmonised, i. e. the UNECE and OECD standards could enlarge their scope of application to all levels of distribution.
- To acknowledge standards elaborated by UNECE and OECD as well as in accordance with the Procedure Manual of the CCFFV, it was proposed by the representative of the FAO/WHO that whenever the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) begins the elaboration of a standard of a produce for which a UNECE standard already exists, the content of the UNECE standard be circulated for comments at step 3 of the Codex Alimentarius procedure and become the basis for the corresponding Codex Alimentarius standard. It might be necessary to re-draft footnote 17 of the terms of reference of the CCFFV, to ensure this procedure.
- To enlarge the number of commenting countries and to ensure the greatest possible harmonization between the standards of the three organisations, when UNECE standards are being adopted as a recommendation for a 2-year trial period, the OECD and the CCFFV could be informed and asked for comments. CCFFV could take into consideration whether a trial period for recommendations would also be needed in the framework of the Codex Alimentarius work.
- To enlarge the number of countries using the standards and to facilitate the application of the standards, the OECD Scheme could take into consideration to adopt Codex Alimentarius standards as OECD standards as a basis for possible explanatory material.

The conclusions of this meeting will be presented:

- to the Codex Alimentarius Executive Committee and Commission in June/July 2001 by the FAO/WHO Secretariat
- to the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme in October 2001 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair
- to the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development in November 2001 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair
- to the CCFFV in June 2002 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair.

The conclusions of the comparison between UNECE and OECD standards and Codex Alimentarius standards will also be presented:

- to the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme in October 2001 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair
- to the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development in November 2001 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair
- to the CCFFV in June 2002 by the OECD Secretariat/Chair.

Thanks

FAO/WHO and UNECE representatives thanked the OECD for organizing this meeting.

2. Note by the secretariat:

The Mexican Presidency to the CCFFV was also invited to the meeting in Paris but was unable to attend. They transmitted the following position in a letter to the Chairperson of the OECD Scheme which is reproduced below as received (paragraph numbers have been added by the secretariat):

“Mexico, 2001-03-30

Dr. Ulrike Bickelmann,
Chairperson of the Organization for Economic Co-operation
and Development (OECD) Scheme for the application of
International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables.

Dear Dr. Bickelmann:

1. By several means we have received your kind communication inviting DGN, as chair of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, to an informal meeting to be held in your headquarters in Paris next Friday 2001-04-20 to discuss possible actions to minimize the duplication of efforts in the standardization of fresh fruits and vegetables.
2. We certainly do appreciate the good will and the mutual interests involved in this proposal, and the reason for the time taken to reply your invitation is that we have been trying to re-arrange several previous established commitments. Unfortunately, it will be impossible for us to attend the meeting.
3. Nevertheless, we do have several issues that we would like to propose and also to clarify from our point of view regarding the interested parties, namely: the United Nations Economic Committee for Europe (UNECE), the OECD Scheme for the application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables (OECD Scheme) and the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (CCFFV):
4. The current activities of the OECD Scheme apparently have not included a separated standardization work, save for the cooperation with UNECE. Therefore, the deliverables of the OECD Scheme seem to be complementary for the standardization efforts as long as it does not involve standardization activities and its works are kept aligned with standards.
5. On the other hand, the important role historically fulfilled by the UNECE's standardization works is evident. However, sometimes it seems to be taken out of context. The United Nations recognizes UNECE as part of its system, and classifies UNECE as a Regional Commission.
6. Therefore, the UNECE nature and the nature of its standards are regional.
7. As regards to us, DGN as chair of the CCFFV is certainly not in a position to compromise or to impose the Committee something different than the agreements of the CCFFV itself or the relevant Codex Alimentarius decision bodies. In this context, it appears that a large majority of the CCFFV members has a general sense that for its membership, as well as the World Trade Organization (WTO) recognition of Codex, the CCFFV is the only legitimated international organization to develop international (worldwide) standards in this field.

8. It appears also that the main concerns of the UNECE have come out of the CCFFV decisions to develop standards for products for which the UNECE already had discussed and published standards. 9.9. However, these decisions have been taken by the members of the CCFFV, many of which are also members of the OECD Scheme and/or the UNECE. Also, the mandate of the CCFFV do establish several links with UNECE which actually seem to be in the best interest of commerce, but none of these links seems to prevent the development of worldwide consensus standards in the CCFFV.

10. Finally, it is a reality that for several members of the CCFFV, which are developing countries, in many cases it would be impossible to attend the UNECE and the OECD works, which comes clear while considering the membership of each organization.

11. After these considerations, we do agree that there are several ways to allow our works to come closer and to prevent duplication of efforts; among other we may suggest the following:

- Whenever the CCFFV addresses an issue that already has an UNECE published standard, the contents of such standard should be circulated for comments in step 3 of the procedure as a draft to the CCFFV members, and therefore, became the point of departure for the worldwide standard.
- Once the standard is consensed in the CCFFV, perhaps the UNECE should start actions to adopt it, considering the wide spread representativity of Codex.
- The UNECE and the OECD Scheme are always welcome to actively participate in the CCFFV activities, just like they have participated so far, and this may help to prevent unnecessary duplication of efforts in the future, considering the list of priorities agreed in the CCFFV.
- If there is a will to take these actions further, there may be a window to explore the possibility of reciprocally consider the UNECE and the CCFFV standards as valid within each other competence as long as the work is not undertaken by the relevant organizations.
- If there is a will to take this actions even further, maybe it would be possible to explore the possibility of agreeing on the future works to be undertaken by each organization, considering the regional and worldwide needs and avoid future duplication definitely.

12. We will look forward to establish further contact and work out actions that may enhance commerce and be consistent with the role we all do play in the standardization of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Yours truly

Miguel Aguilar Romo
Director General

3. Excerpt from the report of the 24th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, Geneva, 2-7 July 2001, paras. 19-23

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD): International Standards for Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, paragraphs 19 - 23:

19. At its 47th Session, the Executive Committee noted the proposal being discussed by the OECD Scheme "that one single international grade standards setting body" be established in relation to commercial quality standards for fresh fruits and vegetables and requested to be kept informed of developments in this area. An informal meeting of the Codex, OECD and UNECE Secretariats had been held in Paris on 20 April 2001 [ALINORM 01/8-Part I para. 6] and had outlined suggestions to minimize duplication of work between the three organizations. The conclusions of this meeting were reported in the Working paper before the Commission.

20. The representative of the UNECE Secretariat stressed the need to avoid any duplication of work between the UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. He supported the proposal to circulate UNECE standards for comments at Step 3 of the Codex procedure when the Committee decided to elaborate a Codex Standard for which there was already an UNECE Standard.

21. The Delegation of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the European Community, stated that the Terms of Reference of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables clearly established measures to avoid overlapping or duplication of work between the two bodies concerned, but that recent developments in the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables indicated that the Committee had not been making proper use of these measures. The Delegation called for a wider debate on these issues, with a view to progressing towards a satisfactory and consensual solution on the basis of the recommendation of the 48th session of the Executive Committee to take account of the experience and expertise of specialized bodies working in this field and ensure that the countries most concerned in individual standards were fully involved in their preparation [ALINORM 01/4 para. 14] . This view was supported by several other delegations who also referred to the participation of countries beyond the region of Europe in the work of the UNECE and stressed the need to rationalize resources by using the experience and expertise of the UNECE.

22. The Delegation of Malaysia, supported by many delegations [Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Japan, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, Uruguay and the United States of America], expressed its concern about the conclusions of the informal meeting especially in regard to the direct circulation of UNECE standards at Step 3 and the amendment of footnote 17 to the Terms of Reference of the Committee. It was noted that UNECE standards could be used as a reference for Codex standards when like products were being considered and suggested that fresh produce standards developed by other recognized organizations could be also used as a starting point. However, the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables remained the lead body in elaborating worldwide grade standards for fresh fruits and vegetables. Many of these Delegations also expressed their disagreement with the introduction of trial periods for recommendations in the work of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables or other Codex committees stating that the Codex procedure allowed for the standards to be exhaustively discussed and it adequately provided for their revisions when necessary. It was also stated that this practice might lead to confusion in international trade.

23. The Commission noted that there was no consensus on the conclusions of the informal meeting and therefore, no change would be made to the Terms of Reference of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. It also agreed that this issue need not be included on the agenda of the next session of the Committee since it had been already discussed widely at different sessions of the Commission (including the present Session) and at the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. The Commission endorsed the view of the Executive Committee concerning the status of the Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables as the international body responsible for drafting grade standards for these products. It also emphasized the need to draw upon and develop the experience and expertise of specialized bodies working in this field and ensure that the countries most concerned in individual standards were fully involved in their preparation. It also noted that in the final analysis the responsibility for the development and adoption of standards for these products rested with the Commission itself.