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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-first session

Geneva, 18 to 20 October 2005

REPORT OF THE SIXTY-FIRST SESSION

Addendum 1

Revision of the Geneva Protocol

Note by the secretariat: This document contains the work that has been developed by the Working Group (European Community, Germany, United Kingdom, United States and the secretariat) that was formed to review the existing Geneva Protocol and to propose the amendments. The discussions have been based on document TRADE/WP.7/2004/7. The present draft of the Geneva Protocol sums up the results of this work.

GENEVA PROTOCOL ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS (REVISION 3, 2004)

Introduction

One of the principal goals of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is to promote greater economic integration of its members. As one activity for supporting this goal, UNECE provides a forum for Governments to develop internationally harmonized standards for agricultural produce.

History

The Economic Commission for Europe established the Committee on Agricultural Problems on 14 May 1949.

This Committee decided at its first session (Geneva, 3-6 October 1949), on the subject of quality standards for perishable foodstuffs, to set up a Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce entrusted with the task of:

- “(1) Determining common standards for perishable foodstuffs.
- (2) Studying steps to be taken on the international level in order to secure the general adoption of standards, control systems and, if necessary, of proceeding with the preparation of an international convention.”

In February 1952, the Working Party found that provisions applicable to all fruit and vegetables could be drafted. It included these general provisions in a protocol, thus adopting a form that, while more flexible than a convention, would go further than mere recommendations in the direction of placing governments under definite obligations.

In 1958, the Working Party adopted the Geneva Protocol on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Fruit, which has served since then as a basis for its work. This protocol was revised in 1964 and 1985. The general provisions contained in the protocol served as the basis for the standard layouts for UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables and for dry and dried produce (fruit). Work on the standardization of Meat, Eggs, Seed Potatoes, Early and Ware Potatoes, Pulses and Cut flowers was carried out according to the same principles.

Since 1997 the Working Party reports to the Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development. In 2003, the name of the Working Party was changed to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards.

Over 80 internationally agreed commercial quality standards have been developed for different agricultural produce: Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Dry and Dried Produce, Potatoes (Early, Ware and Seed), Eggs and Egg Products, Meat and Cut Flowers. See Annexes.

Work on standards for fruit juices and quick frozen food that was done in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts, continues now in the relevant Codex bodies.

Goals of the protocol

The Geneva Protocol establishes a framework for the development of internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agriculture and their application in order to:

- *Facilitate fair trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and provide a common trading language*
The standards are indicative of actual commercial practice. Negotiations and the establishment of a contract become easier and more transparent. The standards facilitate price and quality comparison and create market transparency. The standards can be used as a reference point for international trade dispute resolution.
- *Promote sustainable quality production*
The standards allow producers and their organizations to reduce costs at the production and sales levels and simplify their inventories. The standards provide producers with an indication of the acceptable minimum quality on international markets.
- *Keep unsatisfactory produce from the market*
The minimum quality requirements in the standards assist countries in removing unsatisfactory produce from markets and discourage unfair trade practices.
- *Create market transparency for consumers*
Consumers also benefit from the guaranteed quality of the produce, the information provided and the transparency of the market.

Commitments of signatories

The signatories that have notified the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe of their acceptance of this Protocol

- AGREE to the standard setting process in the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (as set out in its terms of reference and working procedures).
- AGREE to inform the Secretariat of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe on an annual basis about the status of implementation of UNECE Standards in their area of competence.

Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

The responsibilities of the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards include:

- (1) Elaborating internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce based on existing national standards, industry or trade practices for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (including Early and Ware Potatoes), Dry and Dried Produce, Seed Potatoes, Eggs, Cut Flowers and Meat. The Working Party may develop standards for other agricultural products as it considers necessary.
- (2) Amending existing standards based on practical experience, technical developments and the economic evolution of the market.
- (3) Monitoring the application of the standards through reports from participating national/international public administrations, other organizations and the private sector.
- (4) Cooperating with the WTO secretariat to ensure that the standard setting process is consistent with WTO rules.
- (5) Cooperating with other standard setting bodies to avoid duplication of work and divergence of standards (e.g. Codex Alimentarius Commission).

- (6) Cooperating with governmental and inter-governmental organizations that implement standards to achieve uniformity of methods and results (e.g. the European Union¹ and the OECD Scheme² for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables).
- (7) Promoting the application of standards and offering assistance to countries interested in implementing UNECE Standards (e.g. by organizing workshops on the harmonization of national standards with international commercial standards).
- (8) Assist in activities of other United Nations bodies and Specialized Agencies having an impact on trade in agricultural produce (e.g. Cooperation with WHO on the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health).
- (9) Ensuring that all parties interested in the work (members and non-members of UNECE, international governmental and non-governmental organizations) are informed and may participate, to ensure the widest possible input to the standards development process.

The Working Party and its Specialized Sections work in accordance with the Working Procedures defined in Annex 2.

These terms of reference can be amended by the Working Party as necessary.

¹ The UNECE standards are taken into account when drafting European Community standards, which are mandatory at all levels of marketing from producer to the retail level. As of 2005, 36 EC Standards, covering around 90% of Community trade in fruit and vegetables were harmonized with the relevant UNECE Standards.

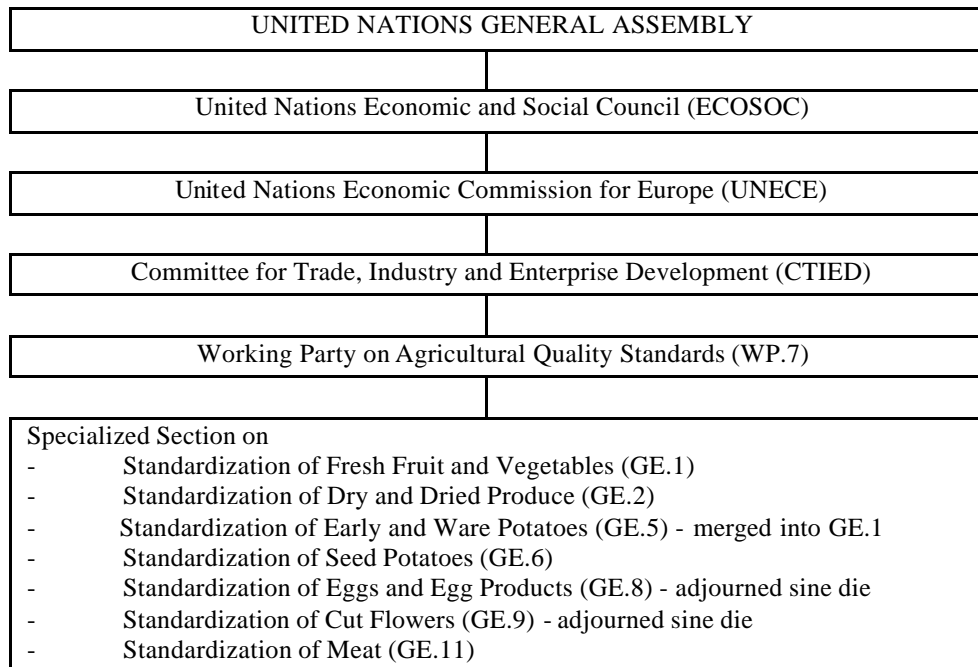
² The OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables adopts the UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables and dry and dried produce and elaborates explanatory material based on them. Their explanatory material includes color illustrations of specific defects and serves as a tool for interpreting the provisions of the standards as well as promoting their international uniform application.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Current organizational structure
- Annex 2: Rules of procedure of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections.
- Annex 3: Process for elaborating UNECE agricultural quality standards
(<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/wrkprc97.pdf>)
- Annex 4: The UNECE control certificate
- Annex 5: (a) List of standards for fresh fruit and vegetables
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/fresh/fresh_e.htm);
(b) Standard layout for fresh fruit and vegetables
(See <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/layout/layout.htm>);
Definitions to the standard layout (to be developed)
- Annex 6: (a) List of standards for dry and dried produce
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/dry/dry_e.htm);
(b) Standard layout and dry and dried produce
(See <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/layout/layout.htm>);
(c) Multilingual index of terms and defects for dry and dried produce
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/wgroups/ge_02/dictionary/dictionary.doc);
- Annex 7: (a) List of standards for meat
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/meat/meat_e.htm);
(b) Standard layout for meat and meat products (to be developed)
- Annex 8: Procedures related to the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes.
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/pot_e.htm)
- Annex 9: List of standards and procedures related to the UNECE Standards for Eggs and Egg Products
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/eggs/eggs_e.htm)
- Annex 10: List of standards and procedures related to the UNECE Standards for Cut Flowers
(See http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/flowers/flower_e.htm)
- Annex 11: Acceptances of UNECE Standards
(Current version, see <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/accept.htm>)
- Annex 12: Guide on the implementation of quality control
(Adopted from OECD, see <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/qualcon/qualcon.htm>)
- Annex 13: Exchange of non-conformity information
(Adopted from OECD, see <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/info/noconf/noconf.htm>)

Annex 1**CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The following chart presents the framework of intergovernmental bodies in which the UNECE meetings concerning the elaboration of UNECE Agricultural Quality Standards operate:



The secretariat of the Agricultural Standards Unit is part of the Trade Policy and Governmental Cooperation Branch of the Trade Development and Timber Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

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Annex 2

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE WORKING PARTY ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS AND ITS SPECIALIZED SECTIONS

In accordance with Rule 52 of the Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe, namely that “Subsidiary Bodies shall adopt their own rules of procedure unless otherwise decided by the Commission”, the following procedures are proposed for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. These procedures update and supersede those agreed by the Working Party at its 53rd session in November 1997.

1 Schedule of meetings

Unless otherwise decided by the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development, the Working Party and its Specialized Sections shall meet annually unless otherwise agreed.

The sessions of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections normally take place in Geneva.

2 Informal meetings

In addition to their official meetings, the working party and the specialized sections, as parent bodies can delegate tasks to informal groups, which can take the form of:

- *Bureau meetings*: meetings of the secretary, chairperson and vice-chairperson and eventually other interested parties. These meetings have as main task to work on follow-up issues of the last session and prepare the next official session.
- *Working groups/ meetings of rapporteurs*: groups formed to achieve a specific task given by the parent body with a time-limited mandate.

The meetings are held in Geneva or at the invitation of a host country. The UNECE secretariat will service these meetings workload permitting and if adequate travel funds are provided.

Invitations to informal meetings will be sent by the secretariat at least 6 weeks before the meeting.

3 Participation to the meetings of the Working Party and its specialized sections

All meetings of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections are open to:

- All United Nations members.
- Regional economic integration organizations.
- Specialized agencies of the United Nations and other Intergovernmental Organizations.
- Invited or accredited non-governmental organizations

Non-governmental organizations having an interest in the standardization activities can apply for permission to attend the meetings of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections by transmitting a justification to the UNECE secretariat. The secretariat will discuss the application with the bureau of the relevant body who can grant the initial participation.

4 *Officers*

The bureau of the Working Party/Specialized Section is elected at the end of each session. It consists of a chairperson and up to two vice-chairpersons.

The Chairperson is responsible for:

- Chairing and facilitating the meetings in a fair and open manner in accordance with the decision taking procedure under 8.3.
- Summarizing the decisions taken at the end of each item.
- Granting the initial participation to new non-governmental organizations.
- Encouraging rapporteurs and informal working groups to make progress in the intersession-period.
- Delegating tasks to the vice-chairperson(s) as appropriate.
- Calling meetings of the bureau with the secretariat, when necessary.
- Presenting the report of the Specialized Section to the Working Party (Chairpersons of the Specialized Sections).
- Presenting the report of the Working Party to the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (Chairperson of the Working Party).
- Presenting the common position of the Working Party/ Specialized Section at relevant meetings of other organizations.
- Assisting the secretariat in the promotion of the work of the Working Party/ Specialized Section.

The vice-chairperson(s) are responsible for:

- Acting as chairperson in case of absence of the chairperson.
- Attending meetings of the bureau in the intersession-period.
- Other tasks delegated to them by the chairperson.

5 *Secretariat*

The secretariat is responsible for:

- Preparing draft agendas for the meetings of the Working Party and its specialized sections in cooperation with the relevant chairperson.
- Preparing pre-meeting documentation on request and ensuring that documents are translated and distributed (if received on time).
- Presenting papers or making interventions during the sessions as necessary.
- Preparing draft reports during the sessions of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections.
- Preparing the final report and its annexes and addenda.
- Preparing informal meetings on request from the Working Party and its Specialized Sections.
- Maintaining a database of contacts for the Working Party and its Specialized Sections
- Maintaining the home page with up-to-date information on meetings, meeting documentation and the text of all standards and related texts.
- Cooperating with other international organizations by attending their meetings and presenting the views of the Working Party.
- Promoting the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections.
- Coordinating programmes to assist countries in the application of the standards to increase their trade potential (seminars, training courses etc.), based on the availability of resources.
- Coordinating cross-sectoral activities within the UNECE and with other groups.

6 *Pre-session timetable for sessions of the Working Party and the Specialized Sections*

The following timetable has been established to ensure timely publication, translation of documents and an orderly preparation of the meetings.

14 weeks before the session:

The secretariat in coordination with the Chairperson prepares a draft agenda (based on the agenda contained in the annex to the last report (see 3.5)) and sends it out with a call for documents by email/fax to regular participants accompanied by an invitation to the meeting.

Chairpersons and Vice-chairpersons will receive a special invitation to attend the Working Party session to present the relevant reports.

14-12 weeks before the session:

Authors inform the secretariat of:

- Subject, length, language, and expected date of submission of documents they intend to send.
- Any additional documents that do not yet appear in the draft agenda.
- Eventual cancellations of documents appearing in the draft agenda.

12-10 weeks before the session:

The secretariat (in coordination with the chairperson) prepares the detailed draft agenda and makes it available on the home page as soon as it is finalized.

10 weeks before the session:

Documentation received by this date will be sent for translation and distributed on the homepage and on paper with an official document number.

6 weeks before the session:

Documentation received by this date will be distributed (homepage, paper) in the original language only with an official document number

Any document received later will be given an INF number and be made available on the homepage and in a limited number of paper copies at the session. The authors are advised to bring a sufficient number of paper copies to the session. INF documents can only be discussed if the participants agree.

2 weeks before the session:

Delegations should submit registration forms to the secretariat.

7 *Pre-session documentation*

7.1 Prepared by delegations

Documents for sessions should be sent to the secretariat in electronic format (e-mail or diskette).

All proposals for new standards or amendments to existing standards must include a written justification.

In case of a major revision of a standard, the original file for the standard should be obtained from the secretariat and deletions should be marked with a strike out (~~strike out~~) and additions or modifications in underlined (underlined).

7.2 *Prepared by the secretariat*

The secretariat will prepare the following documentation:

- Agenda
- Matters of interest arising from the work of other groups within UNECE
- Matters of interest arising from the work of other international organizations
- Information about the application of UNECE standards
- Information on any corrections necessary to UNECE Standards to be sent to the relevant specialized section
- Any other documents requested either by governing bodies or delegations.

8 *Conduct of business*

All work related to standards' development and revision should be done in accordance with the procedure described in Annex 3.

8.1 *Adoption of the agenda*

The first item on the provisional agenda for each session shall be the adoption of the agenda.

8.2 *Discussions and decisions*

At the close of discussion of each agenda item or sub-item the Chairperson will identify the decision(s) taken by the meeting.

8.3 *Procedure for decision taking*

The procedure for decision taking has been designed in such a way as to promote the widest possible application of the standards in trade. Consensus is first sought between all participants, and if that cannot be reached, between those participants representing public standard setting authorities.

The following procedure shall be applied:

- (1) The Chairperson shall facilitate the discussion, striving to reach a consensus on the issue in question between all participants.

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

- (2) If no consensus is reached in accordance with (1) the Chairperson shall ask the dissenting participants if they agree to let the decision go forward and have their reservation noted in the report of the session³.

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

- (3) If the dissenting participants do not agree to the procedure under (2), the Chairperson shall ask all participants if they agree to delay a decision and continue informal discussions in the intersession-period in informal working groups.

³ Reservations should clearly indicate the reason for the reservation and a possible alternative to the issue in question (e.g. alternative text/value in the standard)

If there is consensus, the terms of reference for the informal discussions are determined and the issue is put on the agenda for the next session.

- (4) If no consensus is reached in accordance with (3) the Chairperson shall ask the representatives of public standard setting authorities⁴ present if there is consensus among them on the issue in question.

If there is consensus among these participants a decision is taken and noted in the report of the session together with the dissenting views of other participants.

- (5) If there is no consensus between the participants mentioned in (4) the Chairperson shall ask the dissenting participants if they agree to let the decision go forward and have their reservation noted

- In the report of the session and/or
- As a footnote to the text in question³.

- (6) If the dissenting participants do not agree to the procedure under (5), the Chairperson shall ask the participants mentioned in (4) if they agree to delay a decision and continue informal discussions in the intersession-period in informal working groups.

If one or more participants agree to this, the terms of reference for the informal discussions are determined and the issue is put on the agenda for the next session.

- (7) If none of the participants agrees to the procedure under (6) it is then noted in the report that no decision could be taken on the issue in question, the item is considered as closed and the existing situation remains unchanged.

8.4 *Presentation of the work of the Specialized Sections to the Working Party*

The Chairperson of each specialized section will present its report to the Working Party. If the Chairperson cannot attend the meeting, he/she may delegate this responsibility to a Vice-Chair or another participant. If this is not possible, the secretariat will present the report.

8.5 *Technical discussions in the Working Party*

Detailed technical discussions cannot be held in the Working Party. Texts requiring further technical discussion must be referred to the appropriate specialized section.

Minor technical points, corrections and changes may be considered and agreed to by the Working Party without returning the document to the specialized section to avoid lengthy delays over minor technical details.

8.6 *Report*

Based on the Chairperson's summaries of each item, the secretariat prepares a short, concise summary report reflecting the decisions taken, including revised versions of the working documents. This report is distributed to delegates for formal adoption before the end of the Meeting.

⁴ Governmental authority setting standards for agricultural products in its area of competence or authority to which governments have delegated the responsibility to do so.

9 *Post-session work and documentation*

The secretariat will prepare the final version of the report and its addenda. A list of follow-up actions and an executive summary of the results of the session will be added to the report. The annex to the report will contain the first draft for the agenda for the next session.

Other addenda to the reports of the specialized sections contain the texts agreed for transmission to the Working Party or any other text (e.g. draft standards), which the specialized section considers important to be translated after the session.

The official text of the standards adopted is made available on the website of the UNECE after the meeting of the Working Party in the three official languages based on the addenda to the Specialized Section reports.

If no consolidated text of the standard in question was published after the Specialized Section meeting, it is published in an addendum to the Working Party report.

The official texts of the standards can normally only be changed through the procedure of revising the standard except in the case of minor editorial amendments and corrections, which will be indicated in the text of the standard. Typing errors can be corrected by the Secretariat.

One of the addenda to the working party report contains the tentative calendar of meetings for the coming year and any amendments necessary to the programme of work.

Every two years the work programme for the new biennium is updated in line with the preparations for the budget and added as an addendum.
