



**Economic and Social
Council**

Distr.
GENERAL

TRADE/2000/5
27 March 2000

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
Fourth session, 21-23 June 2000
Item 6 of the provisional agenda

STANDARDIZATION OF PERISHABLE PRODUCE

Note by the secretariat

I. SUMMARY

1. The development of commercial standards for trade in agricultural produce is one of the most successful activities of the Committee. These commercial standards are applied very widely to facilitate access to the European market. Many United Nations member States outside the UN/ECE region apply these standards and sometimes participate in the relevant specialist meetings. UN/ECE works closely with FAO and OECD in this context to ensure good coordination of work.

2. Since the last session of the Committee one session of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development was held as well as sessions of the following specialized sections:

- Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (2 sessions) (GE.1),
- Dry and Dried Fruit (GE.2),
- Seed Potatoes (GE.6),
- Meat (GE.11).

3. At these sessions several new UN/ECE standards and recommendations for perishable produce were adopted. Extensive information on the work of these groups as well as most of the Working Party's standards can be found on the home page of the Agricultural Standards Unit at www.unece.org/trade/agr

4. The groups discussed the possibility of operational activities in the form of workshops or training courses to be organized in south-eastern European countries and countries in transition, depending on the availability of extrabudgetary resources.

5. Following a request from the Committee (see ECE/TRADE/231, paragraph 36 and 37) the possibility of preparing explanatory material to UN/ECE standards was discussed. A working group on that issue was created.

6. A second working group was created to review the present working procedures of the Working Party and its specialized sections.

II. PROGRESS REPORT OF THE DIFFERENT SPECIALIZED SECTIONS

Specialized Section on Coordination of Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (GE.1)

7. *45th session: 26-29 October 1999, Geneva* (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.1/1999/15)

Participation: 26 national delegations, the European Community and several organizations.

Recommendation agreed: Apples and Pears

Standards amended: Asparagus, Broccoli, Table Grapes, Citrus Fruit

Standards under review: Apples and Pears (list of varieties), Citrus Fruit, Cultivated Mushrooms, Kiwifruit, Plums

New work: Upon the request of several African countries it was decided to propose to the Working Party to create a UN/ECE standard for Pineapples. A working group coordinated by COLEACP will prepare a draft text.

Continuing work: A new proposal on the inclusion of Miniature Fruit was discussed which will be further developed at the next session.

Operational activities: Possibilities to assist south-eastern European countries and countries in transition were discussed.

46th session: to be held in Geneva, 23-26 May 2000

8. The Committee will be informed about the outcome of this session.

Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit) (GE.2)

9. *46th session, 7-10 June 1999, Geneva* (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.2/1999/12)

Participation: 13 national delegations, the European Community and several organizations.

Standards agreed: Cashew Kernels, Inshell Walnuts

Recommendation extended: UN/ECE recommendation for Walnut Kernels: Because of substantial changes the text was forwarded to the Working Party for adoption as a UN/ECE recommendation for one further year.

New work: Review of the UN/ECE standards for pistachio nuts.

Continuing work: Revision of the standard layout was discussed and will be finalized at the next session. The dictionary of defects and the preparation of a sampling plan will be discussed at the next session.

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes (GE.6)

10. **30th session, 31 January -3 February 2000, Geneva** (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/2000/8)

Participation : 15 national delegations and the European Community

Amendments to the standard: Provisions for national phytosanitary regulations, introduction of tolerances for powdery scab, stricter tolerances for severe virus diseases.

Genetically modified Organisms : How Genetically Modified Organisms(GMOs) were dealt with by different countries/ organizations was discussed. It was agreed that the rapporteurs should discuss the implications of GMOs in general for the standard.

New work: The possibility of introducing a new classification system will be examined by the rapporteurs. An inventory of concerns of seed buyers will be discussed by the rapporteurs.

Continuing work: A new annex giving information on sampling will be finalized by the rapporteurs. The questionnaire on national certification schemes was finalized and will be send out by the secretariat. The results will be compiled for the next meeting of rapporteurs.

Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat (GE.11)

9th session, 27 - 29 March 2000, Geneva

11. The session will be held after the deadline for documentation for the Committee session. It is planned to finalize the UN/ECE Standard for Bovine Cuts and Carcasses at the session. The Committee will be informed of the outcome of this session.

DECISIONS AND DISCUSSIONS IN THE WORKING PARTY

12. **55th session, 27 - 29 March 2000, Geneva** (see TRADE/WP.7/1999/7)

Participation: 14 national delegations and the European Community

13. **Work of the Specialized Sections:** The Working Party adopted the reports of its specialized sections as well as the proposed recommendations and standards. All proposals for amendments to standards were adopted with the exception of the revision to the UN/ECE Standard for Citrus Fruit.

14. **Citrus Fruit:** In the proposed text, reservations concerning the items still under discussion had been entered. It was felt by several delegations (Greece, Netherlands and Russian Federation) that it would be regrettable to publish a standard containing reservations concerning items which were still

on the agenda. They were therefore not in favour of adopting the text at present.

15. The Working Party invited the Specialized Section to discuss maturity requirements and green skinned oranges again at the next session to try to find a solution or compromise for the diverging positions. The Working Party stressed that it accepted all amendments contained in the proposal and the discussion on these items should not be reopened at the next session of the Specialized Section.

16. **Elaboration of explanatory material:** The question was discussed extensively (see TRADE/WP.7/1999/7, paras. 59-79). The discussion is summarized below.

Background

17. At present, most of the work on the interpretation of UN/ECE standards is done in the framework of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables. Exceptions are the UN/ECE Standards on Meat (Poultry, Pork, Beef), Eggs and the colour chart for Walnut Kernels.

18. Because of uncertainties concerning the future of the OECD Scheme, the European Commission requested the secretariat at the last session of the Committee to prepare a study on the modalities of preparing explanatory brochures to UN/ECE standards in the framework of WP.7 and its specialized sections.

Study prepared by the UN/ECE secretariat

19. **The main results of the study are as follows:**

- work on explanatory brochures can be integrated into the framework of the existing specialized sections without any significant extension of the number of meeting days;
- it would not be possible to do the additional work with the existing staff. It would be necessary to recruit an additional staff member at the junior professional level; because of a 0% growth budget for the UN/ECE in the next biennium, this could only be done within the existing budget if member States decided to stop another activity taking place under the Committee and to transfer the resources to the agricultural standards unit. This is not likely to happen in the near future.
- the additional annual costs including the new staff member, a contribution to travel costs, and printing of the brochures have been estimated as US\$150,000.

20. One possibility of funding additional work would be to create a trust fund. This fund would be managed under strict United Nations procedures and with complete transparency. The UN/ECE would launch an appeal for contributions and any interested party (public or private) could contribute. There would have to be the expectation of regular contributions because otherwise the recruitment of a staff member to be financed by the trust fund would not be authorized.

21. The UN/ECE secretariat emphasized that the UN/ECE valued highly its cooperation with the OECD in different areas (e.g. electronic commerce) and that the UN/ECE is not looking for extra work. However, if OECD member countries decide that they no longer want the OECD to do this work and UN/ECE member states believe it is important to continue it, then the UN/ECE would be prepared to consider taking on the preparation of explanatory brochures on condition that adequate resources were made available.

Discussion

22. **The delegation of the European Community welcomed the study. The European Union and its Member States agreed that it would be useful to regroup the activities on explanatory material at the UN/ECE. He said that the same position would be kept at meetings of the OECD Scheme, where 13 EU Member States are contributing members.** It was hoped that the regrouping of activities would lead to a reduction in travel costs and also to an increased efficiency of the work because standards and brochures would be done in one place. EU Member States had asked whether contributions to the trust fund could be financed out of the Community budget.

23. The delegation of the OECD Scheme believed that the question of regrouping activities in the area of commercial quality standards for perishable produce should be studied in a more global way. They said that the member States of the OECD Scheme have given the mandate to the Scheme to encourage the establishment of a single international body for the development of grade standards. Beginning at its next session (15-17 May 2000) the Scheme will study the best way to reach a conclusion on this subject.

Decision

24. The Working Party decided to create a working group to further discuss the detailed modalities for contributions to the trust fund as well as organization of the work, output and distribution of the results. The delegations of the European Community, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and the United States offered to participate in that group. The secretariat and the Chairman of the Working Party will also participate.

25. It was stressed that there would be no duplication of work: the Working Party is prepared to take on this work only if the work at OECD (which is highly appreciated by WP.7 and its specialized sections) is disrupted and if the funding problem can be solved.

26. **Revision of the working procedures** (see TRADE/WP.7/1999/7, paras. 52-58): The Working Party decided to create a working group on the review of the existing working procedures to study if these can be improved. The delegations of the European Community, Romania, Switzerland and the United States offered to participate in that group. The secretariat and the Chairman of the Working Party will also participate.