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Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**MEETINGS ON AGRICULTURAL STANDARDS HELD IN 2002**

Note by the secretariat:

This document supplements the report of the Working Party (TRADE/WP.7/2001/9) with information concerning meetings held in 2002.

Special attention is drawn to:

- The seminar on "Safe and High Quality Food for International Markets" which was co-organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the International Article Numbering Association (EAN), held at New Delhi at the invitation of the Government of India.
- The agreement reached on the new UNECE Standard for Pineapples and the new UNECE Standard for Ovine Carcasses and Cuts.
- The increasing introduction of criteria for internal quality into UNECE standards for fresh produce.
- The work of the working group on the international harmonization of produce coding.

The Committee is invited to **take note** of this information.

## 1. Asian Seminar on Safe and High Quality Food for International Trade, New Delhi, 4 to 5 April 2002

The seminar was organized at the invitation of the Government of India (Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry) by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Asian and Pacific Centre for Transfer of Technology (UN/APCTT), EAN International, EAN India, Confederation of Indian Food Trade and Industry (CIFTI) (Food wing of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)). Speakers came from the organizers as well as from the World Trade Organisation, the European Union, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States Department of Agriculture, EurepGap and several national and international trade organizations.

### *Objectives*

- To assist small and medium-sized enterprises in the Asia Pacific region to understand international standards for food safety and quality and the functioning of international supply chains.
- To raise awareness about new developments in international food trade and emerging public and private safety and quality standards.
- To address the concerns of the manufacturers in this region related to the Hazardous Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) compliance, food standards related to quality and safety in order to achieve harmonization and greater market access.
- To promote value-added food exports through access to international supply chains.
- To stimulate further cooperation between UNECE and ESCAP regarding standards.

### *Subjects discussed*

- Market access for agricultural products
- Functioning of international supply chains.
- Private and public food safety standards and regulations
- Quality as the key to international food markets
- Examples of global trade facilitation
- Workshops held on fresh produce and processed foods, marine products, meat and dairy products.

### *Summary of results*

The participants agreed on the importance of using international standards and best practices in Asian food supply chains to achieve greater product acceptance and market access. Harmonization and traceability were named as the two major elements to facilitate compliance with international requirements for food safety and quality. Efficient and cost effective implementation of these could be best achieved by adopting international identification standards (e.g. EAN-UCC) and using related IT tools (bar coding, EDI etc.)

The two-day event was well attended, with wide participation from industry, Governments, research institutions and food technologists from several countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The discussions and interest of the participants showed that there is a need for these kind of events in the region.

This event marked the extension of the cooperation between UNECE and ESCAP in the area of agriculture. It is planned to hold a follow-up seminar in 2003, hosted by ESCAP in Bangkok and a further seminar in one of the central Asian member States of UNECE.

## **2. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, 32<sup>nd</sup> session**

This group is responsible for the maintenance of the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes. Contrary to other kinds of produce, standards for potatoes are not harmonized internationally. The UNECE Standard currently serves as the basis for imports from non-EU countries into the European Union.

The group is the only international forum discussing seed potato certification systems and intends to increase the application of the standard and to contribute to greater transparency in trade.

The session was attended by 13 countries among those being the main exporting countries and several major importing countries. A representative of the World Trade Organization also attended the meeting.

A member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Secretariat informed the meeting of the status of the UNECE standard from the point of view of the WTO agreements (TBT and SPS)

### *Work on the standard*

Major changes to the standard were agreed, e.g. the introduction of international classes which will make it easier to compare the different systems used in the world. A draft new introduction to the standard was developed and will be finalized by the Bureau and the secretariat.

### *Research on National Certification Schemes*

The secretariat presented the draft results extracted from answers to a questionnaire to which 30 countries had replied. A publication containing the results will be prepared by the Bureau.

## **3. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, 11<sup>th</sup> session**

This group is responsible for the development and maintenance of UNECE Standards for Meat. Its approach differs significantly from that of the other specialized sections. Its major efforts are in the development of internationally harmonized product descriptions which serve as an international language for meat products. The group does not define quality classes and minimum requirements (as these are already intensively discussed in different forums and are subject to strict national and international legislation).

The session was attended by 10 national delegations mainly from major exporting countries.

### *Work on standards*

The text and images for the new UNECE Standard for Ovine Carcasses and Cuts were agreed and will be forwarded to the Working Party for adoption. The final version of the standard will be published on the Internet.

Concerning the Draft Standard for Chicken Meat it was decided that one further meeting of the rapporteurs was necessary to finalize the chicken specific text. The carcasses and cuts descriptions will be translated to facilitate discussions of the rapporteurs (see TRADE/WP.7/GE.11/2002/13/Add.3)

It was decided that there was a high priority to review the UNECE Standard for Porcine Carcasses and Cuts in order to integrate it into the system of UNECE standards for Meat. A maintenance group (Australia, France, Poland, United Kingdom and United States) was formed and will report to the next session.

The secretariat is working on an Internet version of the UNECE Standard for Bovine Carcasses and Cuts. The maintenance group will review the standard and report to the next session.

The secretariat will discuss the possibility of a trademark for meat with the legal services of the United Nations. Countries will name authorities recognized by them for conformity assessment with the UNECE Standard. The group will cooperate with the Working Party on Technical Harmonization and Standardization Policies (WP.6) in this matter.

Future work will include lama, veal and turkey as well as a discussion paper on traceability.

#### **4. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, 48<sup>th</sup> session**

This group is responsible for the maintenance of 48 UNECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables and the development of new standards as requested. The standards are well harmonized with those of the European Community. The OECD adopts UNECE standards and develops explanatory material as well as other guidelines for implementation.

The 48<sup>th</sup> session was attended by 30 national delegations and several organizations. Several producer countries from outside the UNECE region participated: Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, South Africa, Morocco and New Zealand.

#### *Inner quality*

A major trend in the work is that more and more objective criteria for "inner quality" of fruit are included in the standards. It is hoped that this will result in:

- better quality for the consumer;
- deletion of external quality criteria which are difficult to reach by certain production methods (e.g. organic) or production regions and might be perceived as technical barriers to trade.

A research report on the relationship between the sensory acceptance of citrus fruit and objective maturity indicators was presented by Spain which will lead to major improvements in the UNECE Standard for Citrus Fruit.

*Work on standards 2002*

The new UNECE Standard for Apples and the new UNECE Standard for Pears and their respective lists of varieties were agreed and forwarded to the Working Party for adoption. A new UNECE Recommendation for pineapples was agreed and forwarded to the Working Party for adoption for a one-year trial period.

Revisions to the following standards were agreed: Annonas, Citrus Fruit, Leeks, Melons, Plums (addition of the Lithuanian varieties only), Strawberries and Table Grapes.

Recommendations for Avocados, Plums and Table Grapes (late harvest grapes) were amended and the trial period was extended for one further year.

Work on maturity indicators for Kiwi fruit and Peaches and Nectarines and a new UNECE Standard for Shallots will continue.

*Trademarks*

The secretariat will prepare amendments to the standard layout to include the text on trademarks that had been adopted by the Working Party. Proposals to amend all standards which contain lists of varieties according to this new text will be presented to the Working Party.

*Harmonization of produce coding*

Eighteen delegations attended the second meeting of the working group on the international harmonization of produce coding. There was a consensus that a lot would be achieved if the main parameters (commodity, variety and grade/class) could be harmonized. It was agreed that the group should cooperate with private initiatives working on the same subject to avoid any duplication and come to a consensus which will be useful to everyone.

**5. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (Fruit)**

The Specialized Section holds its annual session from 21 to 24 May 2002, and the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED) will be informed of the outcome.

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