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Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

Sixty-second session

Izmir, Turkey, 29 June – 3 July 2015

Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce on its sixty-second session

I. Introduction

1. The Chair of the Specialized Section, Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America) opened the session welcoming delegates and expressing the Specialized Section's gratitude to the delegation of Turkey, the Ministry of Economy and the Aegean Exporters' Association for organizing the 2015 session in Izmir. This year's session was followed by a workshop on "Agri-food Supply Chains in Cross-border Trade of Nuts and Dried Fruit". It was attended by a large number of participants and new delegations. The three day workshop combined theoretical sessions with a field trip to the Erbeyli Fig Research Institute and a dried fruit processing plant where participants were shown inspection and sampling procedures.

2. During the opening ceremony, the Vice-Minister of Economy of Turkey, Mr. Adnan Yildirim, welcomed all participants. He stressed the importance his country attached to the work of UNECE's Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce. Turkey, he noted, had a long tradition in quality control to improve production as well as consumer protection. This was also underlined in an address by Dr. Mehmet Karabay, Director General, Product Safety and Inspection (Ministry of Economy), when stressing the importance of UNECE as a platform for standardization in this area. Decisions taken at UNECE meetings, he said, had not only a direct impact on foreign trade but also producers, farmers and exporters. He thanked the Vice-Minister and UNECE as well as all others involved in the organization of this session in Izmir. The combination of a regular session with a workshop, both speakers stressed, was a unique opportunity to broaden participation and take decisions of global relevance.

3. Mr. Sabri Ünlütürk, Chairman of the Aegean Exporters' Association and co-organizer of the events, welcomed participants to Izmir, a city of particular importance to the Turkish dried fruit industry. The latter, he explained, was a very important part of



Turkish exports and subject of continued research and improvements. He also emphasized that UNECE's trade standards had become a sine qua non and the leading standards for companies in global trade.

4. The UNECE Executive Secretary, Mr. Christian Friis Bach, via a video-call, expressed his sincere gratitude to the Turkish Ministry of Economy, and particularly the Minister and Vice-Minister as well as the Aegean Exporters' Association for their long-standing support and for hosting this year's meeting. He also stressed that UNECE brings a holistic approach to agro trade, addressing issues linked to standards; trade; trade facilitation; risk management and risk assessment; environmental concerns and transport. The secretary of UNECE's Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, Ms. Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab, thanked the delegation of Turkey and the Aegean Exporters' Association for the excellent meeting preparations and collaboration and welcomed participants including many new delegations. She noted the highly appreciated work of the Specialized Sections and the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its increased visibility which had among others been the result of promotional activities and capacity-building. In April 2015, for example, a dried fruit and nuts exhibition had been held on the occasion of the biannual UNECE Commission session in Geneva to explain the work to delegates and Permanent Diplomatic Missions to the United Nations.

II. Attendance

5. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Afghanistan, Albania, Chile, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkey, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.

6. Representatives of United Nations agencies participated in the session: the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

7. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: the Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

8. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the meeting: International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation (INC) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

III. Adoption of the agenda

9. Delegations adopted the agenda.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

10. The UNECE secretariat briefly reported that the Review of the 2005 reform of UNECE had been completed and the Terms of Reference for a new Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, which replaced the former Committee on Trade, had been adopted. Its first session would be held from 31 August to 2 September 2015 and would include the presentation of a study on regulatory barriers to trade in Kyrgyzstan together with a related business process analysis for agricultural export products.

(b) Other organizations

11. The representative of the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation (INC) welcomed the excellent collaboration with UNECE and stressed the importance of standardization and unique international standards.

12. The representative of UNDP Uzbekistan thanked the Specialized Section for the opportunity to participate in the events and noted that nuts and dried fruit were of particular importance to Uzbekistan. He noted that there was interest by Uzbekistan to explore all opportunities offered in the area of standardization as well as nuts and dried fruit trade. He also expressed hope for continued cooperation in these areas.

V. Review of UNECE Recommendations**(a) Dried Apricots**

13. The Rapporteur from Turkey outlined the proposed changes and briefly presented recent trends in the dried apricot trade, namely an increasing share (43 per cent) of untreated apricots and lower preservative levels used for treated apricots. She stressed that the standard needed to facilitate trade. Therefore, these trends had to be considered in the current revision of the standard, in particular, when setting the tolerance levels; defining certain defects for specific standards and also in the Standard Layout (“rotten” and “fermented”); and reviewing the definition of “soft” fruit.

14. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised Recommendation and adopted several changes which are reflected in the post-session document. Under “Definition of Produce” the Specialized Section amended the definition of the style “slabs”. In the section on “Moisture Content”, it was decided to replace the term “soft fruit” by “high moisture or equivalent denomination” and to define the term “high moisture” in the Standard Layout. Under “Provision concerning Sizing”, it was decided to amend the sentence under Option C to read: “Size ranges other than A. or B. are allowed provided that the range used is labelled accordingly. However, when a size code is indicated, it should not conflict with size codes in Option A.”

15. In the table of quality tolerances, the term “rotting” was changed to “rotten” and “fermentation” to “fermented” (which will also be changed in the Standard Layout). The Specialized Section accepted Turkey’s proposal to separate the tolerance levels for fermented; treated and untreated fruit; and keep the tolerances at 2, 2 and 5 per cent for Classes Extra, I and II for untreated fruit and at 1, 1, and 2 per cent for Classes Extra, I and II for treated fruit. Note was also taken of Turkey’s proposal to add in the definition of “fermented” in the Standard Layout that a slight sour smell was not considered as a defect. To clarify how heat injury occurred, the term “sunburn” was added after the indent “heat injury”. Discussions on the size tolerances are still on-going.

16. When reviewing the tolerance for loose foreign matter, Turkey explained that it would be difficult to lower this tolerance to match those used in the standards for dried figs and dried grapes. Dried apricots had pits and, therefore, fragments of pits might be found (which was not the case for the other two fruits). It was therefore decided to divide the tolerances into two groups: “foreign matter and extraneous vegetable material (except for pitted fruit)” at 0.5 per cent in all classes and “presence of pits, pit fragments and pedicels in pitted fruit” at 1, 1, and 2 per cent respectively for Classes Extra, I, and II. In view of harmonizing with the outcome of discussions that had taken place at Codex Alimentarius meetings, it was decided to change the term “foreign” to “extraneous matter” (also in the Standard Layout).

17. In Section “V. A. Uniformity”, it was decided to add “...if indicated, variety and/or crop year” as a uniformity criteria in each package. In Section “VI. B. Nature of produce”, the Specialized Section introduced “high moisture or equivalent denomination (when appropriate)” and removed the term “soft apricots”.

18. An electronic working group open to all delegations will continue to work on the draft and a new document will be presented to the 2016 session of the Specialized Section.

19. The Specialized Section decided to submit a request to the Working Party in November 2015 to extend the revised draft Recommendation for another year.

(b) Dried Figs

20. The Rapporteur (Turkey) presented the proposed changes. In line with the Dried Apricot Standard, the Specialized Section replaced the term “soft fruit” by “high moisture or equivalent denomination (when appropriate)”. Several delegations expressed their concern about the “Provisions concerning sizing” which contained a minimum size linked to quality classification; a uniformity in sizing table which could lead to confusion and wording that seemed to deal with uniformity requirements. Therefore, the Rapporteur (Turkey) will send an explanatory sentence to define uniformity in size.

21. The Turkish delegation explained that traditionally it was accepted to link fruit size as an essential dried fig feature to a quality classification attribute and this was also reflected in the consumption pattern of dried figs. Other delegations pointed out that in recent years international standards had moved away from linking fruit size to quality classification. As a compromise, it was decided to make the use of a minimum size optional to read: “Optionally, the number of fruit per kilogramme may be limited to.....”

22. As an introduction to the discussions on the table of tolerances, the Turkish delegation showed a short presentation on “sunscald, split or torn and excessively dried product damage” In addition, information was provided to explain that since the ban of Methyl bromide, the new pesticides killed the insects in the fruit instead of expelling them. Delegates discussed several proposals including a 9, 10 and 12 per cent tolerance for damage caused by pests and a 20 per cent tolerance for Class II for serious sun scald, split or torn damage. The United States delegation will inform the meeting about its position on removing the footnote referring to the presence of pollinating bees as soon as possible.

23. The Sizing Section will be re-discussed at the 2016 session of the Specialized Section. All changes will be reflected in the post-session document. The Specialized Section decided to submit a request to the Working Party in November 2015 to extend the revised draft Recommendation for another year.

(c) Dried Grapes

24. The Specialized Section led by the Rapporteur (Turkey) reviewed the changes proposed by an informal working group meeting which had taken place the previous day. All changes are reflected in the post-session document. They include a change in the indent on sugar crystals; new moisture content levels and an exception for the Monukka variety. In the table of tolerances, the United States delegation indicated that the proposed changes in tolerance levels for “pieces of stem” and “sugared” required further consultations with their industry. The United States delegation will provide their comments by 15 August 2015.

25. The Specialized Section reviewed in detail the size tolerances of 10 per cent for produce not conforming to the size indicated and decided to retain the 10 per cent in all three tables. The rapporteur will inform the electronic working group about the application of the 10 per cent tolerance level for the number of berries indicated in a range.

26. The German delegation proposed to introduce a total quality tolerance for all three tables and suggested levels of 5, 10 or 12, and 15 per cent for classes Extra, I and II respectively. The proposal would be reviewed by all delegations.

27. The Specialized Section also decided that combining the three tables in one while indicating separately differing tolerances (when appropriate) could only be done once agreement on all tolerances had been achieved. The secretariat would circulate a combined draft table for comments in due course.

28. Further changes were introduced in Section “A. Uniformity” (see post-session document) and “B. Packaging” to introduce “practically free of all foreign matter in accordance with the tolerance in Section IV” (an expression which should be introduced into the Standard Layout as well). Under “B. Nature of Produce”, the Specialized Section simplified marking provisions under Option 1.

29. Given the numerous outstanding issues, the Specialized Section decided that the revised draft could only be submitted for adoption as a revised Standard to the 2015 session of the Working Party provided that agreement was reached on the total tolerance levels as well as the comments from the United States delegation. The deadline for all comments was set at 15 August 2015. Should this not be the case, the Working Party would be asked to extend the trial period for another year and the Recommendation would be re-discussed at the 2016 session of the Specialized Section.

VI. Review of existing UNECE Standards and alignment with the 2011 Standard Layout

(a) Dates

30. The Specialized Section reviewed the tolerances for “pest damage” contained in the UNECE Standard for Dates on the basis of discussions which had taken place at the 2014 session. The proposed higher values of 8 and 12 per cent for Classes I and II had been proposed because similar to figs, the new pest control killed the pest in the fruit. While this proposal by Tunisia was supported by Saudi Arabia, Germany and the INC, the United States delegation indicated that their national legislation allowed only for a 5 per cent tolerance for produce damaged by pests.

31. The Specialized Section agreed on the new tolerance levels together with a footnote reading: “c When applying its national legislation, the United States does not admit a tolerance higher than 5 per cent for produce damaged by pests.”

32. The revisions will be submitted to the Working Party in November 2015 for adoption.

(b) Inshell Pistachios

33. The Rapporteur from the United States introduced the new revised draft standard which had been aligned with the 2011 Standard Layout. The Specialized Section reviewed the document and included more changes which will be reflected in the post-session document. Sections that required further reflection and consultations (e.g. the table of tolerances) were placed in square brackets. The secretariat will contact countries with reservations to inquire about the latter’s continued relevance and also make aware other producing countries including Iran of the on-going revision.

34. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised document to the Working Party for adoption as a Recommendation for a 1-year trial period.

(c) **Almond Kernels**

35. The Specialized Section reviewed the new revised draft Standard for Almond Kernels which had been aligned with the 2011 Standard Layout by the Rapporteur from the United States. The Specialized Section introduced several changes which are reflected in the post-session document. Items for further discussion and consultation were placed in square brackets (including the table of tolerances)

36. The Specialized Section decided to submit the draft document to the November 2015 session of the Working Party for adoption as a Recommendation for a 1-year trial period.

(d) **Walnut Kernels**

37. The Rapporteur from the United States reviewed the revised and aligned document which had been submitted for consideration as well as further changes proposed by an informal working group composed of the delegations of France, Chile and the United States. It was decided that all proposed and discussed changes would be published in a post-session document and serve as the basis for a new draft which will be sent to all delegations by January 2016 to give them a 2-month period for comments. On the basis of the comments received, a new revised and consolidated draft would be prepared for discussion at the 2016 session of the Specialized Section. It was also stressed that participation in the working group was open to all delegations and the INC proposed to join the group to represent producing countries worldwide. At the 2016 session, a working group meeting would be organized ahead of the formal session to discuss the new draft.

38. One of the issues that require particular attention would be the “scuffing” defect and its related tolerance levels. While hand cracking resulted in less scuffing damage and current tolerance levels were considered adequate, countries using mechanical cracking asked for higher tolerance levels.

39. Other concerns expressed related to the proposed deletion of the second paragraph in Section “II. Provisions concerning quality”, particularly, the removal of the word “seller”. It was decided to re-discuss the issue within the framework of the review of the Standard Layout.

VII. Discussion on the development of an electronic UNECE brochure for Walnut Kernels

40. The Rapporteur (United States) presented to the Specialized Section a first draft of a proposed Brochure for Walnut Kernels. The layout of the brochure follows the Inshell Walnut Brochure’s. Currently, there was still a need for more photos for Classes Extra, I and II; while some of the pictures depicting defects would be taken from the Inshell Walnut Brochure. In addition, more pictures of retail walnut kernel packages would be needed.

41. The United States delegation drew the meeting’s attention to the fact that the revised standard for walnut kernels would need to include the newly internationally traded Livermore variety (red walnut). This would also imply updating the colour gauge and eventually adding pictures to the brochure.

42. The Rapporteur will prepare a first draft brochure prior to the 2016 session of the Specialized Section and ask for pictures as required. The final brochure would be an electronic and printed brochure developed by the United States walnut industry.

VIII. Development of a sampling plan for tree nuts and dried produce

43. The Rapporteur from Germany noted that since the 2014 session no comments had been received. She proposed to ask OECD to separate the dried fruit and nuts sampling plan from the fresh fruit sampling plan and make them two autonomous documents.

44. The INC reported that very good progress had been made in taking pictures to illustrate the plan and in producing a training video to illustrate the content of the sampling plan. The video would be made available for training purposes worldwide.

45. The Sampling plan will be posted for review on the UNECE website as a post-session document by mid-August 2015. It will also include definitions as well as some editorial amendments proposed by the working group on fresh fruit and vegetables and of relevance to dry and dried produce. The Rapporteur from Germany will incorporate comments into this new document which will be submitted for inter-sessional approval and, if approved, to the 2015 session of the Working Party for adoption.

IX. Review of the DDP Standard Layout Annex III – Recommended Terms and Definitions of Defects

46. Since the last session, no comments had been received, however, during this session several issues had been raised and noted for discussion. The secretariat will post the 2014 post-session document again and ask for comments. These will be consolidated for review during an informal working group session prior to the 2016 session, and subsequently, by the formal session.

X. Food waste and standards

47. Following a request by the November 2014 session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and, given the increasing concerns about food waste in many countries (see also the United Nations' post-2015 development agenda - <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015>), the Specialized Section was provided with more information on the topic and asked to consider if this topic would be appropriate for their work. Issues raised in this context included the too stringent provisions of the standards, the issue of non-exportable product or the re-grading of non-conforming produce. Attention was also drawn to the document presented by the delegations of Sweden and the United Kingdom to the 2015 session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/agr/meetings/ge.01/2015/GE_1_2015_10_FoodWaste_E.pdf).

XI. Other business

48. The secretariat invited participants to the UNECE Conference on Traceability of Food which will be held in Geneva, Switzerland on 3 November in conjunction with the 2015 session of Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards to address the growing concern over an adequate traceability of agricultural produce and food.

XII. Future work

49. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items in its 2016 agenda:
- Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Grapes (if no agreement could be reached in 2015)
 - Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Apricots (on-going)
 - Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Figs (on-going)
 - Revision of the UNECE Standard for Almond Kernels (Recommendation)
 - Revision of the UNECE Standard for Inshell Pistachios (Recommendation)
 - Revision of the UNECE Standard for Walnut Kernels
 - Review of the Brochure for Walnut Kernels
 - Revision of the DDP Standard Layout
 - Development of a Layout for an explanatory poster
 - Development of a guideline for inspections (for dry and dried produce)
 - New Standard for Pecan Kernels
 - New Standard for Dried Sour Cherries

50. Discussions on the possible development of a brochure for dried apricots led to the decision that the adoption of the new standard should precede such a decision. In addition, if a brochure should be developed, OECD would be approached and the UNECE secretariat would assist with technical input. In the meantime, and given the budgetary constraints, it was decided to work on the development of a generic poster layout. Posters, it was stressed could illustrate the standards' provisions in a targeted and more cost-effective way. Delegations were asked to send to the secretariat already available material and posters. The secretariat would compile and present possible options at the 2016 session of the Specialized Section.

XIII. Election of officers

51. At its sixty-second session the Specialized Section elected Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America) as Chair and Ms. Matlou Setati (South Africa) and Ms. Elif Ulug Sakalsiz (Turkey) as Vice-Chairs.

XIV. Adoption of the report

52. The Specialized Section will adopt the report of the session. (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.2/2015/2). The next session of the Specialized Section has been scheduled for 27 to 29 June 2016.
