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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization
of Dry and Dried Produce
Sixty-third session
Geneva, 27-29 June 2016

Report

I. Introduction

1. The Chair of the Specialized Section, Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America) opened the session and welcomed the delegates.
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the UNECE secretariat, Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, welcomed the regular and the new participants, noting the large number of countries from Central Asia as well as two donor agencies. The latter have been instrumental in the design and fundraising of a possible project on dried apricots in the Fergana valley and the upcoming UNECE/UNDP Workshop on Cross-Border Trade of Nuts and Dried Fruit (Tashkent, Uzbekistan, 11-13 July 2016). This kind of collaboration, he stressed, was very important for the development of meaningful and coordinated projects, which included all partners (public and private, international and regional) to the benefit of the Central Asian sub-region. He also mentioned that the secretariat had strengthened collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC) and published UNECE explanatory guides and standards on the “sustainabilityXchange” and the “standardsmap” web sites. Authorities and companies worldwide can now access and use this material, and assess their export readiness.

II. Attendance

3. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: France, Germany, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, United States of America, and Uzbekistan.
4. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations participated in the meeting: International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation (INC); Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ); and Hilfswerk Austria International.

III. Adoption of the agenda

5. Delegations amended and adopted the agenda.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

6. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the UNECE secretariat reviewed the budget and programme discussions held at the United Nations in New York in December 2015 as well as in June 2016. He mentioned that the work done at regional levels, especially the normative work including ECE's agricultural quality standards had become the focus of attention. While the committees did not take a final decision on standards setting, the allocation of resources and program will arise again in future budget and program discussions. He suggested that delegations consider contacting their Permanent Missions at the United Nations New York office for support. He also mentioned that the Agricultural Standards Unit's 2018/19 publications budget had been cut to two electronic publications per year. The secretariat has taken measures to secure the publication of the standards and to work on alternatives to traditional publishing. He also informed the Specialized Section that the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) had decided to make food loss and waste in relation to standards the topic of a special conference to be held at its November 2016 session.

(b) Other organizations

7. The representative of the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) gave a brief update on its activities noting that the INC had postponed the work on illustrating the UNECE sampling plan for nuts and dried fruit until its finalization. She also informed participants about the May 2016 INC Congress; the meeting of the INC's Scientific Committee; as well as new projects such as the establishment of a Statistics Committee. The Chairman of the Specialized Section mentioned that he had been invited to attend the INC Congress and had provided an update on ECE's activities. He also mentioned the appreciation by the international business community for ECE's work on nuts and dried fruit standards.

V. Development of a guideline for inspections of dry and dried produce

8. The Specialized Section discussed the possible development of a guideline for the inspection of dry and dried produce, which had been proposed at the 2015 session. As this work was closely linked to the development of a sampling plan, it was decided to broaden this work and combine both activities. The already existing draft Sampling plan could become the basis for an illustrated guideline.

9. The Specialized Section established an informal, electronic working group (Germany, United States and INC) which will review the existing material and ask for comments and contributions by all delegations on the draft sampling plan (presented in Word format to facilitate commenting) by mid-October 2016. At the November session of the Working Party, a meeting would be convened to review the sampling plan and to start collecting photos from delegations. The new draft guidelines and the sampling plan would be discussed at the June 2017 session of the Specialized Section.

10. In order to test the validity of the sampling plan and the various methods proposed, delegations decided to hold a workshop as part of the 2017 session and invite country

delegates and industry to a practical training. It was suggested to hold the workshop in a producing region, if possible. The secretariat was asked to explore this option and contact possible host countries.

VI. Review of UNECE Recommendations

(a) Dried Apricots

11. The delegation from Tajikistan gave a presentation on their dried apricot production noting the increased attention by the government to the development of this industry. They highlighted the importance of the Fergana valley and its small-scale family farmers whose livelihood depended on this industry. Production, they said, stretched into the neighbouring countries of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Central Asian countries cultivated smaller apricot varieties and dried apricots were produced from ripe apricots.

12. The Rapporteur from Turkey outlined the proposed changes to the Recommendation. Lengthy discussions took place on Provisions concerning sizing, particularly, the currently included size codes and the draft standard's Option C as an open option to accommodate also for example the production of the Fergana Valley. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the wording under Option C and the Marking provisions to distinguish between the size ranges under Option A, B and C. The Specialized Section also agreed to the proposal to include under Option C the alphabetical size code table proposed by Tajikistan. In the Table of tolerances, the Specialized Section decided to keep the distinction between "treated" and "untreated" apricots in the tolerance for "fermented fruit". The request by Tajikistan to introduce a tolerance for tears in pitted dried apricots (which occurred due to their ripe state during pitting) was not accepted. It was pointed out that such cuts were known by trade and inspection services and covered by the minimum requirement "intact; however, slight superficial damage is not considered as a defect..." All agreed changes are included in the post-session document.

13. The Specialized Section thanked all delegations for their input to the revision of the standard and adopted the revised draft. It will be submitted to the Working Party (November 2016) for adoption as the new UNECE Standard for Dried Apricots.

(b) Dried Figs

14. The Rapporteur (Turkey) reviewed the proposed changes including in the Provisions concerning sizing and the Table of tolerances. The Specialized Section adopted several amendments such as the deletion of the reference to the presence of the pollinating bee and new tolerances for "damage by pests" which were changed to 9, 12, and 15 per cent for Classes Extra, I and II respectively. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to contact the delegation of Greece and enquire about lifting their reservation in footnote 7.

15. The Specialized Section thanked all delegations for their input to the revision of the standard and approved the revised draft for adoption by the Working Party (November 2016 session) as the new UNECE Standard for Dried Figs. All agreed changes are included in the post-session document.

(c) Dried Grapes

16. The Specialized Section led by the Rapporteur (Turkey) reviewed the proposed changes and adopted amendments in the Section on Minimum requirements. Lengthy discussion took place on the newly merged Table on quality tolerances for seedless and seed-bearing varieties as well as currants.

17. As no agreement could be reached on

- the proposed rephrased minimum requirement on capstem (“free from capstems exceeding 2[3] mm in length, except for lots presented with capstems”);
- the tolerance for berries with attached capstems; and
- the pieces of stem allowed in 1 kg;

the Specialized Section decided to allow for a 2-month consultation period and further discussions in an electronic working group.

18. Provided that consensus can be reached by 24 August 2016, the Specialized Section decided to submit the revised draft to the Working Party for adoption as the new UNECE Standard for Dried Grapes. All agreed changes are included in the post-session document.

(d) Inshell Pistachios

19. The delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran gave a presentation on the country’s pistachio production and provided information on the various cultivars, growing conditions and trade.

20. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised Recommendation and the proposals submitted by the Rapporteur (United States) and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Discussion took place on the inclusion of a “shell to kernels” ratio to define the minimum requirement “sufficiently developed”. As the standard was intended for international trade and applied after packaging, it was decided not to include such a ratio.

21. The Specialized Section adopted several changes and moved some definitions to the Standard Layout (Annex 3). The secretariat was asked to check with the United Kingdom and the Netherlands if their reservation in footnote 2 (now footnote 3) could be deleted.

22. As the delegations could not reach consensus on:

- the tolerances for “cracks and laterally split not on the suture” in cases of mechanically opened shells (which would affect the total tolerance), and
- the positioning of this defect under “other defects”,

they were invited to consult with their industries until 24 August 2016.

23. Provided agreement can be reached by 24 August 2016, the new draft text would be submitted to the Working Party for adoption as the new Standard for Inshell Pistachios. All agreed changes are included in the post-session document.

(e) Almond Kernels

24. The Rapporteur (United States of America) reviewed the proposed changes. Several tolerances were aligned with current United States provisions to facilitate trade. The post session document contains all agreed changes.

25. However, as no agreement could be reached on the tolerance level for bitter almonds (Extra Class), the Specialized Section decided to open consultations until 24 August 2016.

26. Provided that agreement can be reached on the aforementioned, outstanding issue, the Specialized Section decided to adopt the revised draft and submit it for approval by the Working Party at its November 2016 session

VII. Review of existing UNECE Standards and related explanatory brochures

(a) Walnut Kernels

27. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised draft Standard for Walnut Kernels and the amendments discussed at the working group meeting. All agreed changes are included in the post-session document.

28. The Specialized Section thanked all delegations for their input to the revision of the standard and decided to submit the revised text to the Working Party (November 2016 session) for adoption as the new UNECE Standard for Walnut Kernels.

(b) Explanatory brochure for walnut kernels

Documentation: Draft Explanatory Brochure for Walnut Kernels
(ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2016/9)

29. The Rapporteur (United States of America) presented the draft Explanatory Brochure for Walnut Kernels, which describes and illustrates the provisions of the Standard. The Specialized Section adopted several changes, which the Rapporteur will include in an updated version. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation of the United States for their work on the brochure, its layout and printing. A draft of the Brochure will be prepared for approval by the Working Party in November 2016.

(c) Revised colour gauge for walnut kernels

30. The Specialized Section decided not to revise the current colour gauge, which is internationally accepted. The Rapporteur (United States of America) will in the walnut kernel brochure photos of the red-colour walnut variety in addition to those of the colour gauge. The delegation of the United States informed the Specialized Section that its national colour gauge would be revised during the next harvest season. The Specialized Section thanked all delegations that had worked on the revisions to the walnut standard and the explanatory brochure, particularly, the delegations of France and the United States.

VIII. UNECE Sampling plan for tree nuts and dried produce

31. As agreed under item V., the Specialized Section will review the draft Sampling plan until the November session of the Working Party and combine this work with the development of inspection guidelines. The final draft would be the basis for testing and, possibly, adoption at the June 2017 workshop.

IX. Development of a generic layout for an explanatory poster

32. At the 2015 session, the Specialized Section requested the secretariat to assist in the development of a generic poster layout based on already existing poster formats and layouts. Posters, it was noted, were less expensive than brochures and could provide valuable illustrated information and training material for users at the point of sorting, quality assurance, packing and inspection.

33. During the past year, the secretariat had received contributions from delegations, which had been presented to the Specialized Section in a consolidated draft format. The Specialized Section thanked delegations for their contributions and asked the secretariat to contact the United States pistachio industry for additional material. It was also noted that

each poster would be unique as each product had its specific characteristics. It was therefore not possible to predict the posters' individual, final layout.

34. The Specialized Section considered several options and decided to focus on illustrating damages and defects (as shown in the poster provided by the Chilean Walnut Commission) and limit the number of photos to around 20 per poster. If necessary, styles (as shown in the poster provided by the California Walnut Board) would be depicted in a separate poster. The preferred background colour was white. Posters would be made available online and each user could print the posters and easily translate the included text. The posters would mention the link to the illustrated standard's web page (but not the actual text) as well as the date of issue. For food safety reasons, the Specialized Section recommended to print the posters on laminated paper.

35. The following delegations offered to help develop posters:

- United States – poster on inshell walnuts, for which photos were already available
- Turkey – posters on dried apricots and/or dried figs
- Islamic Republic of Iran – poster on pistachios

X. Review of the UNECE Standard Layout for Dry and Dried Produce

36. The Specialized Section reviewed the 2011 version of the UNECE Standard Layout for Dry and Dried Produce and amended various sections to include changes agreed at the sessions since 2012. Those parts that are still under discussion were placed in square brackets for further consultation until 24 August 2016. All changes are included in the post-session document.

37. The Specialized Section decided to submit the amended text for adoption by the Working Party in November 2016.

XI. Development of new UNECE Standards

(a) Pecan Kernels

38. The Specialized Section had been presented a draft standard for Pecan Kernels which had been suspended in 2007. The United States delegation indicated that, at the moment, the United States pecan industry could not support the development of this standard. Representatives from the United States pecan industry might attend future sessions and inform of further developments.

39. The Specialized Section decided to postpone work on the development of a pecan standard.

(b) Dried Sour Cherries

40. The Specialized Section postponed the standards for dried sour cherries pending consultations.

XII. Change of title: UNECE Standard for Dates

41. The Specialized Section was informed of the decision by the Working Party at its November 2015 session to amend the title of the UNECE Standard for Dates to “Dried Dates” (to avoid confusion with the future Codex Alimentarius standard for fresh dates).

42. The Specialized Section took note of the decision of the Working Party and changed all references in the standard from “dates” to “dried dates”.

XIII. Food loss/waste and standards - update

43. The secretariat provided an update to the Specialized Section on recent developments and work done on food loss/waste and standards, including exploration of this topic by other Specialized Sections of WP.7.

44. The secretariat invited participants to the “UNECE Conference on Food loss, waste, and standards”, which will be held in Geneva, Switzerland in November 2016 in conjunction with the Working Party session.

XIV. Other business

45. The secretariat gave a brief update on work done by the traceability discussion group and presented initial findings. The delegation from Tajikistan indicated their interest in participating in this work as traceability had become increasingly important in their country.

46. The secretariat also updated the Specialized Section on the upcoming workshop on Cross-border trade in Nuts and Dried Fruit which will be held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan from 11 to 13 July 2016.

XV. Future work

47. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on the 2017 agenda:

- Alignment and Revision of the UNECE Standard for Prunes - Rapporteur, France (to be confirmed) - with Germany, United States, the INC and, possibly, Argentina and Chile
- New UNECE Standard for Dried Coconut pieces (chunks, flakes, chips) – Rapporteur, United States, with other producing countries
- New UNECE Standard for Dried Bananas (Chair will work with the secretariat to coordinate with producing and exporting countries)
- New UNECE Standard for Dried Papaya (Chair will work with the secretariat to coordinate with producing and exporting countries)
- Development of the UNECE sampling plan and guideline for inspections for dry and dried produce
- Review of the new explanatory posters
- Consider the development of standards for dried berries
- Possible review of the first brochure for dried produce (e.g. dried apricots, dried figs) - Rapporteur Turkey, with input from Tajikistan

48. It was also suggested to consider developing a standard for peanut kernels as well as inshell peanuts and desiccated dried coconut. As both products already have Codex standards, the secretariat will consult with the Codex secretariat.

49. The next session of the Specialized Section has been tentatively scheduled for 19 to 21 June 2017. The secretariat will confirm the venue in the next months.

XVI. Election of officers

50. At its sixty-third session, the Specialized Section elected Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America) as Chair and Ms. Matlou Setati (South Africa) and Mr. Korkut Yavuz (Turkey) as Vice-Chairs.

XVII. Adoption of the report

51. The Specialized Section adopted the report of the session. (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2016/2).
