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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Forty-second session

Geneva, 13-15 October 2014

Report

I. Introduction

1. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi (Italy). The Director of the Economic Cooperation, Trade, and Land Management Division opened the meeting.

II. Attendance

2. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the United States of America.

III. Adoption of the agenda

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/1

3. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with proposed changes.

IV. Matters of interest since the last session

Documentation: Report of the Working Party (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2013/2)

Report of the Committee on Trade (ECE/TRADE/C/2014/2)

Draft Geneva Understanding (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2014/3)

4. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section about the request by the United States, made at the 2013 session of the Working Party, to suspend the decision regarding the adoption of the Geneva Understanding for one more year. In April this year the

delegation of the United States submitted to the secretariat its comments on the draft text of the Geneva Understanding which will be presented to the November 2014 session of the Working Party for consideration.

5. The Chief of the Trade Policy and Governmental Cooperation Section informed the delegates of the on-going restructuring exercise of the two committees serviced by the Division. He explained the three proposed options stressing that none of them would impact the work of the Specialized Section, given that member States had unanimously indicated their continued satisfaction with the work on standards setting and, in particular, agricultural quality standards.

6. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section about the Russian Voluntary Contribution funds that had become available to support the work on the UNECE seed potato guides.

7. The Specialized Section thanked the editor and the UNOG Publication Team for the excellent work done on the UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Diseases, Pests and Defects.

V. Information on the results of the meetings of the Bureau

Documentation: The Standard with proposed changes
(ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/3)
Meeting of the Bureau in Fargo (GE.6/BUR/2013/11)
Meeting of the Bureau in Melbourne (GE.6/BUR/2014/7)
Position on cutting seed tubers (INF.2, Informal document)
Meeting of the Bureau in Changins (INF.3, Informal document)

8. The Chairperson informed the participants about the results of the Extended Bureau meetings held in Fargo, United States in October 2013, in Melbourne, Australia in April 2014, as well as of the Bureau meeting held in Changins, Switzerland in September 2014. The Specialized Section thanked the authorities of the United States, Australia and Switzerland for having hosted those meetings.

9. The Specialized Section approved most of the changes to the Standard, as recommended by the Extended Bureau and indicated in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/3. The changes concerned: (i) the references to IPPC in sections III.B, IV, VI, and in annexes VII (the definition of non-regulated pests) and X; and (ii) definitions of “external defects” and “pest damage” (items 3 and 9 of annex III, respectively). The delegates decided to:

- Amend the bullet point on diseases and pests in section III. B (Goals and scope) to read: “Diseases and pests affecting commercial quality or yield”
- Keep the title of Annex X as “International dispute settlement”
- Keep the sentence “Consignments may also fail to comply with other import requirements, such as phytosanitary regulations, but these are not within the scope of this Standard” in section 1 of Annex X.

10. It was suggested that the requirement to control “External quality and physiology” be revisited by the Specialized Section in the future, bearing in mind the past work done by the Specialized Section on this subject.

11. The Specialized Section submitted the revised Standard to the Working Party for approval.

12. The Specialized Section adopted its amended position on cutting seed tubers. The last bullet point of the position now addresses the concerns of breeders expressed by the European Seed Association with regard to cutting seed of protected varieties:

- Cutting seed potatoes is a common practice in areas or cases where potato varieties with large tubers are in demand. Cutting facilitates the production of varieties with large tubers and reduces seed costs. However, marketing cut seed is not allowed in some parts of the world, because seed cutting increases the risks of disease spread and seed piece decay. It also may reduce emergence.
- In countries where cut seed is accepted into a certification programme, the countries may enforce provisions to minimize the risk of spread of diseases. Cutting seed potatoes is recommended to be done in a closed chain if possible, because cutting by third parties creates a greater risk.
- Extreme temperatures and difference in temperature between soil and cut seed tubers generally cause poorer emergence and plant growth. The risks of seed cutting can be mitigated by pre-cutting and allowing the cut surfaces to suberize. It is important to take proper measures to prevent the spread of diseases between seed lots by thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting all equipment.
- Cut seed is considered a “defect”. Under the UNECE Standard, however, “defects” are only countable when they are expected to have a negative impact on yielding capacity or storability or if they are likely to lead to secondary infection.
- Cut tubers may be acceptable for a designated authority for entrance into their certification programme if the inspection certificate of the seed lot before cutting indicates that the lot meets the designated authority’s requirements and lot identity has been maintained, or the cutting has been done at the farm producing the next generation.
- Seed growers accept the risks and responsibilities of using cut seed.
- When cutting seed of protected varieties, permission may be required from the breeder rights holder.

VI. UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Field Inspection. Recommended Practices

Documentation: Draft Guide to Seed Potato Field Inspection
(ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/4)

13. The delegation of the United States presented the draft Guide which was discussed by the Extended Bureau at its meeting in Melbourne. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft Guide and decided to submit it to the Working Party for approval. All the changes and amendments made are available in the post-session version of document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/4.

14. To clarify the relationship between the terms “field” and “crop” used in the Guide, the delegates decided to include the following paragraph into the section on the scope of inspection:

“The term “field” is defined in annex VIII of the Standard. A field may contain more than one crop. For the purpose of this Guide the crop is a defined area of seed potatoes that is limited to an individual variety and class and is entered as a single unit for certification.”

15. The delegates suggested that the definitions of “field”, “crop”, “lot” and “origin” in annex VII of the Standard be revisited in the future.

16. The Specialized Section also asked the delegation of the United States and the secretariat to finalize the Guide and complete it with photographs illustrating the process of field inspection, as well as to publish the Guide as a paper publication using the same format as for the UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Diseases, Pests and Defects.

17. The delegation of New Zealand introduced the subject of specifying the minimum sample size or the required confidence level to detect faults during inspection with a target confidence level. The delegates agreed that it would be helpful to have guidance (e.g. an indicative table) in the Standard on the sample size that would ensure desired confidence levels for faults having different tolerance levels. The Specialized Section established a Working Group composed of the delegations of Finland, New Zealand (rapporteur), Sweden and the United States who will propose, at the next meeting of the Extended Bureau, amendments to the Standard related to sample sizes for both field inspection and post-harvest testing.

VII. UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Tuber Inspection. Recommended Practices

Documentation: Draft Guide to Seed Potato Tuber Inspection
(ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/5)

18. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft Guide prepared by the delegation of the United States. The changes and amendments made to the draft text are reflected in the post-session version of document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/5. The Specialized Section asked the delegation of the United States to take the suggested changes and amendments on board and to prepare the text of the Guide for further consideration at the Extended Bureau meeting in 2015. The Specialized Section delegated the authority to decide if the Guide should be submitted to the Working Party for approval to the Extended Bureau.

VIII. Sprouted tubers

Documentation: Position paper (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/6)

19. The Specialized Section adopted its position on sprouted tubers presented by the delegations of the United Kingdom and Finland, and asked the secretariat to post it on the website:

- Seed potato tubers which have sprouted present a potential problem for the certifying authority. Sprouts can be damaged during transport, handling and planting, with the potential for uneven emergence. Excessive sprouting can result in the tubers being commercially unacceptable.
- De-sprouting tubers (running the potatoes over a grading line to knock sprouts off the tubers) can also be detrimental to tuber quality, as this process can lead to the spread of pathogens symptomlessly.
- Pre-sprouting (or chitting) seed potatoes can be used to promote dormancy breaking and to manage early emergence in crops. Where pre-sprouting is well managed, sprouts will be short with well-formed robust growth points capable of withstanding the handling process involved in mechanical planting.

- Seed pre-sprouting carries a certain risk, which should ideally be borne by the seed user rather than the seed producer (i.e. post certification). In practice, pre-sprouting may be conducted by the seed producer who may have the facilities and expertise to achieve the desired tuber growth stage on behalf of the customer, which is likely to take place before certification (tuber inspection).
- Under certain circumstances, sprouted tubers may be acceptable to the Designated Authority at tuber inspection. Regulation of this aspect of tuber quality with a single prescriptive tolerance under the Standard would be inappropriate given the dynamic nature of sprouting during the storage season and in the immediate period prior to planting.
- It is recommended that the Designated Authority regulate the marketing of sprouted tubers at the point of inspection to reasonably ensure that sprouts be sufficiently robust to withstand mechanical planting. This should be done taking into account the time of inspection relative to the time of planting and the likely period and conditions of shipping and storage prior to planting.
- Ultimately the seller bears the risk of excessive sprouting which may take place after official inspection of tubers.

IX. Tolerances for mild and severe virus symptoms

Documentation: Proposal on regulating viruses (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/7)

20. The Specialized Section was updated on the virus tolerances in the new EU regulation related to seed potatoes (relevant pages of the regulation are posted on the meeting's website). The delegates noted the regulation's new approach of not distinguishing between mild and severe viruses and decided to align the tolerances for viruses in the UNECE Standard with those in the EU regulation.

21. The Specialized Section approved the proposals submitted by the delegation of the United States, and amended during the discussion, with regard to virus tolerances for crop to produce different quality classes of seed potatoes and for direct progeny. It also agreed to amend the definitions of mild and severe virus diseases. The agreed changes to annexes II, IV and VII of the Standard are reflected in the post-session version of document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/7.

22. The Specialized Section decided to revisit the definitions of virus diseases in the future.

X. Definition of tolerances by weight or by number

Documentation: Meeting of the Bureau in Melbourne (GE.6/BUR/2014/7)

Measuring tolerances by weight or by number. Note by Sweden (INF.1 Informal document)

23. The Specialized Section agreed on the following statement based on the note by the delegation of Sweden and the recommendation made by the Extended Bureau at its meeting in Melbourne:

“Tolerances of tuber faults are calculated by weight in most national certification schemes. The UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes follows this convention. The Specialised Section has noted that there is limited available data to compare results of inspections conducted by tuber weight to those conducted by tuber number, but

where such data exists there is relatively little evidence of a significant difference between the two methods.”

24. It was suggested that the above definition be included in the tuber inspection guide. The delegates also decided to keep this topic open for discussion at future meetings bearing in mind that buyers increasingly request information on the number of tubers in bags in addition to weight.

XI. Risk-based inspection

Documentation: Proposal on risk-based inspection (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/8)

25. The delegation of the Netherlands introduced the topic of risk-based inspection for discussion by the Specialized Section at its future meetings. The next Extended Bureau meeting may wish to discuss national practices in risk-based inspection.

XII. Promotional leaflet

Documentation: Promotional leaflet (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2014/9)

26. The Specialized Section approved the content of the promotional leaflet reviewed and recommended by the Extended Bureau at its meeting in Fargo, and asked the secretariat to print it. The delegates were asked to send photographs for the leaflet to the delegation of the United States and the secretariat by the end of November at the latest.

XIII. Future work and other business

27. The delegation of Finland offered to host the next session of the Extended Bureau in Oulu in September 2015.

28. The Specialized Section supported the proposal by the delegation of New Zealand to start work on a “Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service” and submitted this proposal to the Working Party for approval. The first draft of this Guide, the purpose of which would be to provide guidance on how to establish an operational certifying body, including processes for organizing a training field, training inspectors, keeping records, etc., could be considered at the 2015 session of the Extended Bureau. The Working Group composed of the delegations of Australia, Germany, New Zealand (rapporteur) and Switzerland will submit the first draft of the Guide for discussion at the next Extended Bureau meeting.

29. The delegation of Switzerland made presentations on:

- Molecular diagnosis for seed potato certification in Switzerland
- Recent developments in PVY control methods.

30. The delegates made a technical visit to Agroscope ACW in Changins, where they were informed about the seed potato certification system in Switzerland and the ELISA and PCR techniques for virus testing. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation of Switzerland for having organized that interesting visit.

31. The Specialized Section agreed on the following list of topics for its future work:

- UNECE Guide to Seed Potato Tuber Inspection (United States)
- UNECE Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service (New Zealand)

- Risk-based inspection (Netherlands)
- PCR techniques for virus testing (Switzerland, Netherlands, France, Denmark)
- Amendments to the Standard related to sample sizes for both field inspection and post-harvest testing (New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, United States)
- Review of the definitions of “field”, “crop”, “lot” and “origin” in the context of field and lot inspections (Australia, Netherlands)
- Review of the definitions of virus diseases (United States, Australia)
- Definition of tolerances by weight or by number (Sweden, Netherlands)
- Requirement on “physiology” in the context of certification (United Kingdom, draw on the past work of the Specialized Section)
- Specialized Section’s website, particularly the pest list (United Kingdom, France, United States, Germany)
- Promotion of the Standard and related technical assistance and capacity-building activities (secretariat and the Bureau).

XIV. Election of officers

32. The Specialized Section elected Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom) as its Chair and Mr. Willem Schrage (United States) and Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its vice-chairs. The Specialized Section thanked Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi for having led efficiently and effectively the work of the Section for 14 years.

XV. Adoption of the report

33. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its session.
