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**Specialized Section on Standardization
of Seed Potatoes**

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

Blackleg of seed potatoes

- Review of the Specialized Section's position

Blackleg of seed potatoes - Review of the Specialized Section's position

The following document contains the current text of the position of the Specialized Section on blackleg of seed potatoes as agreed in 2010. The secretariat received comments from the delegations from Germany and Kenya.

* Submitted on the above date to include the most recent contributions of delegations.

The position of the Specialized Section on blackleg of seed potatoes - current text

(Agreed at thirty-ninth session in March 2010)

- Blackleg occurrence in seed potato crops is an important indicator of quality. In the UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes, strict tolerances for blackleg in the growing crop and at lot inspection underpin, as part of the rot tolerance, the control of this disease in certified seed.
- Disease expression in the progeny crop is not always directly related to either inspection findings or bacterial loading in mother tubers. This is due to the importance of the environmental and agronomic influences in the epidemiology of this disease. However, regular inspections remain an effective tool to limit the spread of the disease.
- Conditions which favour blackleg, particularly excessive moisture and in the case of *Dickeya*, high temperatures, can lead to spread of the disease. For the time being, enforcing strict tolerances at certification continues to be the best available regulatory mechanism to control blackleg in marketed seed potatoes.
- Good agronomic practices, such as forced ventilation immediately after harvest, removal of diseased tubers prior to planting, allowing mother tubers to fully deteriorate prior to harvest, are all important in blackleg control.

Comments from Germany

The delegation from Germany indicated that at present they had no comments on the position paper "blackleg".

Comments from Kenya

- The presentation recognizes the importance of *Pectobacterium* spp and *Dickeya* in seed potato production.
- Tolerance for blackleg would be difficult to sustain in the tropics, where temperatures are high, as temperature has been shown to significantly increase infection. The optimum temperatures for the bacteria fall within our temperatures in the tropics hence there is need for tight controls in Kenya and other African countries. Further, farmers reuse saved seed as opposed to using certified seeds making the situation more complex.
- Storage conditions in African countries are poor which may lead to more losses; therefore strict observance of zero tolerance in the field is recommended.
