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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization
of Seed Potatoes

Forty-fifth session

Geneva, 19-21 March 2018

**Report of the forty-fifth session of the Specialized Section on
Standardization of Seed Potatoes****I. Introduction**

1. The meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was chaired by Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom).
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, opened the session and welcomed the delegates to the forty-fifth session. He expressed his appreciation for the active engagement, valuable work and materials produced by the group. He thanked the delegation from the Netherlands for organizing the Rapporteurs meeting in September 2017 which helped advance the work of the Specialized Section and explored new subjects and new areas of work. He also expressed his gratitude to the delegation of Australia for the development of a first App on the UNECE Pest and Disease Guide which sets new standards regarding the use of information technology in the work done by all Specialized Sections who will be encouraged to take similar paths. He also highlighted that the group's work on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) has led to a first poster which, once approved, will be available for downloading from the UNECE's web site. He also noted that sustainable production systems started with the very first step of the production system i.e. seed whose good quality could ensure less food waste later in the production chain and increase the yield. The Specialized Section's work was, therefore, at the core of more sustainable production patterns as set out by SDG 12. The secretariat has obtained funds to work on SDG 12-related issues and particularly food waste reduction measures. This project also offered this Specialized Section the possibility of greater knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices and developing capacities of national agencies including in the pilot countries under the project.

3. He also informed delegates that Ms. Ivonne Higuero had recently been appointed as the new director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division.

II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
5. A representative of the European Commission attended.
6. The European Seed Association (ESA) and the German Plant Breeders Association also participated in the session.

III Adoption of the agenda

7. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.

IV Matters arising since the last session

8. The Chief of the Market Access Section explained that all United Nations bodies including UNECE had taken significant budget cuts in their 2018-2019 budgets including posts and a significant reduction of operational budgets which includes printing, travel and consultancies. This resulted in the need to use available resources more efficiently including conference and meeting resources and a review of meeting schedules. At the moment, some of the resource gaps were bridged through project funds for capacity-building, including for seed potato activities. He mentioned that the next session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would take place in May 2018.

9. He also mentioned that at UNECE level, an institutional and organizational mapping was currently being carried out to identify focus of the organization on 8 SDGs to allow for more effective results and impact. UNECE's work on agricultural standards is meant to contribute mainly to SDG 12 on sustainable production and consumption as well as SDG-17 on global partnerships and SDG-8 on decent work and economic growth. SDG-12 had also been the topic of the conference on "Rooting for Sustainable Food" organized at the November 2018 session of Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes, Mr. John Kerr, had been one of speakers delivering key messages on sustainable practices and possible ways forward to reach SDG-12. In November this year, a follow-up conference will focus on sustainable practical solutions to advance this Goal including training consumers and traders on avoiding food waste or encouraging quality production along the entire supply chain.

V. Standard for Seed Potatoes

10. At its 2017 session the Specialized Section decided to revise Annex IX ("Sampling tubers for virus testing") of the Standard. The Rapporteur (New Zealand) reviewed the proposed changes, highlighting the newly included sections on sample sizes, confidence levels and, as a second approach, confidence intervals. He explained that the new tables 5 and 6 provided guidance on upper limits. The Specialized Section discussed the inclusion of the two approaches. The delegation from Germany mentioned the approach of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) which focused more on impurities and is producer oriented. It was noted that current wording in the UNECE standard

left it to the regulatory agency to decide in favour of buyers or growers. It was therefore agreed that the inclusion of both tables in the standard would allow for a more informed decision.

11. The Specialized Section reviewed the changes proposed by the Rapporteur and decided to add to the title of sections 1 and 5, a reference to “field inspection”. A reference to “virus testing” was added to the heading of sections 2 and 4; and one to “virus” to section 3. The titles of tables 5 and 6 were amended to include reference to “field inspection”. All additional changes and amendments are included in the post-session document.

12. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised text to the November 2018 session of the Working Party for adoption as amendments to the Seed Potato Standard.

13. The Specialized Section amended the definition of “designated authority” (currently included in the Standard) and adopted the proposal to change it to “certifying authority”. This will make it more inclusive of all certifying authorities, public or private. Throughout the text of the Standard the term “designated authority” will be replaced by “certifying authority” (including the acronyms thereof). The changes will also be made to the on-line versions of the seed potato guides. All changes to the Standard are reflected in the post-session document.

14. The Specialized Section decided to submit these changes to the November 2018 session of the Working Party for adoption as amendments to the Seed Potato Standard

VI. Results of the survey on seed potato virus testing methods

15. The initial findings of the survey on seed potato virus testing methods (adopted by the Specialized Section in March 2017) had been compiled by the secretariat. The Rapporteur (Finland) presented the summary report drafted with input from the Australia and the United Kingdom.

16. During ensuing discussions, several delegations expressed their wish for more in-depth and detailed information. The Specialized Section therefore reviewed the full report with all details and decided on the information that will be published. The Specialized Section also made editorial changes, decided to condense the information, and extract further details for certain topics to make the valuable information contained therein more user friendly. In addition, to obtain more information on pooling samples for Elisa and PCR testing, the secretariat was asked to approach the respondents who are regular participants in the Specialized Section once again. The new questions will be drafted with the Rapporteur (Finland) and the United Kingdom K.

17. The delegations from the United Kingdom and Finland with input from Australia, Sweden, Czech Republic and the US will work on a revised and more condensed version of the long report with the help of the secretariat. They will focus on the key messages and information (e.g. on PCR primers) and submit a new draft at the next session of the Specialized Section. Once the longer report has been completed, the summary report will be revised accordingly and both documents will be published at the same time.

18. The Specialized Section thanked the Rapporteurs and contributing delegations for their work on these useful documents which will provide information on best practice, methodologies and validation methods to all countries.

VII. Draft survey on bacterial testing methodologies

19. The Specialized Section decided to review the first draft of the survey of bacterial testing methodologies submitted by the Rapporteur (United States) in a telephone conference, once work on the virus survey has been more advanced. The working group will include the

delegations from the Belgium, Finland, Israel, Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States. The Specialized Section also agreed to include a question on the distinction between the bacterial pathogens (i.e. quality or quarantine pests) in the various countries.

VIII. Draft guide on minituber production

20. At its 2017 session, the Specialized Section had agreed to prepare a draft guide on minituber production. In the absence of a draft, the Specialized Section discussed whether this work should go ahead in light of the existence of the ISPM 33 Guide. It was stressed that a new guideline could be very relevant for certification agencies as well as producers and buyers, particularly where trade is local and so outside the scope of the ISPM 33. Such a guide could provide more transparency and a global view on this issue. The meeting raised the issue of placing additional regulatory burden on the industry and noted that a guide on this topic should be proportionate and helpful rather than burdensome.

21. The delegation from New Zealand presented the provisions on tissue culture and minituber production contained in New Zealand's Seed Potato Certification Rule Book. The Specialized Section noted that a UNECE Guide which could take example from the New Zealand document could provide guidance to laboratories on best practice in minituber production.

22. The Specialized Section decided to ask the Rapporteur (Australia) and working group (France, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa as well as the ESA) to prepare a draft based on the New Zealand document for review by the Specialized Section at its next session in March 2019.

IX. True Potato Seed

23. At its 2018 session, the Specialized Section reviewed a draft statement on True Potato Seed (TPS) and its breeding technology prepared by the United Kingdom on behalf of the working group (Australia, Netherlands, United States), amended parts of the text and decided to retain the last paragraph. The Specialized Section discussed at length whether to include this item in its work plan and in the future maybe include it in the UNECE standard to regulate the marketed material. During the Rapporteurs meeting and the study tour in the Netherlands in September 2017, it had been revealed that the main markets for TPS were in those areas of the world where countries did not have a developed seed tuber supply chain or were not part of the current commercial scale potato production sector. For these markets the business model for TPS is for marketing TPS which would then be handled like a horticultural crop for the local market and to enhance food security.

24. The representative from the European Commission provided an update on development at European Union (EU) level and noted that in the EU basic legislation only applied to tubers and not to other propagating material which was outside the current legislation's scope. He stressed that this was not the case for the UNECE standard. Currently in the EU, the issue was addressed through a specific temporary experiment with the Netherlands currently participating. Within the framework of this temporary experiment, tubers derived from TPS (currently one variety) are regulated just to allow this material to be marketed with certain additional restrictions being applied, in particular the number of generations permitted. He mentioned that it was still too early for any concrete results.

25. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised text of the statement to the Working Party at its November 2018 session and retain this topic on the Specialized Section's agenda

X. Capacity-building

26. The Specialized Section discussed the possible structure and purpose of the capacity-building Guide, a draft of which had been prepared by Germany. The Guide provided valuable guidance and teaching resources for capacity-building projects. The Specialized Section agreed that the document was intended to become an all-encompassing approach to training which could be used in large-scale capacity-building projects or in individual components for more focused training. For the moment, it was agreed, that focus would be given to Part 1 “Capacity-building to introduce a seed potato certification scheme”.

27. At the World Potato Congress, a group of delegates from Australia, Belgium, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States will review the current draft in more detail and submit comments to the Rapporteur (Germany). The Specialized Section will review the revised draft at its next session.

28. Delegations also discussed the online availability of information, visual material and guidance on seed potatoes and took note of the e-learning resources listed in the document. The Specialized section decided to postpone discussions on this topic until the training guideline had been finalized. At the next session delegates would provide information on the production costs of training films.

29. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section on a new technical assistance project focused on quality production, keeping quality and on food loss. It was highlighted that the connection between good and certified seed and food loss was rarely made but an important component in keeping quality and limiting forgone yield in the supply chain. The secretariat outlined the project and the Specialized Section stressed the usefulness of these workshops. Further information would be provided by the secretariat during this year.

XI. Review of risk-based inspections

30. Given that the delegation from the Netherlands could not be present at this session, the Specialized Section postponed discussions on this item to the next session.

XII. Updates and discussion on new and on-going work

31. The Specialized Section decided to postpone an in-depth exchange of information on on-going research and studies on *Liberibacter* to the next session (led by the Finland and the United Kingdom).

32. The secretariat presented the final version of the poster on the Sustainable Development Goals prepared by the Specialized Section. Delegations reviewed the text and asked the secretariat to prepare a Spanish version to be presented at the World Potato Congress in May 2018. In addition, the secretariat also will provide the explanatory leaflet to the participants of the World Potato Congress where delegations of the Specialized Section will discuss the UNECE work with the South American certification agencies. The US delegation will provide the recently finalized Spanish version of the UNECE Pest and Disease Guide. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation from the United States for facilitating the translation of the Pest and Disease Guide into Spanish.

33. The Specialized Section briefly reviewed the first draft of the Seed Potato Guide App for mobile devices and added some introductory text. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation from Australia for the development and funding of the App.

34. Delegations also agreed to promote the Standard and the work of the Section at events including industry and trade fairs. The ESA also offered to collaborate and facilitate the communication with industry in the future.

XIII. Future work

35. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2019 agenda:

- Results of the survey on seed potato virus testing methods
- Draft survey on bacterial testing methodologies
- Draft guide on minituber production
- True Potato Seed
- Capacity-building (including update on funding of e-learning videos)
- Review of risk-based inspection
- New and emerging diseases and pests - information on *Liberibacter*
- Update by the European Commission on new legislation (Proposal: this update could also be included in a presentation to the Working Party)

XIV. Other business

36. The Specialized Section decided to explore the possibility of holding a Rapporteurs meeting in the autumn of 2019.

XV. Election of officers

37. The Specialized Section elected Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom) as Chair, and Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) as Vice-Chairs.

XVI. Adoption of the report

38. The Specialized Section adopted the report (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2018/2) on its forty-fifth session. The tentative date of the next session of the Specialized Section is 18-20 March, 2019.
