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Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Forty-seventh session

Geneva, 25—26 June 2020

Report of the forty-seventh 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 Ms Hanna Kortemaa (Finland).
2. The Secretary of the Specialized Section, Ms. Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab welcomed the delegates to the first online standardization meeting of the UNECE's Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes on behalf of the Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk. She expressed appreciation for the active engagement, valuable work and materials produced by the group and welcomed the many new delegations present at this session. She also noted that following a one-month consultation period, decisions of the Specialized Section would be approved in an intersessional procedure and sent to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) for adoption in November 2020.
3. She expressed her gratitude to the delegates for their work and support in these difficult times. With COVID-19 having spread worldwide, secure food supply and trade was of utmost importance. In this context, she highlighted the newly established UNECE Food Outlook (see <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/foodoutlook.html>) and thanked the Specialized Section for its ongoing contributions. She also informed delegations that UNECE had joined the United Nations Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems to support United Nations country teams and Resident Coordinators in this crisis and to integrate the development of sustainable food systems with all their dimensions (economic, social and environmental) into national and international food policy agendas.

II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States and Zimbabwe.
5. A representative from Euroseeds (formerly, European Seed Association, ESA) also participated in the session.

III. Adoption of the agenda

6. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with some items postponed to the next session.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies

7. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen explained that during the current COVID-19 crisis, the offices of the United Nations buildings in Geneva were closed. Staff are telecommuting and gradually returning to the office. More information on physical meetings in the Palais des Nations was expected over the summer months. He also noted that the vacant post in the Agricultural Unit team had been filled just before the current recruitment freeze and introduced the new staff member, Ms. Kamola Khusnutdinova. He mentioned that the next Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would be held as an informal online session on 29 June 2020.

8. Furthermore, he provided information on the 2019 session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) which included the fourth UNECE-FAO conference on “Food (Waste) for Thought: Food Loss—policy perspectives for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The presentations included many topics of interest to this Specialized Section. He also highlighted that WP.7 had decided to organize at its 2020 meeting a roundtable on food loss, food waste and private standards together with the private sector.

(b) 2019 Rapporteurs meeting

9. The delegation from the United States, gave a presentation on the 2019 Rapporteurs meeting held in Bozeman, Montana (United States), highlighting the various session and the large number of participating country delegations. She mentioned that the Rapporteurs had reviewed various items on the UNECE agenda and also had the opportunity to participate in laboratory and field visits which provided a detailed overview of seed potato production, certification systems, and virus testing in the United States.

V. Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes

10. During the discussions at the 2019 Rapporteurs meeting and the review of the draft guide on minituber production, delegates had highlighted that the definition of Pre-basic tissue culture (PBTC) in Annex 1 of the UNECE standard needed to be reviewed and any changes should be reflected in the draft guide on minituber production. The delegation from Finland had provided written proposals which the Specialized Section reviewed.

11. The Specialized Section discussed in detail the new proposals and took note of the need to revise the nomenclature (scientific names of pests and diseases) as well as certain provisions to ensure consistency throughout the standard.

12. The Specialized Section, therefore, agreed to establish a working group with the delegations of Finland (Rapporteur), Australia, Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom as well as Euroseeds. The working group will review Annex I (as well as the entire standard and its annexes) for consistency in content and terminology. The currently agreed changes are reflected in the post-session document which will serve as a basis for discussion by the working group. In September 2020, the working group will present its work and proposals in a follow-up online session on the revision of Annex I. The secretariat was requested to organize this session in late September 2020 and review the terminology used throughout the

standard once the changes have been approved. Should there be a need for content amendments of the remaining parts of the standard and its annexes, discussion of these changes will be added to the work of the 2021 session.

VI. Draft survey on bacterial testing methodologies

13. At the March 2019 session of the Specialized Section and at the September 2019 Rapporteurs meeting, the draft bacterial testing methodologies survey had been discussed and updated, led by the delegate from the United States on behalf of the working group (Australia, Belgium, Finland, Israel, Netherlands, United Kingdom).

14. The Rapporteur (United States) had integrated all comments received into a new draft survey which she reviewed, highlighting its new structure with separate questions organized according to the various pathogen groups (Blackleg, *Ralstonia*, *Clavibacter*) as well as the amended and newly added questions. She noted that the survey was now very complex and adding more detail could result in respondents refraining from answering the survey.

15. The Specialized Section took note of the need to update the nomenclature used and asked the Rapporteur to work with the delegations from France and South Africa to finalize the survey by September 2020. The Specialized Section agreed to approve the revised draft survey and asked the secretariat to prepare the survey for publication in an online survey tool and circulate it among delegations in the autumn of 2020. The Specialized Section thanked the Rapporteur, the working group, and the scientific nomenclature review delegations for their excellent work.

VII. Lot size of seed potatoes

16. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2021 session.

VIII. Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses

17. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2021 session.

IX. Stability in tissue culture and renewal of varieties

18. The delegate of South Africa presented a detailed overview on the topic of stability of tissue culture and the renewal in tissue culture according to the protocols used in South Africa. She outlined the various steps and approaches taken and explained in detail the various renewal and testing stages. The presentation is available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=52642>. The Specialized Section subsequently exchanged practices, experiences and findings in their various countries which revealed that some delegations used similar protocols, whereas others explained that they had less complex proceedings in place.

19. The Specialized Section thanked the delegate of South Africa for this comprehensive presentation and encouraged delegations to continue the exchange of practices.

X. Draft guide on minituber production

20. The Rapporteur (Australia) reviewed in depth the revised draft guide on minituber production. The Specialized Section amended the guide to reflect also the discussions on Annex I of the UNECE Seed Potato Standard which was in the process of being revised. The rapporteur also stressed that Guide No. 33 of the International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM) provided additional information.

21. Discussions took place on several open issues, including on the authorization and approval procedures of systems of production, testing, inspections, and laboratories.

Delegations were also asked to provide photos for the final version of this Guide. All agreed changes are reflected in the post-session document which will serve as the basis for the next version.

22. The Specialized Section thanked the delegate of Australia and the working group (France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa,) for their work and asked the group to address all the comments received in the Rapporteurs group. The next version of the guide will also need to take into consideration the discussions on Annex I of the Standard.

23. The Specialized Section decided to place the item on the agenda of its 2021 session.

XI. Discussion on diseases and pests: *Liberibacter* and Tomato Potato Psyllid

24. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2021 session.

XII. The potato mop top virus

25. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2021 session, when further information will be provided by the delegations from Finland and the United Kingdom.

XIII. True Potato Seed

26. The Specialized Section continued discussion and exchanged updates on True Potato Seed (TPS). The Chair recalled that several Dutch companies are currently involved in experimenting with TPS and she also recalled that so far only one variety (Oliver F1) had been included in the European Union's temporary experiment for gaining experience with TPS. She noted that targeted markets were mainly outside the European Union region with lesser developed seed potato schemes. The delegation from the Netherlands concurred and informed the section that one more company had applied for Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability (DUS) testing for varieties slightly different from Oliver F1. And protocols were updated in parallel.

27. The delegate of Zimbabwe confirmed that in his country, companies from the Netherlands were registering TPS varieties and progress was being made to develop descriptors of these varieties.

28. The delegation from Australia noted that with technology rapidly progressing, TPS might also need to be addressed in the Standard, eventually. The delegate of the Netherlands also noted that while there was a Dutch protocol of DUS testing, no internationally recognized protocol existed. International cooperation on this topic might be envisaged in the future.

29. The Specialized Section decided to keep this item on its 2021 agenda for further updates and discussions.

XIV. Knowledge sharing, capacity-building and guides

(a) Draft guide on capacity-building

30. The Specialized Section decided to postpone to the 2021 session the review of the new UNECE "Guide on capacity-building to introduce a seed potato scheme" and thanked the delegation from Germany for the revised draft.

(b) Possible development of a knowledge sharing and resource reference page

31. The Specialized Section took note of the videos, images, e-learning training and resource material on seed potato certification available in several countries. The Specialized Section discussed how this material could be shared and how new material and language versions could also be added to the Seed Potato Disease Application. It was explained that the latter would require additional funding.

32. The delegation from Australia offered to make available a dropbox folder where the already available material could be shared. Discussion on building a platform would be taken up by the Specialized Section at a later stage.

(c) Possible development of a poster/paper on the benefits of certified seed

33. The Specialized Section reviewed a draft poster on benefits of certified seed which had been prepared by the delegation from Australia. Several delegations stressed the usefulness of such an education tool.

34. The Specialized Section decided to create a working group (Australia, Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe) which would work on the next version for review and discussion by the Specialized Section.

(d) Online Seed Potato Guide Application: process for updating

35. As a follow-up to the development, donation and hosting by the delegation from Australia of the Online Seed Potato Guide Application for Diseases, Pests and Defects, the Specialized Section discussed briefly how to handle updates and additional language versions.

36. The Specialized Section agreed to review all proposed updates and decide in intersessional approval procedures on their integration into the Seed Potato Guide Application for Diseases, Pests and Defects. In case of additional language versions, a disclaimer would state that the only valid reference was the English language version.

(e) Workshops and guides

37. The Specialized Section took note of the 11th World Potato Congress dates of 31 May to 3 June 2021 in Dublin, Ireland, and agreed to explore the possibility of organizing a workshop back-to-back with the actual Congress. The delegation from Australia and the United Kingdom would help with contacts to the Congress organizers and the authorities in Ireland.

XV. Possible revision of the list of national certification schemes

38. At the 2019 Specialized Section session, participants suggested an update of the list of national certification schemes and relevant contacts. The delegation from Germany informed the Specialized Section that it had already started to update the list and received many replies. In the course of this work, the German delegation had also noticed that several contacts were no longer valid and offered to update the 2016 list of certifying authorities. In addition, the delegation from Germany will also update the list of varieties. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation from Germany and will assist in the process.

XVI. Future work

39. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2021 agenda:
- Revision of the entire standard for seed potatoes
 - Draft guide on minituber production
 - Update on the preliminary results of the survey on bacterial testing methodologies
 - Guide on capacity-building
 - Capacity-building (development of a knowledge sharing and resource reference page; poster on the benefits of certified seed; updates to the Online Seed Potato Guide Application; workshops and guides.
 - Lot size of seed potatoes
 - Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses
 - True Potato Seed
 - New and emerging diseases and pests - information on *Liberibacter*, and the Tomato Potato Psyllid
 - The potato mop top virus - sharing experiences
 - Revision of the “List of national certification schemes” and “List of varieties”.

XVII. Other business

40. The Specialized Section reviewed and discussed the impact of COVID-19 outbreak on the seed potato and potato sectors. In most countries, seed potato certification had been considered an essential service and could continue to operate under the COVID-19 restrictions. The work was impacted by the preventive measures, social distancing rules and stricter hygiene measure which made the work more complicated and slower. In some countries, training operations continued as usual; in others, training had to be cancelled. A reduction in the number of field inspectors had resulted in a reduction of field inspections and a downgrading of crops in some regions. In other countries, national travel restrictions had been a challenge to certification processes. Some delegations pointed to the upcoming more difficult post-harvest controls which could be impacted by the restriction in the procurement of chemicals used in polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing. The United States delegate, who had led a UNECE impact survey during the outbreak and lockdowns, pointed to the large oversupply of processing potato varieties and increases in demand for fresh market varieties. She also stressed the uncertain outlook on the seed potato market in many countries for the coming months. Owing also to the uncertain marketing and business side.

41. The delegation from Germany informed the Specialized Section that Germany currently carried out ring tests for virus testing in Germany as well as in 10 additional countries from Europe and outside Europe (Elisa or PCR tests). The delegate of Germany will provide further information to interested countries.

42. The Specialized Section thanked the secretariat for the organization of the online session which had made it possible for many more delegations to participate in this session. It was also suggested that the secretariat consider a hybrid solution (physical meeting and online session) in the future.

43. The Specialized Section took note of the 2021 dates of the Specialized Section session (18 to 19 March 2021) and agreed to explore the possibility to hold an informal session and a workshop back-to-back with the World Potato Congress. The secretariat thanked the delegation from Sweden for their offer to host a Rapporteurs meeting in 2021. Further details on dates and venues will be shared in due course.

XVIII. Election of officers

44. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair and Ms Nina Zidack (United States) and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) as its Vice-Chairs.

XIX. Adoption of the report

45. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its forty-seventh session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2020/2) in a written procedure.
