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Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Twenty-fourth session

Geneva, 28-30 September 2015

Report of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat on its Twenty-fourth session

I. Introduction

1. The 2015 session of the Specialized Section included on its first day a symposium on recent developments related to food safety standards and management systems, their impact on the meat industry, as well as possibilities for increased harmonization of private and public standards and verification programmes to facilitate trade while safeguarding consumer interests. The programme and the presentations are available at <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=40070#/>.

2. Presentations were made by Ms. Veronique Discours-Buhot, Director of the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI) of the Consumer Goods Forum, who outlined GFSI's various programmes and impact; and Dr. Angela Siemens, Vice-President, Food Safety, Quality and Regulatory at Cargill who emphasized that food safety was a shared responsibility. Since food safety issues affected the whole sector, she emphasized that food safety standards must be science based. Mr. Tom Heilandt, Secretary of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, outlined the work of the Commission, stressing that the Codex standards were voluntary, inclusive, transparent and science-based. He also briefly compared private and public food safety standards, highlighting the need for cooperation among all stakeholders to achieve the objective of safe food and fair practices in food trade.

3. Mr. Ian King (Australia), the Chair of the Specialized Section, and Mr. Craig Morris, Vice-Chair (United States of America) co-chaired the symposium. Mr. Ian King chaired the formal session.

4. The Chief of the UNECE Market Access Section opened the formal session noting that the successful symposium of the previous day had brought to the attention of participants key issues related also to topics outside the group's regular work but important for the international trade in meat. He was pleased with the presence of new participants



from the public and private sectors as well as from many international organizations present in Geneva. He welcomed this cooperation, which could be extended further in the future.

5. UNECE's role, he said, was to facilitate technical discussions. UNECE's relevance and technical know-how relied very much on its excellent pool of experts representing all stakeholders involved. Last week, in New York, at the Sustainability Summit, United Nations member countries adopted the post-2015 development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Three of them have an explicit reference to food, sustainable agriculture, sustainable consumption patterns and cooperation among agencies. In the coming years, the work of UNECE's specialized sections would also contribute to attaining the goals set out in this ambitious agenda. Cross-cutting themes such as, for example, this year the November 2015 UNECE conference on traceability of agricultural produce will become a more integral part of the groups' agendas. He also mentioned that preparatory work on a new agenda item (eating quality) had progressed since the last session and welcomed the discussions on the possibility of integrating this item into the work of the Specialized Section.

6. He explained that he had received authorization from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to represent Kosovo and introduced the technical expert who had been nominated to take part in the discussions.

II. Attendance

7. Representatives of the following United Nations member countries attended the meeting: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, France, Germany, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Poland, Russian Federation, Serbia, Spain, and United States of America.

8. The following specialized programme participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

9. Representatives from the following observer organizations, non-governmental organizations, associations and private sector groups also attended: GS1 Global Office; AUS-QUAL Pty Ltd, International Association TIP, International Meat Secretariat, International Trade Centre (ITC), ISO, The Global Food Safety Initiative/The Consumer Goods Forum, IHEID, Nestlé S.A., Cargill Incorporated.

10. A representative from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) Kosovo¹ also attended.

III. Adoption of the agenda

11. The meeting adopted the agenda.

¹ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

12. The Chief of the UNECE Market Access Section introduced the new secretary of WP.7 and her team. He reported that the UNECE review had been completed in April 2015 and the newly established Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards had held its first session in September 2015. At this session, the Steering Committee had also endorsed the new Geneva Understanding.

13. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section about a multi-year capacity-building project, recent training events and preliminary work on an agriculture reference platform. Suggestions for further events were welcome.

(b) Other organizations

14. The Secretary of the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission noted that his organization had no comparable work to that accomplished by the Specialized Section in the area of meat cuts, which he considered unique worldwide. Codex was active in many areas which were complementary to the Specialized Section's work and he stressed that his organization was very open to closer cooperation. He therefore suggested envisaging the inclusion of cross-references to Codex Food Safety standards in UNECE standards. The Specialized Section welcomed this proposal and agreed to include, where applicable, references to Codex food safety standards in UNECE's meat standards or on UNECE's meat standard Internet page (the modalities would be defined in due course).

15. The representative from GS1 Global Office drew the Specialized Section's attention to the "UN Blue Numbers for sustainable agriculture" programme which had been presented to the United Nations General Assembly this week. He also stressed the importance of harmonizing public and private standards and mentioned his organization's collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC) which the UNECE secretariat had also contacted for joint activities.

16. The representative from AUS-QUAL Pty Ltd, Australia gave a brief update on recent international developments in the area of eating quality, pointing to the multitude of activities and projects as well as the growing need for coordination and harmonization. He noted that there was support for collaboration on data sharing and UNECE as a possible platform. The representative from the Polish Beef Association as well confirmed the considerable expansion of the network of countries active in this kind of research over the past year.

V. Meat seminar (28 September 2015)

17. The Chair congratulated the secretary of the Specialized Section and her team for the organization of the symposium – which had provided an excellent opportunity to discuss issues of relevance outside the normal scope of the Section's work. The symposium had emphasized the strong need and readiness for cooperation between public- and private-sector parties involved in standard setting, as well as the recognition that no single agency could take on the role and responsibility for all areas of food safety and quality. He emphasized the need to ensure that UNECE's as well as other standards remained relevant in this highly dynamic and rapidly changing landscape of food safety descriptions and labelling. Other delegates stressed the high quality of the presentations and noted the

importance of having involved many different stakeholders in the discussions. It was further pointed out that the concept of food safety as a shared responsibility was an important outcome of the seminar.

18. It was therefore decided to continue organizing such seminars (which carried a capacity-building component) within the framework of the Specialized Section on Meat (23-26 May 2016). This would help open discussions to topics of wider interest and attract a larger audience. The format of this year's symposium, i.e. fewer speakers and more room for discussions would be kept. Topics suggested for the 2016 symposium included: food waste; human and animal safety interaction; halal and kosher standards and industry; discussions on the use of UNECE standards among the large retailers and traders operating world-wide; or a focus on meat trade in booming Asian markets. The secretariat will circulate a draft programme by early February 2016. Delegations were invited to help identify speakers.

VI. Proposals for new UNECE Standards

(a) List of examples - processed poultry meat including ready-to-cook preparations and ready-to-eat products

19. The Rapporteur (United States of America) reviewed the proposed list of examples (5 commonly traded items) which had been added to the already adopted Standard as an annex. While the body of the standard was not open for new negotiations, several editorial mistakes were corrected in all three language versions. The reference to production methods (halal and kosher), the Rapporteur explained, had been removed from this standard last year as they referred to the meat source which in turn could be halal or kosher.

20. The delegation of France stressed that the standard was far from being in line with current European Union legislation and it was therefore decided to include a disclaimer at the beginning of the standard as well as a footnote in the Annex reading: "UNECE standards are voluntary standards and do not necessarily comply with every country's regulatory requirements and customs". It was stressed that the examples were only guidelines and not compulsory specifications. The list could be expanded at any time and delegations were invited to send to the Rapporteur more examples, if possible with photos and descriptions.

21. The Specialized Section decided to submit the Annex (List of Examples) with the disclaimer for adoption by the Working Party at its November 2015 session. As the standard had already been adopted in 2014, only the proposed editorial changes would be introduced by the secretariat.

(b) Processed bovine meat products

22. At the suggestion of the Rapporteur (Argentina), the Specialized Section agreed to postpone the elaboration of a new draft standard for processed bovine meat.

VII. Amendments to UNECE Standards

(a) Deer Meat - illustrations and photos

23. The Rapporteur (Russian Federation) could not yet submit the required photos and illustrations. He informed the meeting that photos would be taken this fall and would be sent to the secretariat by December 2015 to be discussed prior to the next session.

(b) Edible Meat Co-Products

24. The delegations of the United States, Argentina and France had submitted several new proposals and collected some images. France indicated that they would send to the UNECE secretariat new, professional photos that could be used provided that the source is cited. The secretariat will then prepare a table/list of cuts and all available photos. The delegation of the United States will add the missing photos by February 2016.

25. The Specialized Section adopted several changes which are reflected in the post-session document. It was agreed to keep all edible co-products in the standard, even those that are already referenced in the specific product standards. In addition, a reference note was added in section 2. Minimum Requirements which reads “Meet the OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code for BSE and SRM removal: www.oie.int/en/international-standard-setting/terrestrial-code/access-online”.

26. The Specialized Section decided to submit the revised text of the Edible Co-Products Standard for adoption by the Working Party in November 2015. Photos would be added prior to the next session in May 2016.

(c) Bovine meat

27. The Rapporteur (Australia) reviewed the consolidated document which contained all the proposals received. The Specialized Section agreed to add a new cut entitled “Loin (Bone-in) with full tenderloin” to the Standard which had been suggested by Poland. In addition, the editorial changes proposed by Serbia were duly noted and will be reflected in the final version of the Standard. The concerns of Kosovo with regard to “marbling” and fat content were discussed. The Specialized Section also addressed Kosovo’s request to explain the definition of storage conditions; country of origin and country of birth; and clarified why certain codes in the bovine category were not specified.

28. The Specialized Section decided to submit the changes to the Standard for Bovine Meat for adoption by the Working Party in November 2015.

VIII. Eating quality

29. At the 2014 session of the Specialized Section it was agreed that a special working group would develop a draft proposal on a possible development of a collaborative way to collect and record information on the development and keeping of protocols or procedures and data under the auspices of UNECE in the area of research into meat eating quality. The head of this working group (Poland) briefly described the background to this work and recent developments in the area. He explained that eventually researchers were aiming at building a model and establishing a grading system for eating quality. He also outlined the main findings and proposals developed by the UNECE working group.

30. The Specialized Section discussed in detail the progress made in the area of eating quality as well as the various new systems that had evolved in the past years which reflected the different country situations or consumer expectations. It was stressed that eating quality was based on consumer perceptions and should not be confused with traditional carcass quality which served a different purpose. While eventually a new grading system could be the result of the current research, at this stage, the foremost issues were the collecting, storing and sharing of data in a neutral forum such as UNECE.

31. The secretariat informed the Section on discussions with UNECE's technology department, the modalities of establishing a scientific group under the auspices of the Specialized Section and the financial implications. She drew attention to the fact that data stored at the United Nations was in the public domain.

32. While delegations agreed to the usefulness of the eating quality discussions, it was felt that the best way forward would be the endorsement of the proposal to establish a scientific reference group within the current Specialized Section structure to discuss the collaborative management of pooled international data; the development of consumer satisfaction prediction approaches and their potential application. The new group will be headed by Poland as Rapporteur. Nominations for participation should be sent to the secretariat by 1 November 2015. For the next session in May 2016, the newly established group would also look into intellectual property issues, a possible uniform methodology, collection and housing of data, links to other groups within UNECE and the possibility to use GS1 standards.

33. Australia presented its OsCap system – a mandatory training programme (every 8 weeks) for all graders to ensure everywhere and at all times the objective measurement and the consistent application of chiller assessment and grading of fat color, meat color and marbling.

IX. Food waste and standards

34. The Section had a constructive discussion on the issue of food waste and loss, particularly in the meat supply chain. There was consensus that loss and waste occurred along the whole supply chain, but particularly at the distribution and consumer stage. Studies on the issue had been published by several institutions including the World Resources Institute, which had produced a draft food loss waste protocol due to be published in 2016 or other projects in the EU. Delegations outlined projects and initiatives in their respective countries, including: government programmes on food-waste reduction and work on lean finely textured beef in the United States; government initiatives in France; looking in to the rational use of the whole animal in Russia or Kyrgyzstan to take advantage of the protein source; adopting European Union legislation on the use of by-products in Serbia; Poland's and Australia's work on consumer education; adoption of European Union best practices and legislation in Albania and Kosovo; Argentina's observation on better practice to avoid waste at the dressing stage; and Germany's initiative entitled "Too good to waste" a national consumer education programme.

35. At the suggestion of France, the Specialized Section decided to consider the elaboration of a standard for co-products resulting from slaughter and processing (products that are already traded, safe for human consumption and are or could be used by the agro industry).

X. Future work

36. The Specialized Section agreed to place the following items on next year's agenda:

- Edible co-products (photos) - Rapporteurs - France and United States
- Deer meat (photos) and skeletal diagrammes – Rapporteur - Russian Federation
- New standard for co-products from slaughter and processing e.g., blood or other products to be identified – Russian Federation - initial study
- Eggs and egg products - Rapporteur -United States
- Eating quality - Rapporteur - Poland
- Retail meat cuts – lamb and veal – Rapporteur -United States (delegations are invited to send to the Rapporteur their most important internationally traded cuts)
- Duck and goose – China (to be confirmed)

37. The delegation of the United States proposed to hold a rapporteurs meeting on eggs and egg products within the framework of their national workshop on eggs and egg products (“National egg quality school”) in Indianapolis, Indiana, United States from 16 to 19 May 2016.

XI. Other business

38. The delegation of Kyrgyzstan presented the concept of the development of a halal industry (sheep meat) certification in the country and its economic potential in the region. Australia noted that it had long-standing experience in this area and suggested that Kyrgyzstan draw on already available experiences in this area.

XII. Election of officers

39. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Ian King (Australia) as Chairperson, and Mr. Craig Morris (United States) as Vice-Chairperson until the next elections in 2016.

XIII. Adoption of the report

40. The Specialized Section adopted the report (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2015/2) on its twenty-fourth session. The next session will take place in Geneva from 23 to 26 May 2016.
