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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Twenty-seventh session

Geneva, 2-4 July 2018

Report of the twenty-seventh session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

I. Introduction

1. Mr. Ian King (Australia), Chairman of the Specialized Section, chaired the session.
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, welcomed the delegates to the twenty-seventh session. He expressed his appreciation for the Section's active engagement which had resulted in a large portfolio of standards used and implemented at national, regional, and international levels, and with impact worldwide. He noted that this influence had also been highlighted at the symposium held on the first day of the session and which had focused on electronic trade and the use of electronic tools in the international meat trade. He thanked all contributors to the symposium, stressing that UNECE was very excited to be part of these new developments. He highlighted the important work of the scientific reference group for eating quality whose many regular and new participants were a driving force of the cooperation with UNECE.
3. He also mentioned that in recent years many countries from the UNECE's lesser developed regions had asked for help in building meat markets and their preparations for international trade. The Specialized Section's work and expertise provided very important reference and training material for these countries. Capacity-building and training required additional funds which needed to be raised for the implementation of standards. He also stressed that it was in the interest of all countries that safe and good-quality meat was traded and that included produce from the lesser developed countries. Ensuring and safeguarding the quality and authenticity in the trade of meat was not only a service to the buyer or the end consumer; it was also an important prerequisite to avoid fraud and other incidents on domestic and international markets. The work of the Specialized Section, he said, was built on accurate standards and guidance to reinforce their application. In the past years, the Specialized Section had developed new work and integrated new countries. This was

considered an important step to initiate real impact in a food system facing the challenges of the future: climate change, population growth, and declining resources.

4. He thanked all participants for their active participation throughout the year and for their support in training events, stressing that this helped advance the quality agenda worldwide and was an essential contribution to the sustainable development of all countries.

5. The Chief of the Market Access Section explained that he had received authorization from the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to represent UNMIK Kosovo¹ and introduced the technical expert who had been nominated to take part in the discussions.

II. Attendance

6. Representatives of the following United Nations member countries attended the meeting: Albania, Australia, Chile, China, France, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay.

7. Representatives from the following international organization attended: International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), International Meat Secretariat, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Trade Organization/Standards and Trade Development Facility (WTO/STDF).

8. Representatives from the following observer organizations; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); associations, academia and private sector groups also attended: Agriculture and Food Development Authority of Ireland (Teagasc), AUS-Meat Limited, AUS-QUAL Pty, Birkenwood PT, Gira Consultants, INRA, Institut de l'Elevage, International Meat Secretariat (IMS) International Meat Sector (IMS), INZAR, Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), MLA Europe, Polish Beef Association, PrimeX Connect, Texas Tech University, University of Novi Sad.

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

III. Adoption of the agenda

10. The meeting adopted the agenda with some agreed changes.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) UNECE and subsidiary bodies

11. 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 such as printing, travel and consultancies. This resulted in the need to use available resources more efficiently. Some of the resource gaps will be bridged through project funds for capacity-building. He informed delegates that the previous UNECE capacity-building project, under which workshops had been organized on meat and e-certification in the meat trade (Nanjing and Tianjin, China), had ended in December 2017. The project had achieved very positive results. He informed

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

delegations that the most recent session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards had taken place from 3 to 4 May 2018 and focused on the review of a new study on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade in Georgia and the follow-up to previous studies on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Republic of Moldova.

12. He also mentioned that at the UNECE level, an institutional mapping was currently being carried out to identify the focus of the organization on 8 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to allow for more effective results and impact. The work of the UNECE on agricultural standards is meant to contribute mainly to SDG 12 on sustainable production and consumption, SDG 17 on global partnerships and SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth. SDG 12 had been the topic of the conference on “Rooting for Sustainable Food” at the November 2017 session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and had been organized with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The Chair of the Specialized Section had provided valuable insights into the sustainability of the meat sector. He expressed the firm belief that the work of the Specialized Section was an integral part of the work in a sustainable future of agriculture with a real and changing impact.

(b) Other organizations

13. The representative of International Meat Secretariat (IMS) thanked the UNECE for the opportunity to participate in the important work at UNECE on meat standardization. He provided a brief introduction to the IMS, noting that IMS was a non-profit international organization for red meat (beef/veal, pork, sheep meat), representing mainly livestock producer associations and national/regional meat associations. He explained that IMS provided input, on behalf of the private sector, to a number of intergovernmental organizations on the many positive contributions that livestock makes to sustainability.

14. He commended the group on the very well organized and informative UNECE symposium on “Sustainable international e-trade for me(a)t.” Concerning the contribution of this group’s work to sustainability, the IMS would encourage future cooperation with already existing efforts within the United Nations family, in particular with the FAO, which hosted multi-stakeholder work to develop global guidelines for life-cycle assessment of livestock production systems. He also stressed that international cooperation required long-term vision, and was more complicated to manage, but was nevertheless worthwhile and the only way to move forward credible and widely adopted international standards.

V. Meat seminar

15. The 2018 session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat of the United UNECE included on its first day a seminar on “Sustainable international e-trade for me(a)t”. The seminar, with speakers from around the world, focused on electronic trade and e-certification in meat trade and particularly: “Sustainable meat trade and e-solutions—the example of China’s inspection and quarantine procedures of importing meat products”; “Combining e-business with global standards to foster sustainable international meat trade”; “Facilitating trade—the Dutch experience with e-certificates for meat export”; “Agri-food e-standards in the international supply chain”; “Meat-messaging—case presentation of an e-system between the United States and Australia” and “Making eating quality possible—harmonizing electronic data collection systems worldwide”. All presentations are available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47825>.

16. The symposium showed how countries and the private sector were developing and implementing electronic commerce, electronic inspection methods and e-certifications to

make trade more efficient, both time- and cost-wise. The examples showed that electronic means can enhance the cross-border e-commerce solutions by facilitating procedures. The e-trade example presented also showed a new way of applying international standard language to facilitate the trade of meat on electronic platforms as well as the need to prepare the meat standards for electronic trade. Electronic means and tools presented at the symposium provided efficient options for the international meat trade today and in the future. Among others, they help prevent and reduce food waste caused by produce held back for regulatory or administrative reasons and reduce the risk for fraud.

17. The Specialized Section thanked all speakers and participants for their excellent presentations and the discussions. It was decided to hold another symposium in 2019.

VI. Eating quality

18. The Rapporteur for eating quality from Poland reviewed the work of the UNECE scientific reference group for eating quality and the collaborative eating quality research undertaken during the past 4 years. He outlined the proposals developed in rapporteurs and working group sessions to develop the Research Guidelines complementing the UNECE Standard for Bovine Meat, particularly its section 5.7. The Guidelines are intended to provide the full application to the reference standards listed in Section 5.7 and refer to the meat colour reference standards (5.7.1); fat colour reference standard (5.7.2) and marbling reference standard (5.7.3). While they have been listed in the bovine meat standard for many years, their practical application remained restricted. AUS-MEAT Limited has agreed to train and certify in the use of these reference standards outside Australia (under contractual arrangements). The reference standards will then be available for purchase by those trained.

19. In addition to the AUS-MEAT marbling score, Meat Standards Australia (MSA) scores, which are aligned with marbling standards of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), should be referenced in Section 5.7 as well. He proposed the establishment of a technical working group to figure a conversion between the scores. In addition to the already included reference standards, he noted the group's request to include a pH measurement standard, a hump height reference standard, a skeletal ossification reference standard and an animal age reference standard.

20. The Specialized Section also took note that the international foundation on eating quality had been established to facilitate the work, data collection and data storage on eating quality. This will help raise greater interest, align research and outcomes and facilitate the sharing of results. The Rapporteur explained that the collected data would be stored in a common databank with a shared data component accessible for research purposes. The foundation ("International Meat Research 3G Foundation") includes a scientific reference group with several sub-working groups that submit proposals and recommendations to the UNECE Rapporteurs group.

21. The Specialized Section also agreed to the recommendation by the Rapporteur's group to adopt the MSA standard as the new research methodology for eating quality of bovine meat at UNECE level. The representative from MSA will provide this research methodology to the secretariat for publication on the UNECE web site.

22. The Specialized section commended the groups on its progress and adopted the proposals. The revised Research Guidelines are available on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47825> as post-session documents. They will be submitted for adoption to the November 2018 session of the Working Party.

VII. Revision of standards

(a) Goose meat

23. The Specialized Section reviewed the comments submitted by Serbia; the changes proposed at the 2017 Rapporteurs' meeting; and the proposals by the delegation from France. The delegates from China and France, who had worked on the goose standards as Rapporteurs, sent their regrets for not being able to attend the meeting.

24. During the review of the proposed amendments, several delegates noted that while the term "quick" included in Section 3.4 was terminology used by industry and had no defined time line, it was useful to keep it in the standards. The editorial error ("quick 5") would be corrected by the secretariat. It was also agreed to change the low temperature range from -1.5 to -2 to align with the duck standard. The comments by France on Sections "3.5.3 Production system" and "3.5.6 Chilling system" were acknowledged. The Specialized Section felt that the issue was covered by Section "1.2 Scope" and the reference in the introduction of Sections 3.5.3 and 3.5.6. to the agreement between buyer and seller. The proposal to include a minimum age of slaughter (free-range slaughter) for goose was not accepted, as a minimum age had not been defined in the Standard for duck meat either. In reply to a question by Serbia, it was clarified that the special condition clause mentioned under "Superior quality" (section 3.5.3), was a general wording which covered the various special feeding regimes used by several countries to produce superior quality goose meat.

25. As some of the comments needed further consultations and feed-back, the Specialized Section asked the secretariat to compile all remaining proposals in a revised post-session draft for submission through an inter-sessional approval procedure before the end of July 2018.

(b) Porcine meat

26. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposals by France (INF.1). The first proposal (Section 3.5.2) on including "non-castrated male porcine" in category 1 was deemed to be covered by category 8; proposal 2 was accepted and category 2 was amended to read "indoor/outdoor"; proposal 3 was approved and new wording was added under 3.6 reading "For countries recording fat thickness" and in section 3.7.2 reading "For countries using lean meat content." The Specialized section accepted the proposal by Poland to remove the end notes to the table in Section 3.7.2.

27. The Specialized Section decided to submit the amendments for adoption by the November 2018 session of the Working Party.

(c) Ovine meat

28. The Specialized Section took note of the comments submitted by France and UNMIK Kosovo. The Specialized Section agreed to review the proposal by UNMIK Kosovo at the next session when Australia will provide images of dentition. The proposal to amend cut 5020 was not accepted as the number of vertebrae was listed under the items to be specified.

29. It was also agreed to review and update the French version of the Standard and include the relevant images. The proposal to amend Section 3.5.2 Category 7, Ram was adapted to read "Adult entire male ovine having more than one permanent incisor teeth. Cuts 4900, 4860, and 5109 would be checked against English version. Cut 4880 was considered correct. Section 3.6.1 was not amended.

30. The Specialized Section decided to submit the agreed amendments for adoption by the November 2018 session of the Working Party.

(c) Rabbit meat

31. The secretariat had received no comments on the standard in two consecutive years. Therefore, it decided to postpone a revision of this standard to a later date.

VIII. Case studies on utilization of standards

32. At its November 2017 session, the Specialized Section had asked delegations to present case studies on the utilization of standards. Some of the delegations present (Australia, Uruguay) noted that they used selected standards for their exports. Delegations were asked to send more information to the secretariat by 30 October 2018. Further case studies would be provided by industry.

XI. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Specialized Section on Meat

33. The Specialized Section reviewed links between its work and the United Nations SDGs, with emphasis on linkages to the meat sector's economic role; the reduction of environmental impacts and better resource utilization; the product's use for food and non-food purposes; the production of high-value protein with otherwise non-utilized resources (grass); and the Specialized Section's standardization of by-products for consumption and further processing. Delegations noted the need for objective research and scientific studies of the impact of livestock production on the environment. This was also underlined by the representative from the IMS, who pointed to the need to take into account the work by the FAO on sustainability and life-cycle assessment of livestock production systems.

34. Delegations also noted the development of national sustainability frameworks and a need to identify their linkages with components included in the standards. It was also important to consider possible negative impacts of e.g. poultry production as well the impact of the new manufactured meat products (artificial protein production).

35. The Specialized Section decided to work on a paper focused on these issues for discussion at the next session in 2019.

IX. Future work

36. The Specialized Section discussed possible ways forward of the Section's work and stressed the need for close collaboration with the IMS, GS-1 and other partners. It was decided to organize another symposium or workshop in 2019 (for example on consistency for standard development (private standards) and sustainability; food integrity, food fraud and traceability for meat). It was also decided to explore the possibility of holding this symposium/workshop prior to the 2019 International Congress of Meat Science and Technology, ICoMST (Berlin).

37. Further items for the 2019 agenda included:

- Study of the possibility to develop quality standards for fish meat (scope to be defined) aquaculture and sea (Rapporteur: Serbia and other delegations);

- Study of the possibility to align the ECE cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System - HS codes (supported by China);
- Compilation of standards' implementation and utilization worldwide;
- Eating quality (Rapporteur, Poland);
- Ovine Standard (coordinated by Australia) – dentition.

X. Other business

38. Delegations were informed that the 2019 International Congress of Meat Science and Technology (ICoMST) will take place in Berlin from 4 to 9 August 2019.

XI. Election of officers

39. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Ian King (Australia) as Chairperson, and Mr. Mark Lobstein (United States) as Vice-Chairperson. The Specialized Section thanked the outgoing Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Bucky Gwartney (United States), for his many years of servicing as a delegate and his time as Vice-Chair as well as his much-appreciated support for the work and the events organized by the Specialized Section.

XII. Adoption of the report

40. The Specialized Section adopted the report on its twenty-seventh session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2018/2). The tentative dates of next session in Geneva, Switzerland, are 9-11 September 2019. Dates and venues of other events will be communicated in due course.
