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Future work

Future work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) *

The following document is submitted to the Working Party for information and consideration. It provides a brief summary of the proposed future work of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections (on Standardization of Meat; Fresh Fruit and Vegetables; Dry and Dried Produce; and Seed Potatoes).

The Working Party is invited to review and identify, as required, areas of synergies and possible new areas of work directly under WP.7 and the Specialized Sections.

* Submitted on the above date to include the input from the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat (28 to 30 September 2015).

I. Introduction

The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) is mandated to develop, interpret and promote the practical application of internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce.¹ Given the global impact of its work, it takes into account the needs of Governments as well as the private sector (producers, traders and consumers) from all countries where the standards are, or might be, implemented.

The Working Party, acting within the framework of the policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and subject to the general supervision of the UNECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the UNECE Trade Subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards. As per its terms of reference, the Working Party shall:

- (a) Draw up internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce based on existing national standards and industry and trade practices for: fresh fruit and vegetables (including early and ware potatoes); dry and dried produce; seed potatoes; meat; eggs; and cut flowers. The Working Party may develop standards for other agricultural products, as it considers necessary, subject to the availability of resources.
- (b) Harmonize the application of its standards internationally by developing and disseminating interpretative and explanatory material.
- (c) Revise and amend existing standards to adapt them to changing production, trading and marketing conditions.
- (d) Cooperate with the World Trade Organization (WTO) secretariat to ensure that the standard-setting process is consistent with WTO rules.
- (e) Cooperate with other standard-setting bodies, particularly with the Codex Alimentarius Commission, to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards.
- (f) Undertake research activities relevant to the development, implementation and promotion of its standards.
- (g) Monitor the application of the standards through reports from public administrations and the private sector.
- (h) Promote the standards and assist Governments with their practical application by organizing seminars, workshops and training courses.
- (i) Define and promote uniform quality-control procedures and the use of the model quality conformity certificate. Cooperate with governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing standards to achieve uniformity of inspection methods and comparability of results.
- (j) Carry out voluntary peer reviews of national quality-control systems.
- (k) Convene meetings of heads of national quality control services.
- (l) Develop the framework for and promote mutual recognition of inspections by countries.

¹ Extracted from the Terms of Reference of the Working Party, adopted as document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2007/12 at its November 2007 session, and approved by the UNECE Committee on Trade in October 2008 and by the Executive Committee on 20 March 2008 (document ECE/EX/2008/L.8) (<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/aboutus.html>).

(m) Promote communication between governmental, inter-governmental and other organizations implementing the standards and carrying out controls to make trading simpler, smoother and more convenient for traders.

In order to facilitate discussions on the Working Party's future work, this document proposes items for discussion at the Working Party level and summarizes the proposals for future work outlined in the reports of the meetings of the Specialized Sections on Standardization of Meat; Fresh Fruit and Vegetables; Dry and Dried Produce; and Seed Potatoes, respectively.

The Working Party is invited to review the potential future work to be undertaken by the Working Party and, as required, provide guidance on the priorities for future work identified by the Specialized Sections, including potential synergies and possible additional areas of work to ensure that the UNECE agricultural quality standards remain relevant and continue to facilitate trade, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Proposals for future work under WP.7

Following the recommendation by the Working Party at its 2014 meeting, three of the four Specialized Sections have so far looked into the issue of food loss/waste during 2015 and two of them have identified related areas of work.

In November 2015 and for the first time, an international conference on a cross-cutting theme involving all four Specialized Sections will be organized within the framework of the Working Party session. Focusing on traceability of agricultural produce, the conference will explore trends and traceability requirements for agricultural produce, how it impacts value chains, and how international marketing and quality standards could support traceability efforts, e.g. through labelling requirements or secure code marks.

The secretariat has therefore compiled the following topics for possible future work under WP.7. This list contains examples and suggestions to guide discussions. Any other proposals are most welcome.

- Traceability – continuation
- Food loss and food waste – standards; sustainable production and inspection
- The future of standards (e.g. how will they evolve?)
- Public-private standards and sustainability standards

In order to enlarge the scope of the work on the new items and to ensure full development coverage, the Bureau of the Working Party is also invited to develop working contacts with other relevant bodies in the UNECE. UNECE's Centre for Trade Facilitation and e-Business develops, among others, animal traceability data exchange, an alert system for food and feed (RASFF) notification exchange and e-Laboratory observation report messages which could be of interest for informed discussions on traceability. Similarly, UNECE's Working Party on Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies is working in risk management issues that the work on traceability might wish to be informed of.

WP.7 might also wish to be informed of the results of UNECE's relevant work elsewhere. For instance, the majority of the studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade contain business process analyses of the export and import procedures related to selected agricultural products. The discussions on traceability would benefit from such practical

information on the trade in these products coming from the Working Party's parent body, the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards.

III. Proposals for future work of the Specialized Sections under WP.7

The following summarizes the proposals for future work discussed in the four different Specialized Sections of the Working Party.

A. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

At its twenty-fourth session (28-30 September 2015), the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat identified as its future work the following topics which includes two new areas of work.

(i) New area of work - Eating quality

At the 2014 session of the Specialized Section it was agreed that a special working group would develop a proposal on a collaborative way to collect, record and evaluate information on meat eating quality within the framework of UNECE. Meat eating quality research aims at developing eventually a new model for grading meat.² Following the development of a discussion paper (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2015/7), the Specialized Section proposed 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 commercial application. The new group will be headed by Poland as Rapporteur. For the next session of the Specialized Section 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.

(ii) New area of work - Food waste

Following the recommendation of the Working Party at its 2014 session that all Specialized Sections discuss the issue of food loss/waste and standards, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat had very constructive discussions on the issue of food waste and loss in the meat supply chain. There was consensus that while loss and waste occurred along the whole supply chain, in the case of the meat supply chain it occurred primarily at the distribution and consumer stage. Meat and its by-products and co-products were generally well used during the production stage due to their value and many potential uses. However, few of these products which were traded also internationally are currently governed by international regulations. The Specialized Section therefore decided to consider the elaboration of a standard for co-products (that can be re-used and are safe for human consumption) and are or could be used by the agro industry, i.e. a standard for co-products/by-products resulting from slaughter and processing.

² The work aims to identify parameters that influence consumers' perception of the quality of different meats when cooked. By performing consumer testing on different cuts of meat prepared with different cooking methods, and in different countries, and correlate the data with information on the animal breed, upbringing and carcass handling, the work aims to develop a model to predict consumer taste in different markets. This model is then expected to be used in developing new ways of grading meat quality.

(iii) Seminars and symposia

“Public meats/meets Private” – 2015 Symposium on meat (focus: interaction between public and private standards and management systems for food safety)

At its 2015 session the Specialized Section organized a symposium on meat and discussed recent developments related to food safety standards and management systems, their impact on the meat industry, and possibilities for harmonization of private and public standards and verification programmes to facilitate trade while safeguarding consumer interests. The discussions emphasized that food safety was a shared responsibility, and that both public and private actors have an equal interest in ensuring food safety among all market actors. Participants highlighted the strong need for cooperation between public- and private-sector parties involved in standard setting and it concluded that no single agency or actor can take on the issues alone.

Given the success of the symposium in terms of complementarity to the work of the Specialized Section; increased and more as well as diverse participation, the Specialized Section decided to continue the practice of organizing seminars as part of the Specialized Section sessions as had been done in 2014 and 2015. Topics suggested for the 2016 symposium included: food waste; human and animal safety interaction; halal and kosher standards and industry; use of UNECE standards among 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.

(iv) Agenda items for the 2016 session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

The Specialized Section agreed to place on the agenda for its next meeting (23-26 May 2016):

- Edible co-products (photos)
- Deer meat (photos) and skeletal diagrammes
- New standard for co-products from slaughter and processing e.g., blood or other products to be identified – initial study
- Eggs and egg products
- Eating quality
- Retail meat cuts – lamb and veal
- Duck and goose

B. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

At its sixty-third session (21-24 April 2015), the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables identified the following topics and new areas of work.

(i) New area of work - Traceability

At its 2015 session the Specialized Section discussed traceability issues in the area of fresh fruit and vegetables, noting that tracking back of fruit and vegetables to their true origin remained a challenge, despite regulatory efforts and technical advances.

Discussions focused on a possible amendment of the marking and labelling section in UNECE standards to better support the traceability of products as well as on the difficulties linked to the verification of official codes (while cautioning that there should not be

additional labelling requirements). There was consensus that the aim was not to develop a new traceability system but to examine how, through simple measures, the standards could support traceability efforts. It was therefore decided to revisit the UNECE Standard Layout provisions for labelling and invite the working group (Hungary, France and Poland) to present an update on progress made at its 2016 session.

(ii) *New area of work - Food waste related to the use of standards*

At its 2014 session the Specialized Section discussed an information note on food waste and standards which had been prepared by the designated working group. Preliminary findings indicated that retail trade in Europe currently sold mostly Class I and sometimes Class II products and there was little reason to believe that marketing standards created a lot of food waste. However, it was decided that in the coming 12 months the working group would examine individual product standards followed by the Standard Layout, to identify where food waste/loss occurred or could potentially occur. The working group would then prepare a discussion paper on ways to amend the Standard Layout to reduce food waste. OECD would be informed in due course of any resulting change in the Standard Layout. The working group will present a revised discussion paper at the 2016 session.

(iii) *Agenda items for the 2016 session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables*

The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for its next session (18-21 April 2016):

- Standard for Sweet Peppers (revision)
- Citrus fruits - labelling requirements
- Apples - list of varieties
- Leeks - amendments and food waste review
- Tomatoes - food waste review
- Table grapes - tolerance for loose berries
- Headed cabbages - running to seed
- Standard Layout - general review, traceability and food waste review
- Glossary of terms
- if required, review of discussions at the Codex CCFFV meeting on garlic, aubergines, kiwi fruit and ware potatoes
- Annonas (at the request of Costa Rica)

Further requests should be sent to the secretariat by the beginning of January 2016.

C. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

At its 2015 session (29 June – 3 July 2015), the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce identified the following topics and new areas of work.

(i) *Food waste related to the use of standards*

During the discussion on this topic at the 2015 session of the Specialized Section participants raised issues such as the sometimes too stringent provisions

of the standards, the problem of non-exportable product and the re-grading of non-conforming produce.

(ii) *Agenda items for next meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce*

The Specialized Section decided to include the following items in its 2016 agenda (27-29 June 2016):

- Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Grapes
- Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Apricots
- Revision of the UNECE Recommendation for Dried Figs
- Revision of the UNECE Standard for Almond Kernels
- Revision of the UNECE Standard for Inshell Pistachios
- Revision of the UNECE Standard for Walnut Kernels
- Review of the Brochure for Walnut Kernels
- Revision of the DDP Standard Layout
- Development of a layout for an explanatory poster
- Development of a guideline for inspections (for dry and dried produce)
- New Standard for Pecan Kernels
- New Standard for Dried Sour Cherries

D. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

(i) *Agenda items for next meeting of the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes*

The Specialized Section held no formal session in 2015; however, at the invitation of Finland, a Bureau and rapporteurs meeting was held in Oulu, Finland, on 8-11 September 2015.

The Specialized Section is currently working on the following topics which will be discussed at its forthcoming session (31 August – 2 September 2016):

- Guide to Seed Potato Tuber Inspection
- Risk-based inspections
- Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service
- Specialized Section's website
- Sample sizes
- Physiology
- PCR techniques for virus testing
- Promotion of the Standard
- Capacity-building activities, including a survey of interested parties

The following topics were proposed for addition to the work of the Specialized Section

- Ask ESCAA to conduct a review of the EU schemes to update the tables of participating country schemes.
- True Potato Seed.