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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Seventy-second session

Geneva, 9-11 November 2016

Report of the seventy-second session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

I. Introduction

1. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division opened the seventy-second session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7). In her opening remarks she stressed the importance of coordination and collaboration among international organizations in the development of standards. She drew delegates' attention to the Food Loss and Waste Conference organized together with the Geneva office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This conference was an excellent opportunity for WP.7 to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and lead to further steps and joint actions. She emphasized that last year's conference on traceability had established a very active ad-hoc discussion group on the subject. She congratulated WP.7's Specialized Sections for their initiatives including nuts and dried fruit exhibitions to Rapporteurs meetings, symposiums, topical events on traceability and food loss and a culinary event to mark the International Year of Pulses. She also noted that all Specialized Sections had started new complementary areas of work in addition to their regular work items.

2. The 2016 session of the Working Party included on its second day an international conference on food loss with presentations on subjects of interest to all four Specialized Sections and organized in partnership with the FAO Office in Geneva. A summary report on the conference, the programme and the presentations would be available at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41409#/>.

3. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Pierre Schauenberg, Chairperson of the Working Party.

II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Austria, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Luxembourg, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.

5. The European Union was also represented.

6. The following international organizations, specialized agencies and programmes and intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, companies, academia and independent experts participated in the session: Ahold Delhaize, Bern University of Applied Sciences, Bosphorus University Istanbul, Csend, Ec-Terra Sarl, Feedback, Geb Solutions, Green Growth Knowledge Platform, International Association for Training and Inter-Employment Programs, International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), Nestlé, Slow Food Switzerland, Tesco Stores Ltd, Republican R&D Enterprise "Centre for Identification Systems", Union Maraîchère de Genève, University of Geneva, Verein foodwaste.ch, World Business Council for Sustainable Development, World Resources Institute.

III. Adoption of the agenda

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with agreed amendments.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

(a) United Nations, UNECE and subsidiary bodies

9. The Chief of the UNECE Market Access Section briefly reviewed the budget and resource allocation discussions held at the United Nations General Assembly in December 2015. He indicated:

- The normative work of UNECE had been the focus of attention and that the allocation of resources might arise again in future budget discussions.
- The large reductions in the United Nations publications budget required new solutions such as e.g. posters to be printed by the users following precise printing and paper quality instructions; online photo repositories or USB sticks containing standards and publications.

10. He also stressed the need to align the work of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections with the SDGs and informed about an on-going mapping exercise in UNECE of the international scope of the work done also by WP7. Noting that requests from countries from outside the UNECE region for training or participation in standardization activities had increased, he informed the Working Party about a resolution on agriculture which is currently being negotiated at the General Assembly in New York. For the first time, such a resolution also included the five Regional Commissions of the United Nations. He noted that the next session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards was

scheduled for 12 and 13 April 2017 and that the work of WP.7 would be presented at that session. During a review of the Working Party's Terms of Reference (TORs), it had become obvious that some points required revision as they no longer reflected WP.7's current work and direction. It might be useful to review the TORs and include a reference to the link between WP.7's work and the SDGs.

(b) Recent developments in other organizations and the use of standards by countries

11. The representative from the European Commission informed delegates about the alignment/update exercise between the EU's 10 specific marketing standards and UNECE standards which had just started and was scheduled to continue into 2017.

12. The representative from the INC presented the work of the INC and the organization's role in the global trade of nuts and dried fruit.

13. The Chairpersons of the Specialized Sections presented the work of their Sections since the 2015 session of the Working Party, as well as current and future activities. The presentations are available on the UNECE website at: <http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=41409#/>.

V. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

14. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, Mr. Ian King (Australia), stressed that in the area of meat, UNECE had been facilitating international trade for many years. In Australia, all beef meat cuts exported to over 110 countries followed UNECE standards. Buyers, therefore, knew what they are purchasing in this global scenario and UNECE standards had largely contributed to that.

15. When reviewing the work of the Specialized Section he noted the increased participation in the Specialized Section's session both from public and private sectors as well as academia and research institutes. At the 2016 session the Russian Federation and Poland had informed the Specialized Section that they had adopted national regulations based on UNECE standards.

16. He also drew the delegates' attention to the discussion at the meat symposium on links between other public as well as private standards and the need for mutual recognition. This had resulted in a decision by the Specialized Section to work with the Codex secretariat on a list of relevant Codex reference standards which would also be included in the meat standards. This collaboration with Codex ensured easy access to relevant food safety and hygiene provisions which were complementary to the UNECE meat cut standards. Delegates expressed their appreciation for this approach. Collaboration in the area of fresh fruit and vegetables mainly consisted of close collaboration with the Codex secretariat as well as an alignment of UNECE standards with Codex standards.

17. He also reviewed the Specialized Section's on-going work on the revision of the eggs and egg product standards; the suspension of work on deer meat as well as co-products from slaughter and processing. Revised and new standard for adoption included a new standard for retail meat cuts (lamb and veal) and a revised and updated standard for edible co-products.

18. In recent years, he explained, the Specialized Section had explored a new area of work on eating quality. This reflected the growing importance of worldwide collaboration in the area of eating quality research which had the potential to change "meat grading" internationally and to provide consumers with an "Eating Quality Guarantee" based on

consumer analysis, meat science and the objective measurement of quality traits. In this new area of work, UNECE could play an important role in providing an international forum for setting the standards used in those collaborative studies.

19. The Working Party adopted:

- The Report of the Specialized Section's twenty-fifth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2016/2)
- the revised UNECE Standards for Edible Co-products
- the new UNECE Standard for Retail Meat Cuts - Lamb and Veal,
- "Eating quality" as a new area of work of the Specialized Section.

20. The Working Party took note of the Meat symposium on new trends and new developments in international meat trade organized on the occasion of the Specialized Section's annual session in September 2016.

VI. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

21. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States), reviewed the work of the Section and presented the revised standards submitted for adoption.

Inshell Pistachios: He explained that a few days prior to the Working Party session, substantive comments on the Inshell Pistachio Standard were received from the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Due to the tardiness of these comments and their comprehensive nature, along with the implications they would have on the trade practices, more time would be needed for their evaluation. Additionally, since there was consensus on the current revised standard, it was proposed that the current revised standard be adopted while the comments from Iran be kept to form part of the next revision cycle (in 3 years) of inshell pistachios. This would allow sufficient time for consultations and evaluations.

Walnut Kernels: He informed the Working Party that the delegation of France could not agree with certain provisions of the revised walnut kernel standard which would also affect the walnut kernel explanatory brochure. The Specialized Section asked for a 1-year trial period for both the walnut kernel recommendation and the walnut kernel brochure with the option of an inter-sessional adoption if agreement is reached prior to the sixty-fourth Session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce. Gratitude was expressed to the delegation of the United States for their help and financial contribution to the development of the brochure.

22. **Sampling Plan:** The meeting was informed that work on the inspection and sampling plan was on-going and that efforts would be made to review the current draft in the coming months, thereby enabling testing and adoption at a workshop scheduled to be held during the session of the Specialized Section in 2017. This effort would be led by the United States.

Generic layout for explanatory posters: He indicated that the elaboration of a generic layout for explanatory posters had led to the preparation of a draft poster for dried apricots through the combined efforts of Turkey and Central Asian countries. More draft posters would be prepared for other dried fruit and nut standards.

23. The Working Party extended the trial period for one more year for

- the walnut kernel standard and
- the walnut kernel brochure.

24. The Working Party adopted the report of the Specialized Section's sixty-third session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2016/2) and the standards for:

- dried apricots
- dried figs
- dried grapes (Note: Germany withdrew its reservation for mould)
- almond kernels
- inshell pistachios (keeping on file the proposals by Iran which will be re-examined during the next revision cycle of the standard in 3 years).

25. The Working Party also decided to include in its future work an addition to its working procedures to advise all Specialized Sections on how to deal with reservations expressed by countries that did not participate in the revision processes. The delegate from Poland indicated that even though they didn't participate in the last few meetings of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce, they followed the group's work." Poland would therefore review its reservations in the revised standards adopted by the Working Party.

26. With regards to food waste discussion, the Chair of the Specialized Section noted that he had received notice from industry on consumers' lacking information on how to store nuts and dried food properly, a frequent problem in this sector and a source for food waste.

VIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

27. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann (Germany), reported on the increased participation in the work of the Specialized Section, presented in detail its work and the proposed revisions to a large number of standards. She explained that at the April 2016 session not all decision could be taken and consultations and discussions had continued well after the session.

28. The Working Party adopted:

- the Report of the Specialized Section's sixty-fourth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2016/2)
- the revised UNECE Standards for Annonas, Aubergines, Avocados, Chicory, Garlic, Leeks, Sweet Chestnuts, Table Grapes; Truffles
- the revised UNECE Standard for Sweet peppers (the secretariat was asked to update the electronic version of the explanatory brochure for sweet peppers)
- the revised UNECE Standard for Citrus Fruit (noting that a list of citrus fruit varieties will be made available on the UNECE website for information purposes)
- the revised UNECE Standard for Apples and the new list of apple varieties with the following stipulation: the new structure and content of the List was accepted; however, at the request of the delegation of the Netherlands, the colour groups of the current standard in the case of mutants of the varieties Elstar and Jonagold would be kept as in the old standard (same colour groups for mutants as the original variety). A possible new classification as to colour groups for these mutants should be discussed at the 2017 session of the Specialized Section. The delegation of the United States expressed concern about the inclusion of colour groups, welcomed

further discussions at the 2107 session and reiterated his request for a limitation of the list to the major varieties.

- Glossary of terms (noting that this Glossary should be used in connection with the Standard Layout for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables).

29. The revision of the Standard for Tomatoes will be re-discussed at the 2017 session of the Specialized Section as no agreement could be reached prior to the Working Party session.

VII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

30. The Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Mr. John Kerr (United Kingdom), provided a detailed presentation of the Section's 2016 session and outlined future work as contained in the Specialized Section's report. He also highlighted that the Section had so far produced four guides which provided excellent training material. He mentioned that while capacity-building was important, accessing funds for projects outside the UNECE region was difficult. He also reported on the discussion on food waste and stressed that the standard for seed potatoes ensured that good quality from the beginning resulted in less waste further up in the production chain. The standard was therefore considered a way of limiting waste by maintaining good quality.

31. The Working Party adopted

- The Report of the forty-third session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2016/2)
- Revisions to the Standard for Seed Potatoes
- Guide to Seed Potato Tuber Inspection
- Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service

32. He also mentioned that the Specialized Section was currently mapping its work against the SDGs and their targets – with an emphasis on SDG2 (Zero hunger) and SDG12 (Sustainable production and consumption patterns) as well as SDG 17 (Global partnerships). The identified links would be illustrated in a poster to be used for communication and information purposes.

33. The Chair of the Working Party encouraged the other Specialized Sections to envisage similar mapping and communication exercises which could then be consolidated at the Working Party level in a common position.

34. The secretariat stressed the usefulness of the guides (also in electronic format) in capacity-building in all areas covered by the Working Party. In addition, these guides go beyond the standard itself and, therefore, provide a comprehensive view of all aspects linked to the standards' implementation, use or inspection. The Working Party asked the other Specialized Sections to reflect on the possible development of training material, their format, content and collaborations with other organizations. It was also suggested that members of the Working Party and the Specialized Sections share information on initiatives implemented at their national levels.

X. Food waste and standards

35. Delegates reviewed the conference on food loss held on 10 November and thanked the secretariat for organizing such an informative and useful event which highlighted the many facets of food loss and food waste. The lively event, the many examples and initiatives presented, as well as the engagement of the speakers and audience had clearly

demonstrated that all actors in the supply chain had their role to play in the reduction of food loss. There was no single and unique solution. Situations could not necessarily be reproduced elsewhere. Coordination and cooperation between all partners active in this area were therefore key to changing the current situation. The study on food loss in Kenya whose preliminary results had been presented by the secretariat had clearly shown the impact of standards and the necessity for holistic solutions. In order to continue this dialogue and not lose the constructive momentum of the conference, it was decided to continue discussions in an ad-hoc group (initially focusing on the Kenya study, links to other organizations, and the niche of the link between standards and food loss). The secretariat will ask for the nomination of participants in the coming weeks.

36. It had also become obvious that more dialogue between the public and private sector was necessary on the relationship of public and private standards. Furthermore, information, communication, training and sensitizing producers, traders, consumers and NGOs was seen as very important to change not only perceptions but also to find solutions. In short, it had become obvious that when quality was not there from the outset, and quality could not be guaranteed and managed throughout the supply chain – food waste occurred. Quality and the minimum requirements contained e.g. in UNECE standards were therefore seen as a very important factor in limiting food loss. This should be clearly communicated to all stakeholders via the UNECE networks as well as at national levels. The Working Party decided to ask the secretariat to dedicate part of their web site to food loss information and asked each Specialized Section for a short text to explain their link to food loss. This would be one step to improve communication and provide information to be used by national delegations as well.

XI. Traceability

37. The secretariat gave a brief update on the work done by the traceability discussion group (organized under the auspices of the Working Party in November 2015). Initial findings focused on access to accurate and trusted information; UNECE labelling provisions for fresh fruit and vegetables and traceability issues mainly in the area of code marks as well as traceability challenges for small-scale farmers in developing countries. The Working Party took note of these valuable discussions and the progress made. The possible establishment of a central repository of all countries issuing code marks was suggested, That repository could perhaps be at UNECE, and would be accessible to inspection agencies.

XII. Capacity-building and promotional activities

38. The secretariat also informed the Working Party about capacity-building activities in 2016 and planned activities for 2017 in the area of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat and dried produce. Particular attention was drawn to the 2016 activities under the United Nations Development Account project on cross-border agricultural supply chains which included a case study (business process analysis) on dried grape exports from Uzbekistan and a training workshop on the cross-border trade in nuts and dried fruit held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan (July 2016). The workshop was a follow-up to the 2015 workshop which took place in Izmir, Turkey, and helped train Central Asian countries in the export of nuts and dried fruit. Both workshops had led to a collaborative project in the Fergana Valley aimed at pooling production and two and possibly three neighbouring countries increasing their production and export potential. The workshop in Tashkent had been organized together with UNDP and its regional Aid for Trade project and donor agencies. In the cases of Brazil and Namibia, at the initiative of those countries, the secretariat also facilitated capacity-

building events. The secretariat also stressed the value of the alignment of WP.7 work with the SDGs and the use of partnerships with other international organizations in the planning and implementation of events and trainings.

39. Delegations informed the meeting participants of the following:

- the thirty-first International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables will take place from 13 to 15 March 2017 in Bonn, Germany
- A Swedish market access cooperation project with Moldova which will run over the next 3 years and contain aspects of quality control and standards as well.

XIII. Future work

40. The Working Party decided to list the following items as its future work:

- Revision of its Terms of Reference (with an initial draft to be prepared by the secretariat and the bureaux of all Specialized Sections)
- Revision of its Working Procedures to clarify the provision on reservations in case of revisions of standards
- A Conference in 2017 on sustainability issues in connection to standards– including a broad view as well as food waste issues
- Electronic quality certificates for fresh fruit and vegetables (with initial exploratory work by the secretariat; first discussions at the April 2017 session of the Specialized section on Fresh fruit and Vegetables and a presentation at the WP.7 session)
- Report on Food Safety Modernization Act introduced by the United States in September 2016 and its large-scale impact on all countries exporting to the United States.

XIII. Other business

41. The following meetings are planned for 2017:

- Seed potatoes: 29-31 March
- Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 2-5 May
- Dry and dried produce: 19-21 June
- Meat: 5-7 July
- Working Party: 6-8 November

42. Possible changes in venue and date will be communicated in due course.

XIII. Election of officers

43. The delegations elected Mr. Pierre Schauenberg as Chair (Switzerland) and Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland) as Vice-Chair.

XIV. Adoption of the report

44. The Working Party adopted the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2016/2).