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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

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Item 2 of the provisional agenda

Matters arising since the last session

Programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards 2019-2020 *

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

This document contains the proposed programme of work of the Working Party and its Specialized Sections (on Standardization of Meat; Fresh Fruit and Vegetables; Dry and Dried Produce; and Seed Potatoes) for 2019-2020. The Working Party is invited to review and identify, as appropriate, areas of synergies and possible new areas of work directly under the Working Party and its Specialized Sections and endorse the 2019-2020 programme of work.

In addition, the Working Party is invited to request the renewal of its mandate for a five-year period from 2019 to 2023 and the update of its terms of reference contained in document ECE/EX/2008/L.8 (approved on 8 March 2008) to reflect the inclusion of the Sustainable Development Goals in its work without the amendments incurring financial implications.

This document is prepared according to ECE/CTCS/2017/10 section II c and ECE/CTCS/2018/2 section VII a.

* Submitted on the above date to finalize programme of work details.

I. Introduction

The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (Working Party 7) is mandated to develop, interpret and promote the practical application of internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce. Given the international 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 (ECE), and subject to the general supervision of the ECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the ECE 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.
- (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.

To facilitate discussions on the Working Party's programme of work for 2019-2020, this document lists the work undertaken at the Working Party level and summarizes the proposals for 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.

II. Proposed programme of work under Working Party 7 – 2019-2020

The Working Party is invited to review the proposed programme of work 2019-2020 to be undertaken by the Working Party and 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 ECE agricultural quality standards remain relevant and continue to facilitate trade, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals – namely Goals 8,12 and 17.

Since 2014, the Working Party has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals and focused on improving sustainable production and consumption patterns, particularly through its focus on the prevention of food loss/waste and related areas of work in cooperation with other international organizations, the private sector and civil society. This has resulted in the organization of three consecutive international conferences on cross-cutting themes involving all four Specialized Sections within the framework of the Working Party 7 session. Focusing on traceability of agricultural produce, on food loss prevention, and on sustainable food production and standards, the conferences explored trends and traceability requirements for agricultural produce, how international quality standards support traceability efforts, and how a better quality production prevents and reduces food loss. The latter supports directly Target 12.3 on halving food loss by 2030.

For the period of 2019-2020, it is proposed that the Working Party continue its focus on sustainable consumption and production related to the implementation of Goal 12 and its target 12.3 on halving food loss by 2030. To this end, it is proposed that the Working Party will work with its Specialized Sections and intensify efforts to review and compile practical measures and tools to help all participants of agricultural supply chains (covered by the Specialized Sections) to prevent and avoid food waste and food loss. In line with the aforementioned, the secretariat proposes that the Working Party in cooperation with its Specialized Sections could also pay particular attention to emerging topics such as food fraud or food integrity to ensure the full implementation of the related Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, the Working Party in cooperation with its Specialized Sections would also consider the sustainable use of available natural resources and measures to mitigate the negative effects of climate change. To this end, the Working Party would encourage the development of new tools and guidelines and organize international conferences/workshops to promote their use and implementation. The Working Party would do so in cooperation with other international organizations, the private sector and civil society.

The Working Party would also revise its Terms of Reference to include the work on SDGs and revise its Working Procedures to clarify certain provisions.

III. Proposals for Work for the Specialized Sections under Working Party 7

The following summarizes the proposals for future work discussed and agreed adopted by the four different Specialized Sections of the Working Party. The Working Party is invited to endorse the proposed work.

A. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

The Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat identified as its future work the topics included in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2018/2 (see below). The Specialized Section has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals. Continued focus will be on preventing food waste and loss in the meat supply chain and repurposing as well as sustainable resource utilization. Further items are included upon expressed demand of member States.

- Sustainable Development Goal 12: Compilation of standards' implementation and utilization worldwide;
- Study of the possibility to develop quality standards for fish meat (scope to be defined) aquaculture and sea;
- Study of the possibility to align the ECE cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System;
- Eating quality research and ECE Standards;
- Revision of the Standard for Ovine meat;
- Symposium/workshop on food integrity, food fraud and traceability as well as on consistency of standards (public and private) for sustainability.

B. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

The Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables identified as its future work the topics included in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2018/2 (see below). As per established practice, items related to revisions of standards are included upon expressed demand of member States closer to the meeting dates. The Specialized Section has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals and is currently preparing two important guidelines to help prevent and reduce food loss by 2030. The Specialized Section is working on the electronic version of the quality certificate used in the exchange of fresh fruit and vegetables to enhance the clearance time of fresh produce at the border and reduce food loss related to delays. Experts from the Specialized Section are involved in capacity building events focused on fostering the implementation of sustainable trading practices to prevent food loss and enhance quality production in Central Asia.

- Sustainable Development Goal 12: Development of minimum marketing quality guidelines;
- Sustainable Development Goal 12: Development of a code of good practice;
- Sustainable Development Goal 12: Development of an e-quality certificate for the trade of fresh fruit and vegetables;
- Revision of the Standard for Citrus fruit;
- Revision of the Standard Layout.

C. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

The Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce identified as its future work the topics included in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2018/2 (see below). The Specialized Section has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals and continued focus will be given to the sustainable trade and production of nuts and dried fruit, food loss prevention and the sustainable resource utilization to mitigate climate change effects. Further items are included upon expressed demand of member States.

- Sustainable Development Goal 12: Organization of symposia on the sustainable trade in cashew nuts and other produce;
- Development of a poster or brochure on cashew kernels and a cashew kernel colour chart;
- Development of a new standard for dried berries;
- Development of a new standard for peanuts and pecan nuts;
- Development of a new standard for prunes, dried melons, papayas;
- Revision of the standard for inshell pistachios (kernel content and shell ratio);
- Revision of the Standard Layout;
- Finalization of the sampling plan, guidelines and video for nuts and dried fruit together with a sampling and inspection event;

- Review of the explanatory posters (inshell walnuts, walnut kernels, dried figs, dried grapes and inshell pistachios);
- Review of the Central Asian explanatory brochure for dried apricots in view of an adoption as an ECE brochure

D. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

The Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes identified as its future work the topics included in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2018/2 (see below). The Specialized Section has aligned its work with the Sustainable Development Goals and continues to focus on the sustainable production and trade of certified seed to prevent food loss in the supply chain; and on the sustainable use of resources to mitigate climate change effects and improve food security. Further items are included upon expressed demand of member states.

- Results of the survey on seed potato virus testing methods;
 - Development of a survey on bacterial testing methodologies;
 - Development of a guide on minituber production;
 - Review of the latest development in the area of true potato seed;
 - Capacity-building and training material (guides, e-learning, videos);
 - Review of risk-based inspection procedures;
 - Review and discussions on new and emerging diseases and pests and strategies to mitigate risks;
 - Updates by delegations on new legislation.
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