



UNECE Weekly

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UNECE presents its agricultural quality standards at world potato congress POTATO RUSSIA 2007



Three hundred years after Peter the Great introduced the potato to Russia, UNECE experts introduced the UN's international standards for potatoes at Russia's first global potato congress.

POTATO RUSSIA 2007, held in Moscow on 21-24 August, was a three-part event with an international symposium, exhibition and field demonstrations, attracting 4,200 visitors from over 32 countries. Also attending were potato producers, experts in potato breeding, chemical and agricultural machinery companies, packers, processors and food retailers. After China, Russia is the next largest producer country of fresh potatoes in the world.

The decision to hold the congress was taken by the Russian Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Aleksei Gordeev and Mr. Ate Oostra, Director-General of the Netherlands Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Safety, who opened the field demonstrations on 40 hectares of land at the Lorkh All-Russian Research Institute for Potato Cultivation on the outskirts of Moscow.



Demonstration fields at Korenevo

The Chairman of UNECE's Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, Mr. Pier Giacomo Bianchi, and the head of UNECE's agricultural standards unit, Mr. Serguei Malanitchev, gave a presentation at the symposium and contributed an article to the proceedings of the congress (see overleaf).

UNECE Weekly: Mr. Malanitchev, why is this event important for UNECE?

The objective was to bring together the various parties involved in the international potato production chain and to be the meeting place for industry, science and authorities. And Potato Russia 2007 definitely succeeded in this. Mr. Bianchi and I were very pleased to have the opportunity to present and promote our potato standards*, as global references in international trade, to such a wide audience.

UNECE Weekly: What benefits can be gained from using standards as international references?

The standards we develop at UNECE offer producers and traders tremendous advantages in international trade. They define common terminology



* UNECE Standard concerning the certification and commercial quality control of seed potatoes, and UNECE Standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of early and ware potatoes. The texts of these and other UNECE agricultural quality standards are available at: www.unece.org/trade/agr. They can be downloaded and used free of charge.



Pier Giacomo Bianchi (right) and Willem Schrage (left), Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes.

"ENVIRONMENT FOR EUROPE"

Countdown to the Sixth Ministerial Conference



Environment ministers throughout the UNECE region are gearing up for the Sixth "Environment for Europe" Conference,

to take place at the SAVA Centre in Belgrade on 10-12 October. In Belgrade, they will take stock of progress made in improving the region's environment since their previous meeting in Kiev four years ago, and decide on priorities for future cooperation.

The Belgrade Conference will gather more than 1,200 delegates representing the 56 countries of the UNECE region. More than 20 intergovernmental organizations will also be attending the Conference. At least 50 ministers and high-level officials are expected to participate, as will more than 200 representatives of national and international NGOs, including environmental NGOs, business, trade unions and local authorities.

Busy agenda

An assessment and implementation segment will set the scene for the Conference, and the Environment ministers are expected to hold policy debates on a number of topical environment-related issues, including education for sustainable development, and biodiversity.

The final section of the Belgrade Conference will be dedicated to the future of the Environment for Europe process and it will conclude with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration.

A full timetable will be given in the next UNECE Weekly.

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Website: <http://www.unece.org/env/>

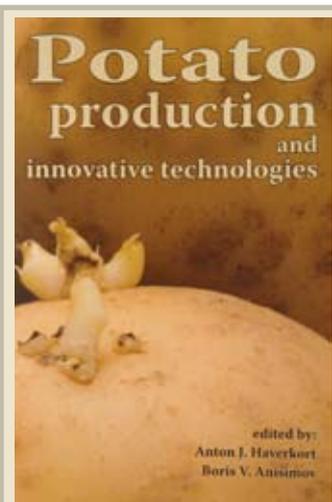


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and quality requirements, which makes it considerably easier to compare the quality of potatoes produced in different locations. To give you a simple example: many countries certify seed potatoes as class "Elite". However, the conditions and standards of this certification can differ enormously from country to country. This means that a buyer has to examine each national regulation separately to be assured of the quality. Not only this, but they would have to constantly check to see whether the national standards have been modified. Applying the UNECE standard as an international reference removes this necessity.

Another important aspect of our seed potato standard is that it specifies a "zero tolerance" for most pests and diseases. This helps countries using it to deliver a healthy product.

All our agricultural standards contain commercial quality provisions that serve as a reference for trade contracts. This avoids misunderstandings arising between the buyer and the seller. Also, by using the standards, it's easier to compare prices for products from different sources. And sales and contract operations become cheaper and less risky. That saves money on all fronts.



UNECE Weekly: You mentioned producers and traders, but how about the consumers? Is it to their advantage, too, to use UNECE standards?

Absolutely. The "minimum quality" requirements defined in the standards keep low-quality produce out of the market. I think this is very reassuring for all of us, especially as consumers.

P.G. Bianchi, W. Schrage and S. Malanitchev, UNECE standards for certification, marketing and commercial quality control of seed potatoes and early and ware potatoes. Potato production and innovative technologies, edited by Anton J. Haverkort and Boris V. Anisimov. Wageningen Academic Publishers, Netherlands, 2007.

Potato production in 2005
(million tons)

China	75
Russia	37
India	25
United States	20
Ukraine	19
Poland	15
Germany	13
Belarus	8
Netherlands	7
France	7
United Kingdom	6
Canada	5
European Union	67
Total world	328

Source: FAO. Latest available statistics.

UNECE invites all interested countries to contribute to the ongoing development of its standards by taking part in the activities of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its specialized sections. This is an open environment of professionals where national experts can discuss and find mutually acceptable solutions to the commercial quality issues that may arise in their domestic markets and have implications for international trade.

Information on standard-setting meetings is available at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings.

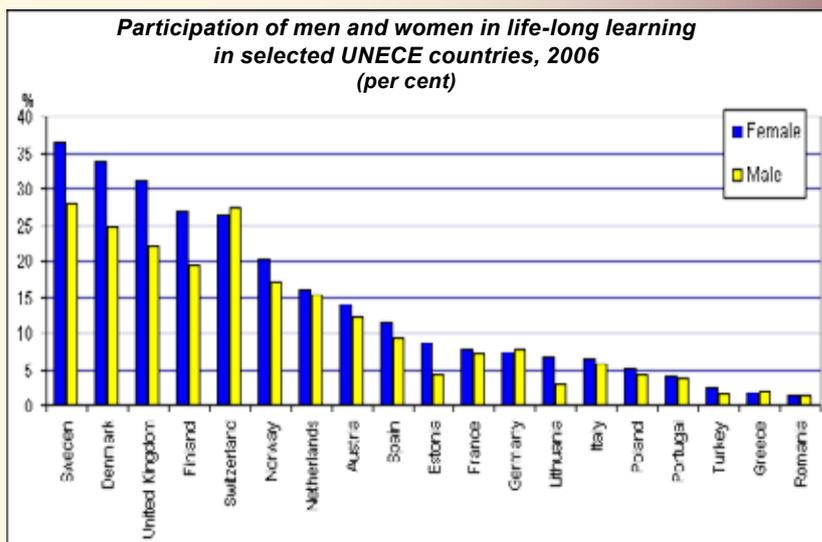
Facts and Figures

Participation of men and women in life-long learning

During one's adult life there is always a need to improve knowledge, skills and competences for the purposes of work or employment or for personal interests and social activities. In modern open economies, governments, employers and various social partners tend to promote and support possibilities to acquire and regularly update skills and knowledge. However, the degree of this support as well as societal attitudes regarding life-long learning vary considerably across countries.

As the chart attests, in 2006 the relative frequency of reported training prior to the survey was highest in the high-income Northern European countries, and also in Switzerland. By contrast, the medium-income countries in the sample recorded much lower, in some cases nearly negligible, relative levels of life-long learning incidences.

From the gender perspective, female and male engagement in lifelong learning were nearly at par in Switzerland and a few other countries, while in the majority of surveyed countries females reported higher rates of training prior to the survey. The difference, at about nine percentage points on average, was most pronounced in Northern Europe.



Source: EU Labour Force Survey and Eurostat database.

Note: Life-long learning refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they had received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey.