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**SUBSIDIARY BODY REPORTS  
COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS**

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CONCENTRATION OF WORK WITHIN UNECE**

Note by the secretariat

*Summary*

This note summarizes the progress made in implementing the decision contained in paragraph 56 of the Work Plan on ECE Reform (document E/ECE/1434/Rev.1) to initiate consultations “with the OECD in order to concentrate the activities of the two organizations [in the field of agricultural quality standards] within the ECE.”

1. Following a decision in the UNECE reform plan to initiate consultations on the concentration of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) activities in agricultural quality standards within the UNECE, the secretariat, in consultations with interested parties, drew up a draft transition plan. The plan was discussed at the 2006 sessions of the Specialized Sections on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and of Dry and Dried Produce, and revised to take into account those discussions. The Committee on Trade then approved the Plan at its June 2006 session (document ECE/C/TRADE/2006/18/Add.1).
2. The Executive Committee of the UNECE considered the transition plan at its meeting on 20 September 2006, and requested that the plan be submitted to the highest level of the OECD by the UNECE Executive Secretary, Mr. Marek Belka. On 9 October 2006, in a letter by Mr. Belka, the details of the plan were submitted to Mr. Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of the OECD.
3. The UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards discussed the draft transition plan at its November 2006 session and set up a cooperation task force composed of representatives of Slovakia, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the European Commission and the UNECE secretariat.
4. The OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables (hereafter referred to as the OECD Scheme) considered the transition plan at its November 2006 plenary meeting. A number of countries requested additional time to examine the draft transition plan. The meeting invited delegations to submit questions on this topic to the OECD and UNECE secretariats. As a result, two rounds of questions and answers took place in the first quarter of 2007.
5. The OECD Scheme met at a special session in April 2007 to revisit the issue of transferring its activities to the UNECE, based on the draft transition plan and the clarifications received during the exchange of questions and answers. The delegations decided to establish an exploratory task force to examine all aspects of a possible transfer and to inform the OECD Committee on Agriculture, the parent body of the Scheme, about the establishment of this group.
6. An OECD exploratory task force was established with participants from Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, Morocco, Switzerland, and the OECD secretariat. The OECD task force was advised to work closely with its UNECE counterpart. The OECD exploratory task force is expected to provide a final report to the 2009 meeting of the OECD Scheme with a clear recommendation regarding the possible transfer of activities to the UNECE.
7. The UNECE and OECD task forces met jointly during the week of the May 2006 meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. The representative of Sweden was elected as Chairperson of the UNECE task force and the representative of the Netherlands was elected as Chairperson of the OECD task force.
8. The task forces established working groups to advance transition-related work and prepare documents on the following issues for consideration at the November 2007 meeting of the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards:

(a) Legal aspects (UNECE and OECD). This group was asked to prepare draft terms of reference and working procedures of the Working Party and its specialized sections, as well as recommendations for future work on the Geneva Protocol;

(b) Explanatory brochures (Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom and OECD). This group was given the task of exploring new approaches to presenting the standards and interpretative material, and estimating the time and other resources needed to implement such approaches;

(c) Financing (UNECE, European Commission and OECD). Taking into consideration the work from group (b) above, this group was asked to estimate the amount of resources and ways of obtaining them, both financial and in kind, to bridge any gap between the cost of producing one or two brochures per year and the resources available at the UNECE;

(d) Organization of meetings. Switzerland volunteered to propose ways of organizing the annual sessions of the Working Party and its specialized sections on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and on Dry and Dried Produce in order to incorporate effectively the work on brochures;

(e) Other activities (Morocco, Slovakia, OECD). This group was asked to propose how to incorporate other activities of the OECD (heads of inspection services meetings, peer reviews and preparation of various guidelines) into the future UNECE programme of work.

9. The chairpersons of the task forces were given the assignment of drawing up a project plan to monitor progress in the work of the above groups.

10. The Specialized Section agreed that the UNECE secretariat should start work on brochures on sweet peppers and walnut kernels. Countries interested in taking part in this work were invited to inform the secretariat before the end of July.

11. The delegation of the United States of America had informed the secretariat that they would prepare the first draft of the explanatory brochure on inshell walnuts and walnut kernels. The consideration of the draft of this brochure is planned for the next meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce in June 2008.

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