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**Economic Commission for Europe**

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

**Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

**Forty-eighth session**

Geneva, 18 - 19 March 2021

**Report of the forty-eighth session of the Specialized Section  
on Standardization of Seed Potatoes****I. Introduction**

1. The meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was chaired by Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland).
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen welcomed the delegates to the forty-eighth session of the UNECE's Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes in an online hybrid format with interpretation into UNECE's official languages. He expressed appreciation for delegates' continuous support to the UNECE as well as valuable work in the past year and for the materials produced by the group, despite the on-going COVID-19 crisis.
3. He also highlighted the agenda items to be discussed in the next two days, including the preliminary results of the new bacterial pathogens survey, amendments to Annexes I and VII of the Standard for Seed Potatoes and proposals to the draft guide on minituber production, among others.
4. He noted that the decisions of the Specialized Section approved during the session would be sent to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) for adoption in November 2021.

**II. Attendance**

5. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States.
6. The European Commission was also represented.
7. Representative from Euroseeds (formerly, European Seed Association, ESA) also participated in the session

### III. Adoption of the agenda

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with discussions under Items 3 and 8 of the agenda postponed to its 2022 session.

### IV. Matters arising since the last session

#### (a) United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies

9. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen highlighted that since last Session of the Specialized Section in June 2020, the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards met in an informal online session on 29 June 2020. He also informed the Specialized Section that the next session is scheduled to be held on 21-22 June 2021.

10. Furthermore, he provided information on the outcomes of the 2020 Informal virtual consultations of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7). He shared that the WP.7 adopted a new Programme of Work in an inter-sessional approval procedure, which highlights future work on emerging topics such as sustainable food systems, circular economy as well as on the nexus of sustainable use of available natural resources and measures to mitigate the negative effects of the climate change.

11. He also mentioned that a virtual UNECE-FAO “*Roundtable on Food for Partnership – Sustainable, Resilient and Climate-proof Food Supply Chains*” highlighted the complexity of food loss and the importance of public-private collaboration in tackling the issue. FeedUP@UN, an on-line food loss management system designed by UNECE, was officially launched during the above roundtable as a potential solution to re-imagine our food systems and enhance the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Finally, he mentioned that the United Nations will hold its first-ever Food Systems Summit in September 2021 and encouraged contributions to the preparatory phase and the event itself.

### V. Draft survey on bacterial testing methodologies

12. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section had reviewed and updated the draft bacterial testing methodologies survey. Discussions were led by the delegate from the United States (Rapporteur) on behalf of the working group (Belgium, Finland, United Kingdom and Australia) and approved of a final version for circulation. In January 2021, the secretariat disseminated the final survey on bacterial testing methodologies which closed in March 2021.

13. The rapporteur (United States) presented preliminary results of the survey and expressed appreciation to the delegations for their contributions. She noted that the survey had collected 51 responses from 32 countries. Some replies were only partially completed due to either technical restrictions, flaws of survey design or the inexistence of a specific pathogen in some countries. The rapporteur emphasized that preliminary analysis represented a small sampling of about 1/3 of the total findings. She further highlighted that the Blackleg disease was found to be the most common disorder caused by bacterial pathogens. Moreover, the survey showed that tubers were the most frequently sampled material and PCR was overtaking ELISA and IF as the most common detection method.

14. As some of the delegations reported that they were not able to complete the survey on time, it was agreed to reopen the questionnaire for another four weeks and inform delegates of the new opening period. The United States delegate would prepare an updated report and, possibly, a position paper, which would be published on the UNECE website. The Specialized Section thanked the delegate from United States for her excellent analysis of the survey on testing methods for bacterial pathogens of potato that are associated with seed certification.

## **VI. Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes**

15. Following the detailed discussion at the 2020 Session and the decision to review Annex I of the Standard, particularly the definition of Pre-basic tissue culture (PBTC), the Specialized Section had established a working group led by the delegation from Finland (Rapporteur) with delegations from Australia, Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom as well as a representative from Euroseeds. The working group had met online in September 2020 to review Annexes I and VII of the Standard for consistency in content, definitions and terminology. Subsequently, several delegations submitted written comments which the Specialized Section reviewed.

16. The delegation from Finland presented the proposed changes to the definitions and terminology in Annexes I and VII to the Specialized Section. The Specialized Section agreed on the new definitions of Pre-basic tissue culture (PBTC) in Annex I and those for “clonal stock”, “initial stock” and “mother plant” in Annex VII. The Specialized Section also discussed and agreed on the proposed changes to the requirements of the micropropagation material text.

17. The Specialized Section approved proposed changes to Annex I and Annex VII and agreed to submit amendments to the Standard to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) for adoption. It was further agreed that the working group (Finland (rapporteur) – Germany, United Kingdom, Australia, United States, Netherlands, South Africa and Euroseeds) will continue its work on reviewing and revising the entire standard and its annexes and place this item on the 2022 session agenda.

## **VII. Draft guide on minituber production**

18. The Specialized Section decided to postpone the discussion of this item and place it on the agenda of its 2022 session. In the meantime, the working group led by Australia (rapporteur) and including France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa and United Kingdom will review the new Draft guide on minituber production, available on current session’s page to ensure that it reflects changes to Annex I of the Standard approved during the session. The secretariat was asked to organize an online meeting for the working group in the coming month, to integrate the new definitions and finalize the draft guide.

## **VIII. Revision of the list of national certification schemes and list of varieties**

19. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section had decided to update the list of national certification schemes for seed potatoes and relevant contacts, as well as the list of varieties under the leadership of the rapporteur (Germany).

20. The delegation from Germany presented the completed listing of national certification schemes (last updated in 2017 and 2019), the list of designated certification authorities and the list of varieties. She thanked the delegations for providing relevant information.

21. She highlighted the addition of new information on the national certifications schemes from countries that had not been included before and noted that new information (i.e. EU minimum conditions) and references (crop and lots) had been added to the original table. In addition, she mentioned that the table now contained a newly added overview of various national information schemes.

22. She further reported that the documents were translated into Russian and French languages. The delegation from the United States offered to explore the possibility of translation into Spanish. The delegation from France offered to examine help with Arabic translation. The secretariat will coordinate with the delegations accordingly.

23. The Specialized Section thanked the rapporteur for preparing the revised lists containing the updated information from more than forty countries. It was decided by the Specialized Section that the updated documents would be published on the UNECE Seed

Potato webpage, following the session, for the ease of reference. All other countries were encouraged to send their updated information to the secretariat.

## **IX. Knowledge sharing, capacity-building and guides**

### **(a) Draft guide on capacity-building**

24. The Rapporteur (Germany) presented the revised draft of the UNECE “Guide on capacity-building to introduce a seed potato scheme” on behalf of the Working Group (Australia, Czech Republic, Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom and United States).

25. The guide focuses on capacity building for countries intending to establish seed potato certification schemes. It was approved by the Specialized Section after careful review and with some input and guidance provided by the delegations. Some additional text was suggested by the Specialized Section to highlight the importance of high-quality potatoes as well as a shortened title and a reference to the UNECE website for further information. It was concluded that capacity building is a major aspect to establish and ensure production of high-quality seed potatoes and was also agreed to complement the guide with some pictures illustrating training events from the previous years.

26. The Specialized Section decided to submit a revised guide on capacity-building to the November 2021 session of the Working Party for adoption and subsequent publication on the UNECE website. The Specialized Section thanked the rapporteur for preparing the updated guide on capacity building.

### **(b) Update on development of a knowledge sharing and resource reference page on seed potato certification**

27. The delegation of Australia informed the delegations that in the course of 2020 he created a sharepoint site (<https://vicspa.sharepoint.com/sites/UNECESeedPotatoes>) to allow delegations to upload the relevant material. He thanked delegations that already uploaded their material and encouraged other delegations to upload the videos, poster and photos related to the seed potato activities in their countries. In case of registration issues (on the site) or technical problems, he offered his assistance.

28. The Specialized Section agreed that the collected material would be reviewed during the 2022 session.

### **(c) Development of a poster/paper on the benefits of certified seed**

29. The Specialized Section reviewed an updated poster on the benefits of certified seed which had been prepared by the delegation from Australia, with contributions from the working group (Australia, Germany, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe).

30. The Specialized Section suggested several amendments to emphasize the focus on quality seed potatoes (vs. clean seeds), high level of the benefits of quality seeds potatoes and promoting high quality seeds. The Specialized Section further proposed to change some of the pictures to reflect the new title and updated text in the poster and agreed to use the newly created sharepoint site for the submission of photos by delegates with due indication of copyrights.

31. The Specialized Section approved the suggested changes and decided to submit the poster for adoption to the November 2021 session of the WP.7 for adoption and subsequent publication on the UNECE web site. In the future and upon availability of funds, the poster could be presented at events such as World Potato Congress, besides being uploaded on UNECE website. The secretariat was asked to explore resource availability to help with the design of the final poster layout.

#### **(d) Workshops and guides**

32. The Specialized Section took note of the World Potato Congress postponed owing to the pandemic and now scheduled to take place during 30 May – 2 June 2022 in Dublin, Ireland. The Specialized Section agreed to explore the possibility of organizing an informal meeting and a workshop during the congress, subject to availability of funding. The Conference organizers expressed support to such the possibility of holding an event.

33. The delegation of Australia informed delegates that in 2022, at the side-lines of the World Potato Congress, the first-ever International day of potatoes would be organized. He encouraged delegations to reflect on and support his concept and its possible annual celebration in the future.

34. The delegation from South Africa reported on a Potato Seed System Development Workshop Series held on 6, 8 and 14 October 2020 which was hosted by the National Potato Council of Kenya in collaboration with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and International Potato Center (CIP). She noted that South Africa had presented an overview on “Seed system in South Africa – Farmers accessing seed in advanced centralized seed system, case of South Africa”

### **X. The potato mop top virus**

35. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2022 session.

### **XI. True Potato Seed and potato plants in pots**

36. The Specialized Section continued discussions and exchanged updates on True Potato Seed (TPS) and potato plants in pots.

37. The delegation from the Netherlands reported that several companies were involved in the TPS and five varieties had been submitted for registration last year alone. One variety registered on the national level with negotiations ongoing to register the variety at the European Union (EU) level. He further mentioned that the EU had started an experiment on TPS to explore future regulations in Europe, in which the Netherlands take part.

38. The delegation from Germany emphasized the increasing interest in growing potato plants in pots. As these were not covered by any certification schemes, the Specialized Section agreed to discuss potential control mechanisms in the future.

39. The Specialized Section agreed to keep the item as future work and suggested to establish a working group (United States, Germany, Netherlands (rapporteur), United Kingdom, France, Finland, South Africa and Euroseed) to continue discussions and subsequently propose the possible amendment of the standard.

### **XII. Herbicide carryover and seed potatoes**

40. The Specialized Section decided to discuss this item in a newly created working group (Australia, United States, United Kingdom (rapporteur), New Zealand, South Africa, France) to determine if this could lead to possible amendments of the Standard or a study paper.

### **XIII. Future work**

41. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2022 agenda:
- Revision of the entire standard for seed potatoes
  - Draft guide on minituber production
  - Survey on bacterial testing methodologies – conclusions and (may be) a position paper

- Capacity-building (development of a knowledge sharing and resource reference page; poster on the benefits of certified seed)
- Lot size of seed potatoes
- Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses
- True Potato Seed and potato plants in pots
- New and emerging diseases and pests - information on *Liberibacter*, and the Tomato Potato Psyllid
- The potato mop top virus - sharing experiences
- Herbicide carryover and seed potatoes

#### **XIV. Other business**

42. The Specialized Section thanked the secretariat for the organization of a session in an online hybrid format and provided interpretation into Russian and French which had made it possible for many more delegations to participate in this session.

43. The Specialized Section took note of the 2022 dates of the Specialized Section session (17 to 18 March 2022) and agreed to explore the possibility of holding an informal session and a workshop back-to-back with the World Potato Congress, provided funding would be available. There will be no Rapporteurs meeting in 2021 due to COVID-19 situation.

44. In light of the appointment of Ms. Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab as a Chief of UNECE-FAO Forestry and Timber Section, the Specialized Section thanked her for many years of work and fruitful collaboration.

#### **XV. Election of officers**

45. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair and Ms Nina Zidack (United States) and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) as its Vice-Chairs.

#### **XVI. Adoption of the report**

46. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its forty-eighth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2021/2) in a written procedure.

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