



Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

Sixty-eighth session

Geneva, 16-18 June 2021

**Report of the sixty-eighth session of the Specialized Section
on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce****I. Introduction**

1. Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States) chaired the sixty-eighth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce convened in a hybrid format, allowing for interpretation.
2. The Deputy Executive Secretary of United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Dmitry Mariyasin, opened the session by welcoming the delegates to the hybrid session and highlighting the importance of the agricultural quality standards agenda at the UNECE as well as its role in sustainable food systems and the circular economy.
3. He mentioned the ongoing preparations for the first United Nations Food Systems Summit and UNECE's contribution, including through the Issue Based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems. He expressed his gratitude to the delegates for their work and support as well as progress made despite the COVID-19 crisis and wished them successful deliberations in the session.

II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Tajikistan, Turkey, United States of America, Uzbekistan.
5. The European Commission was represented.
6. A representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Tajikistan was also represented.
7. Representatives from the following observer organizations, non-governmental organizations and associations also attended: Alimkhan Exim Group, American Peanut Council, Austrian NGO "Hilfswerk International", Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Kyrgyzstan, International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC).

III. Adoption of the agenda

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

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

9. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of UNECE, Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, welcomed the delegates. She gave an overview of relevant intergovernmental meetings held in 2020, such as the informal consultations of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards held in June 2020 and the informal session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) held in November 2020. She noted that the sixth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would be held in a hybrid format on 21-22 June 2021.

10. She informed the delegations that the Working Party had adopted a new programme of work in an intersessional approval procedure. That programme of work focused on market transparency, food security and enhanced collaboration and she highlighted future work on emerging topics such as sustainable food systems, the circular economy as well as on the nexus of sustainable use of available natural resources and measures to mitigate the negative effects of climate change.

11. She provided an overview of relevant workstreams and deliverables, including the launch of a blockchain enhanced FeedUP@UN tool and its relevance to the implementation of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2, 8, 11 and 12. She invited delegations to inform the Specialized Section of any interest to pilot the tool on the national or regional level. She provided two examples of global and regional events, such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s launch of the regional flagship publication in May 2021, including UNECE's contribution and the UNECE-FAO virtual roundtable, "Food for Partnerships – Sustainable, Resilient and Climate-proof Food Supply Chains", held in November 2020.

12. The sixty-ninth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe had been held on 20-21 April 2021 and had focused on "Promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources in the UNECE region". Ms. Tuerk gave an overview of the decisions (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/E_ECE_1500-2103148E.pdf), while flagging the high-level statement calling for strengthening work on the circular economy in the UNECE region and inviting subsidiary bodies to consider embedding it into their scope of work (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/E_ECE_1497-2102163E.pdf).

13. The secretariat noted that all decisions of the Specialized Section would be approved in an intersessional approval procedure and only then sent to the Working Party for adoption in November 2021. The report would be adopted in a written procedure.

(b) Recent developments in other organizations

14. The representative of the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC) stressed the excellent working relations and collaboration with UNECE. The INC was presented as the principal representative of the global dried fruits and nut industry, having over 859 member companies from 82 countries across five continents.

15. The INC explained its vision of being the international source for information on nuts and dried fruits on health, nutrition, production statistics, trade and consumption, food safety, government standards and regulations and agricultural quality standards. In this regard, the INC had published several technical kits based on the UNECE standards for dry and dried produce and had hosted webinars for over 1,000 industry representatives. The INC

highlighted collaboration with UNECE on preparation of the cashew poster and a video production for the International Day of Forests as well as the INC's participation in the FAO's launch of the United Nations International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (2021).

16. A representative of the Central Asian Working Group (CAWG) covering Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, stressed the organization's role in promoting UNECE commercial quality standards in Central Asia. The Specialized Section took note of the update provided by the representative of CAWG, including its upcoming meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, focusing on commercial standards for fresh fruit and vegetables and dry and dried produce.

V. Development of new standards

(a) Inshell pecans

17. At its November 2020 session, the Working Party had adopted the revised draft standard submitted by the Specialized Section as a UNECE Recommendation for Inshell Pecans for a 1-year trial period. The Specialized Section reviewed the Recommendation, particularly the text related to colour classification and minimum requirements. While some delegations were in favour of submitting the Recommendation for approval to the Working Party as a new UNECE standard, the delegation of the United States requested the extension of a trial period for another year because of the ongoing revision of the United States national standard.

18. The Specialized Section decided to submit the Recommendation for Inshell Pecans to the November 2021 Working Party session for extension for a 1-year trial period.

(b) Pecan kernels

19. At its November 2020 session, the Working Party had adopted the revised draft standard submitted by the Specialized Section as a UNECE Recommendation for Pecan Kernels for a 1-year trial period. The Specialized Section reviewed the Recommendation, particularly the text related to minimum requirements and provisions concerning tolerances. While some delegations were in favour of submitting the Recommendation for approval to the Working Party as a new UNECE standard, the delegation of the United States requested the extension of the trial period for another year because of the ongoing revision of the United States national standard.

20. The Specialized Section decided to submit the Recommendation for Pecan Kernels to the November 2021 Working Party session for extension for a 1-year trial period.

(c) Apricot kernels

21. At its November 2020 session, the Working Party had adopted the revised draft standard submitted by the Specialized Section as a UNECE Recommendation for Apricot Kernels for a 1-year trial period. The Specialized Section reviewed the Recommendation and the parts related to minimum requirements and provisions concerning quality tolerances and sizing.

22. The delegation of Turkey expressed its concern about a maximum allowance for moisture content, currently at 6.5 per cent and proposed lowering the upper limit to 6 per cent, with the aim to avoid rapid product deterioration and subsequent food loss. The delegation further explained that moisture content higher than 6 per cent may result in food safety concerns. The delegation from Tajikistan confirmed that in response to demand from the importing countries, apricot kernels with the moisture content of up to 7 per cent had been exported over the past two years and considered acceptable. They requested to reduce the quality tolerance in Class I and II and the Specialized Section agreed to raise this issue during the consultation period, following the session.

23. After a follow-up discussion in a Working Group (CAWG, Turkey, United States) the delegations agreed to keep the maximum moisture content allowance at 6.5 per cent, while noting Turkey's concern related to potential food safety concerns.

24. The Specialized Section decided to submit the Recommendation for Apricot Kernels to the November 2021 Working Party for adoption as a UNECE standard for Apricot Kernels, following the consultation period.

(d) Dried persimmons

25. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section had reviewed the proposed draft standard for dried persimmons, followed by post-session consultations. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised draft and all the sections in square brackets. The amended text included the definition of produce, minimum requirements (amendment of text under the footnote, related to white coating), moisture content (determination of treatment used in producing countries, presence of the calyx and alignment of the column titles with the Standard Layout), sizing (number of fruit per kilogram), and quality tolerances (determination whether there is a need for differentiating between peeled and unpeeled dried persimmons; split of defects and adjustment of tolerance allowances). After consideration of proposals made by the delegations of Germany, Tajikistan, United States and Uzbekistan, the Specialized Section agreed on the proposed amendments to the standard.

26. The Specialized Section decided to submit the draft standard on dried persimmons to the November 2021 Working Party for adoption as a recommendation for a 1-year trial period, following the consultation period and intersessional approval procedure.

(e) Raw and roasted inshell peanuts

27. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section had agreed on the inclusion of roasted peanuts in the new UNECE standard, which was reflected in its new title "Raw and Roasted Inshell Peanuts". The Specialized Section reviewed the revised draft proposal and amended the sections on moisture content, classification and provisions concerning sizing and tolerances.

28. The Specialized Section agreed to submit the draft standard for adoption by the Working Party as a Recommendation for a 1-year trial period, following the consultation period.

(f) Raw and roasted peanut kernels

29. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section had agreed on the inclusion of roasted peanut kernels in the proposed new UNECE standard, which was reflected in its new title "Raw and Roasted Peanut Kernels". The Specialized Section session reviewed the revised draft proposal and amended several sections.

30. The Specialized Section agreed to remove the reference to raw kernels in the indent "free from rancidity" under the minimum requirements. As such, the requirement would be applicable to both raw and roasted peanut kernels. The Specialized Section agreed to retain the maximum moisture content of 10 per cent for raw peanut kernels and 4 per cent for roasted peanut kernels, currently in brackets. The Specialized Section removed the restriction to only whole peanut kernels in Extra Class. In the provision concerning sizing, the Specialized Section agreed that the measurement could be in kernels per ounce, grams or pounds. The Specialized Section agreed on the proposed text and allowances under the provisions concerning tolerances.

31. The Specialized Section agreed to submit the draft standard for adoption by the Working Party as a Recommendation for a 1-year trial period, following the consultation period.

VI. Review of existing standards

(a) Prunes

32. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised Recommendation for Prunes, which had been extended by the Working Party in November 2019 and again in 2020. The Chair explained that the outstanding issue pending agreement for the past two years had been the provisions concerning sizing. The delegation of France informed the Specialized Section of the work that had been done over the past year and proposed to add the sizing table for pitted prunes in addition to non-pitted prunes.

33. The Specialized Section requested the secretariat to organize an online follow-up session, where the Working Group would harmonize a section on sizing, considering France's proposal on sizing provisions for pitted and unpitted prunes. If agreement were reached, the revised draft would be submitted in November 2021 for adoption by the Working Party. The changes for consultation (in square brackets), were included in the post-session document.

(b) Cashew kernels

34. The Specialized Section noted that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the producing countries were neither able to prepare a draft nor to reach an agreement on the draft Cashew Kernels standard.

35. The Specialized Section decided to postpone the discussion of the draft Cashew Kernels standard to the 2022 session of the Specialized Section.

(c) Dried dates

36. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal to amend the UNECE standard for Dried Dates. The delegation of Germany proposed to remove the word "dried" from the name of the standard and refer to it as "UNECE Standard for Dates", pointing to the fact that dates are traded in their natural state and usually without additional drying measures. The proposal was supported by the delegation of Turkey; the delegation of the United States expressed concern, noting a difference between dried dates and dates, particularly their different ripening stages and colour range.

37. The delegation of Germany took note of the difference in ripening stages marketing and clarified that the current UNECE standard covered only the most ripened stage. She proposed to describe which ripening stages would be covered in the standard, excluding the very early stages. A compromise was reached on amending the sections on definition of produce and labelling to clarify the stages of ripening of dates.

38. The delegation of Germany proposed to reflect proposed changes in the updated draft and circulate the document for a post-session consultation and subsequent intersessional approval procedure. If an agreement were reached, the updated draft would be submitted as a revised standard for adoption by the Working Party session in November 2021.

(d) Revision of the Standard Layout for Dry and Dried Produce

39. The delegation of Germany noted that proposed amendments to the Standard Layout had already been taken into consideration and approved at the 2020 session of the Specialized Section. Germany proposed to align all Dry and Dried Produce standards with the 2020 edition of the Standard Layout, to facilitate better understanding of UNECE standards by the industry.

40. The Specialized Section requested the secretariat to align all existing standards with modifications of the Standard Layout adopted in 2020 in the course of next year and before the 2022 session of the Specialized Section.

VII. Sampling plan for tree nuts and dried produce and guidelines for inspections of dry and dried produce

41. At its 2019 session, the Working Party had agreed to the decision by the Specialized Section to demonstrate and review a proposed sampling plan at a dedicated inspection workshop, to be hosted by the delegation of Turkey in Izmir. Given the ongoing pandemic, the workshop could neither be organized in 2020 nor in 2021. The delegation of Turkey proposed to move forward with the adoption process, considering ongoing travel restrictions in 2021 and, possibly in 2022. The delegation of Germany supported this approach and proposed to finalize and submit the sampling plan to the November 2021 Working Party session for adoption.

42. The Specialized Section agreed to finalize the sampling plan and requested the secretariat to organize a follow-up session, where the document would be reviewed, and any concerns addressed. The final version would be circulated for approval in an intersessional approval procedure. If the sampling plan guidelines were approved, the Specialized Section would submit them to the Working Party session in November 2021 for adoption.

VIII. Explanatory materials

(a) Cashew kernels – poster

43. At the 2020 session, progress was made on the explanatory poster for cashew kernels and the poster included the defect “spotted”, which was not included in the UNECE Cashew Kernels standard. Considering that the standard had been last revised in 2013, the Specialized Section agreed to postpone the review and finalization of the explanatory poster until after the revision of the standard.

44. Due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, the Cashew Kernels standard was not revised in 2021, and the discussion was postponed to the 2022 session to allow for participation of producing countries. Consequently, the discussion of the explanatory poster was also postponed.

(b) Almond kernels – poster

45. The delegation of Germany asked whether producing countries could develop a poster on almond kernels, considering that the posters prepared so far had been well received and almond kernels were a very important product in international trade. The delegation of the United States informed the Specialized Section of an almond kernel poster developed by the United States almond industry that was already circulated to some member countries and the Specialized Section secretariat and was available for all members. It was agreed to establish a working group (Germany – Rapporteur, INC, Tajikistan, United States) to discuss the draft.

46. The Specialized Section agreed that the Working Group would review the draft in a follow-up session and prepare a draft almond kernel poster for the review of the Specialized Section at its 2022 session.

IX. Panel discussion on future work

Circular economy – transitioning to circularity in food trade

47. The secretariat reported on the outcome of the sixty-ninth session of the Commission that had been held in April 2021 with an overarching theme of the circular economy. The session deliberations had resulted in issuance of a high-level statement inviting all sectoral committees and subsidiary bodies to review their work for an enhanced circular economy focus within their existing mandates, budgets and programmes of work. The secretariat

invited member States to propose any ideas on potential contribution to the topic, with further discussion envisaged at the upcoming Working Party session in November 2021.

48. The Specialized Section noted that while the topic of the circular economy was very important to the nut and dried fruit sector, the type of discussions proposed on this issue was beyond its core mandate, but proposed a discussion of this item to be considered at the Working Party session.

Sustainable food systems and the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit

49. The secretariat reported on the upcoming United Nations Food Systems Summit, taking place in September 2021, highlighting it as an opportunity to rethink our food systems and emphasizing the planned launch of new actions reflecting a change in the way we produce and consume food. All United Nations bodies were invited to contribute to the Summit and the UNECE would contribute at the Executive Secretary level and with support of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards.

50. The secretariat invited contributions, ideas and support from the Specialized Section.

Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises and agricultural quality standards for resilient supply chains

51. The secretariat reported on recent activities related to a national-level debate on food and nutrition. Considering the important role of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in sustainable trade, the secretariat hoped to explore possibilities to integrate MSMEs into its work. It invited ideas and suggestions from the Specialized Section.

52. The secretariat also reported on the e-learning course on commercial quality standards and wished to explore the interest from countries to participate in a peer review. The Specialized Section requested the secretariat to circulate the e-learning modules to the entire group for review and feedback. The delegations of Belgium, Finland, Germany, and Spain undertook to submit a report (which guarantees the minimum of four countries to provide feedback).

Nexus of sustainable use of natural resources

53. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section about the enhanced cooperation at UNECE and its four nexuses. Following the decision of the sixty-ninth Commission, the Executive Secretary was considering the revision of the current arrangement of nexuses and their re-organization around the circular economy topic. The Specialized Section would be informed accordingly.

Resilient food supply chains and post-COVID recovery

54. The Specialized Section agreed that considering the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the food supply chains and post-COVID recovery discussion should be postponed to the Working Party session.

Analysis of the impact of agricultural quality standards on the trade of dry and dried produce

55. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section of the interest to analyse the impact of agricultural quality standards on the trade of dry and dried produce. It invited ideas and suggestions to measure the impact of UNECE standards on agricultural trade, while highlighting interest expressed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to collaborate.

56. The United States delegate emphasized that topics related to the circular economy, sustainable food systems and the nexus of sustainable use of natural resources were beyond his assigned mandate of contributing to quality standard development. He expressed willingness to contribute to the analysis of the impact of agricultural quality standards on the trade of dry and dried produce.

57. Germany supported the position of the United States and noted that its delegation was not in a position to cover the different items proposed. Germany said that the Commission report called for considering contribution to these items “within their mandates” which was limited to supporting sustainable production and sustainable trade. It highlighted that the recently launched FeedUP@UN was an ongoing contribution of the Working Party to sustainable food and the circular economy.

58. The Specialized Section noted the secretariat’s report under Agenda item 11 and agreed to contribute to the analysis of the impact of agricultural quality standards on trade of dry and dried produce. In that regard, the Specialized Section recommended holding a discussion, jointly with the INC and FAO on relevant data collection to assess the impact of UNECE quality standards.

59. The Specialized Section took note of the INC’s visual trade maps posted on their website analysing the volume of dried fruit and nut trade (<https://www.nutfruit.org/industry/statistics>).

X. Future work

60. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for 2022:

- Revision of Cashew Kernels standard
- Development of the explanatory poster on cashew kernels
- Development of the explanatory poster on almond kernels
- Alignment of existing standards with the Standard Layout
- Sampling plan workshop

61. Any other proposals for future work should be sent to the secretariat as early as possible, preferably by 1 February 2022.

62. The date and venue of the next session would be communicated in the coming months.

XI. Election of officers

63. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States) Chair of the Specialized Section and Ms. Aysegül Uluhan (Turkey) and Mr. Umed Aslanov (Tajikistan) Vice-Chairs.

XII. Adoption of the report

64. The Specialized Section adopted the report of the session in a written procedure.
