

Draft opening statement for the Executive Secretary

Opening

by

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General

Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

at

76th Session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7)

15 November 2021, 11:00 (CET) in Tempus 2 and online

N.B. Anticipated duration of speech: 5-7 minutes

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15 November 2021, Opening - 11:00

Hybrid format, Palais des Nations, Geneva, **Tempus 2**

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you today to the **76th Session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards** being held in hybrid mode, that is online and in the meeting room here at the Palais des Nations.

While most of you are connected remotely, I am delighted to welcome delegates from across the globe as well as many new participants. I wish to express my deep gratitude to all of you for your continuous engagement in the important activities of the Working Party. Your work is central to driving a global agenda for international trade and sustainable development.

The work on agricultural quality standards is one of the longest lasting work streams of UNECE. Today, Working Party 7 is convening for its 76th session! This demonstrates the great relevance and the continued importance of a key pillar of UNECE's trade related work.

I commend your Working Party for making significant progress in the past year, despite the COVID-19 crisis, with its many challenges. I understand that during the past year, all meetings were successfully held, resulting in a record number of nearly 20 standards presented for adoption today. This is truly impressive, and I wish to thank you for your commitment!

Please rest assured that the secretariat stands ready to give you the best possible support for this important work you are carrying out!

With food being one of the most fundamental needs of every person on the planet, this year marks **two important events on the global food arena**.

First, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2021 as the *International Year of Fruit and Vegetables*, not only emphasizing their vital role in human nutrition, but also urging efforts to improve sustainable production and reduce waste.

In this vein, I would like to highlight the work of the ***Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables*** and its contribution to advancing fruit and vegetable food systems with over 60 standards developed to date. Your Specialized Section's work makes a substantial contribution to increasing sustainability and reducing loss and waste of these highly perishable produce.

I would like to take this opportunity and thank the outgoing *Chair, Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann of Germany* for her many year of service as a delegate and her much-appreciated support for the work of the Specialized Section and the Working Party.

I would also like to commend the work of the ***Specialized Sections on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Seed Potato and Meat***. Your work directly contributes to sustainable production in different sectors with over 100 agricultural quality standards developed and updated on a regular basis.

Secondly, on 23 September 2021, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres convened a first-ever ***Food Systems Summit*** as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Summit called on all stakeholders to intensify efforts to make food systems more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

At the Summit, Member States committed to step-up their efforts towards transforming food systems through five action tracks designed to identify solutions that can deliver wide-reaching benefits. I would like to emphasize that your work on developing the agricultural quality standards is an integral part of making this transformation a reality and I call on you to contribute to this process.

And finally, let me now turn to UNECE.

As you may know, at ***this year's Commission session*** in April, members States committed to intensify efforts towards promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources.

In response to this decision, UNECE together with UNEP launched a 4-year project on ***Accelerating the transition towards a Circular Economy in the UNECE region***.

It is in this context, that we are also holding a ***Roundtable on Fostering Circularity in Food Trade***, which will take place tomorrow during lunch.

Our Roundtable will explore the links between circular economy and agri-food production, trade and standards, including in relation to food loss and waste. I would like to emphasize our strong commitment to supporting proposed activities in enhancing a circular economy focus, within your existing mandates and program of work.

To close, let me emphasize that your continuous engagement and participation in the meeting today are a testament to the commitment to advancing international trade, developing competitive markets, and delivering on the 2030 Agenda. I am confident that together we can further expand the impact of our standards and our work, while building resilient and sustainable food systems.

I wish to thank you all once again for your active engagement and wish you successful deliberations.