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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

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Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes

History of the Standard for Seed Potatoes

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

As part of the ongoing revision of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Standard S-1 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of seed potatoes, the rapporteur's group is proposing to remove the text that refers to the history of ECE, the Working Party and the history of the standard, and to make it available in a separate document.

This document contains the text, amended to align with recent strategic planning documents of ECE. The document is submitted for review.



I. About the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) was set up in 1947 by the Economic and Social Council. It is one of five regional commissions of the United Nations.
2. Its primary goal is to promote economic integration and cooperation among its 56 member States as a means of achieving sustainable development in the ECE region. However, all interested United Nations Member States may participate in its work. Over 70 international professional organizations and other non-governmental organizations take part in ECE activities.
3. It focuses on economic cooperation and integration, trade, transport, environmental policy, sustainable energy, forests, housing and land management, population and statistics.
4. ECE activities include policy analysis, negotiation of international legal instruments, development of regulations, norms and standards, exchange of best practices, and technical assistance.

II. History and goals of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

A. History

5. In October 1949, the ECE Committee on Agricultural Problems established the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Foodstuffs to determine common standards for perishable foodstuffs “and to study steps to be taken on the international level in order to secure the general adoption of standards and control systems”. Later, the responsibility of the Working Party was extended to cover non-edible horticultural produce and quality development, which is reflected in its present name.
6. The activities have led to the elaboration of a wide range of ECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried produce, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat, and cut flowers.

B. Goals of the standards

7. ECE agricultural quality standards aim to:
 - Facilitate fair international trade and prevent technical barriers to trade
 - Improve producers’ profitability and encourage production of high-quality produce
 - Protect consumer interests.
8. The ECE Working Party and its four Specialized Sections provide a forum where countries can discuss all issues relating to commercial quality that may arise in their domestic markets and have implications for international trade. The Working Party offers assistance to countries by organizing workshops on the harmonization of national commercial standards with international ones.

III. History of the Standard for seed potatoes

A. History

9. Work on the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes (hereinafter “the Standard”) began in 1958.
10. At the ninth session of the Working Party some disagreements were raised concerning the nomenclature of the different categories of seed potatoes. The Group of Experts (from

the Federal Republic of Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) was charged with preparing an analysis of existing national regulations and drafting recommendations for international standardization.

11. Provisional recommendations were adopted in 1960 at the tenth session of the Working Party for trial and revision according to the resulting experience.

12. The first version of the text was adopted by the Working Party in 1963 at its sixteenth session. The Standard has been regularly updated since then.

B. Development of the Standard

13. The development of the Standard for Seed Potatoes and other work of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes is conducted in line with the Terms of Reference and the Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards which are available on the ECE website. According to its Terms of Reference, the Working Party is open for participation by all United Nations Member States in compliance with the accreditation process contained in the guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies (E/2013/37 E/ECE/1464).
