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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Fiftieth session

Geneva, 16 and 17 March 2023

Report of the fiftieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

I. Introduction

1. The fiftieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was chaired by Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland).
2. The Officer in Charge of the Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Mr. Ariel Ivanier, welcomed the delegates to the fiftieth session of the Specialized Section, held in person at the Palais des Nations in Geneva with interpretation provided in the three official languages of ECE. He expressed appreciation for delegates' continuous engagement as well as for the valuable work in the past year and the materials produced by the Specialized Section.
3. He commended the progress made in 2022, including on the ongoing revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes, on the draft guide for minituber production, and the completion of a survey on lot and sample sizes for seed potatoes.
4. He highlighted the importance of the agenda items to be discussed in the next two days and noted that the ECE standard is unique as it is the only international standard for seed potatoes, and that it has a clear impact over the past 60 years, since its adoption in 1963. He noted that the Specialized Section would be celebrating the sixtieth anniversary of the Standard on Seed Potatoes, and thanked the Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva and the Finnish Food Authority for hosting a reception on the occasion.

II. Attendance

5. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America.
6. A representative of the European Commission attended the meeting.



7. Representatives of the following non-governmental and private sector organizations participated in the session: Aardevo (Netherlands (Kingdom of the)), Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, Europatat, Potato Certification Service (South Africa), Potatoes New Zealand.

III. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

8. The Specialized Section adopted the provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/1) with a change in the timing of agenda item 7.

IV. Matters arising (agenda item 2)

(a) Recent developments in the United Nations, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and its subsidiary bodies

9. The Officer in Charge of the Market Access Section, informed of the outcomes of events since the last session of the Specialized Section in March 2022, notably the session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which had been held in a hybrid mode (online and in person) on 27 and 28 June 2022, and the seventy-seventh session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards held in a hybrid mode on 14–16 November 2022. The Working Party had adopted the reports of the 2022 sessions of the Specialized Sections along with three new standards for dry and dried produce, and one new recommendation and four revised standards for fresh fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2022/2).

10. He further informed that the upcoming meeting of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would be held on 26 and 27 June 2023, and the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on 13–15 November 2023. Prior to those, the seventieth session of ECE would be held on 18 and 19 April 2023 under the theme Digital and Green Transformations for Sustainable Development in the Region of the Economic Commission for Europe.

V. Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes (agenda item 3)

11. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had decided to initiate a comprehensive review of the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes. The review was assigned to a rapporteur's group consisting of Finland (rapporteur), France, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, Euroseeds and Potato Certification Service (South Africa). Over the course of 2022, the rapporteur's group met four times to review the standard.

12. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposals for revisions to the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes submitted by the rapporteur's group (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/3), up until and including section V on provisions concerning sizing. As part of the revision, the text on the history of the standard had been moved to a separate document (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/4).

13. The Specialized Section approved the work done by the rapporteur's group, and also agreed on additional changes. It requested the rapporteur's group to continue the review in, focusing on section VI and onwards plus resolving bracketed issues, and invited other delegations to join the work. Interested delegations should contact the secretariat.

VI. Lot size and sample size of seed potatoes – survey results (agenda item 4)

14. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had discussed whether there was a need to define maximum lot sizes for seed potatoes, such as is the case for cereals and grasses. The

Specialized Section decided to conduct a survey on the topic of lot and sample size limits and practices as background for further discussions. The delegation of Germany had offered to take the lead in conducting the survey.

15. The delegate from Germany (rapporteur) reported on the results of the survey, which included responses from 31 countries. The results showed that there was a significant variation in sample sizes across countries, measured by area or weight. Similarly, there was a wide range of sampling sizes used for testing for viruses and tuber diseases, as well as for external defects and post-control trials. It was noted that sampling sizes were more uniform when testing for specific bacteria, such as *Clavibacter michiganensis* spp. *sepedonicus* and *Ralstonia solanacearum*. The survey also found that lot sizes for marketed seed potatoes were mostly unrestricted.

16. The Specialized Section discussed the results of the survey on lot size and sample size of seed potatoes (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/INF.1) and concluded to use relevant findings when revising the relevant paragraph of the standard.

17. The Specialized Section thanked the rapporteur for her excellent work on a complex subject. The rapporteur thanked the secretariat for their support in administering the survey.

VII. Revision of position papers of the Specialized Section (agenda item 5)

18. At its 2022 meeting, the Specialized Section had decided to set up a rapporteur's group consisting of Finland, the United Kingdom (rapporteur), the United States, and Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority to review the Specialized Section's position papers.

19. The Specialized Section discussed the proposed revisions to its position papers (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/5). The rapporteur led the Specialized Section in an extended review of the position papers.

20. The Specialized Section agreed on several changes to the position papers on potato virus Y, blackleg, silver scurf of seed potatoes, cutting seed potatoes, sprouted tubers, and true potato seed. For the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes, the Specialized Section discussed whether it was still needed or should be discontinued. It agreed it should be kept as it was still relevant for some areas, but that more research would be required to properly update it. Cognizant of time constraints, it decided to table the paper for future work.

21. The Specialized Section approved all the edits made to the position papers in session and decided to submit the revised versions to the Working Party for approval. It also agreed to include the position paper on the vigour of seed potatoes in the list of future work.

VIII. Herbicide carry-over and seed potatoes – draft position paper (agenda item 6)

22. At its 2022 meeting, the Specialized Section had discussed whether herbicide carry-over should be included in the requirements of the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes or if a position paper was needed. It decided that a position paper was necessary before considering whether to include a provision on herbicide carry-over in the standard. It asked the rapporteur's group set up for this topic at its 2021 meeting (France, the United Kingdom (rapporteur), the United States, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, Potato Certification Service (South Africa) and Potatoes New Zealand) to work on preparing the position paper.

23. The Specialized Section decided to postpone the review of the draft position paper on herbicide carry-over (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/6) to its next session.

IX. True potato seed and potato plants in pots (agenda item 7)

24. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had shared information on the topic of true potato seed (TPS) and potato plants in pots. It decided to keep the item on the agenda for continued discussion.

25. Mr. Paul van den Wijngaard, Managing Director at Aardevo B.V. and Aardevo North America, presented on the topic on behalf of Euroseeds. Mr. van den Wijngaard discussed the advantages and challenges of TPS and hybrid breeding, and the potential contribution of TPS to meeting global challenges. Key advantages included the limited transmission of diseases via TPS, lower logistic and seeding costs (25–100 g TPS versus 3,000 kg of tubers per hectare), more efficient and effective breeding platform and faster introduction of new varieties. This can help save resources through improved logistics, reduced growing areas and faster development of robust, resistant and efficient varieties. Challenges for hybrid potato seed breeders include longer growing cycles of potatoes from seed, the very small size of the seed, and the completely different agronomy. He noted that international regulation and practice currently focus on potato cultivation from tubers, and that different regulation would be needed for TPS. He emphasized that production of TPS and seed potatoes is based on completely different technologies with different phytosanitary risk profiles and therefore should lead to a different set of regulations to ensure safe movement of goods between countries.

26. The Specialized Section thanked Mr. van den Wijngaard for sharing new insights on TPS production and agreed to continue discussing potential future work to define rules relating to TPS.

X. Draft guide on minituber production (agenda item 8)

27. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had reviewed the draft guide on minituber production and decided to continue the work of the rapporteur's group (consisting of France, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the United Kingdom, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority (rapporteur), Euroseeds, Potato Certification Service (South Africa) and Potatoes New Zealand) to finalize the draft guide and to place it for approval at its 2023 meeting. Over the course of 2022, the rapporteur's group held four half-day meetings online to review the draft guide, with Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority as rapporteur and facilitated by the secretariat.

28. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft guide on minituber production as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/7. Delegations made a few comments and suggestions to the draft.

29. The guide is in its final version, however the Specialized Section decided to take the comments on board and refer them back to the rapporteur's group to address remaining questions, in particular as relates to plantlets and micropropagative material. Delegations were invited to send photos associated with the production of minitubers.

XI. Knowledge-sharing and capacity-building (agenda item 9)

(a) Seed potato webinar series

30. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section decided to set up a working group to develop an online webinar series (Finland, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority (rapporteur)). Initial proposals for webinars include sessions on the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes; herbicide damage; blackleg; *Liberibacter* (Zebra Chip); potato virus Y (dormant tuber); and potato mop-top virus. The rapporteur's group proposed that ECE collaborates with the World Potato Congress (WPC) in developing and hosting the webinar series.

31. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposals for webinars (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/INF.2) and discussed these and additional proposals for capacity-building. The Bureau had approached WPC for potential co-organization of a webinar series. It had discussed to first organize a session on the UNECE standard, potentially followed by other joint webinars. The WPC webinars are free of charge, and if jointly organized they would be jointly promoted by the two organizations. The Specialized Section was encouraged to keep thinking of ideas for webinars, and proposals for good presenters. The delegation of the United Kingdom proposed to add TPS to the topics.

32. The Specialized Section decided to draft a concept paper on the organization of the webinars (Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, in collaboration with the secretariat).

(b) Finalization of a poster/paper on the benefits of certified seed

33. Following the adoption of the text for the poster on the benefits of certified seed at the 2021 session of the Working Party, the Specialized Section in 2022 reviewed the proposed design of the poster and suggested some changes to the pictures and design. The poster was amended in line with the comments, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/INF.3.

34. The Specialized Section decided to replace the first photo with a photo of a growing crop, and move the photo of differently coloured potatoes to the middle. It approved the final poster with those changes.

(c) New and emerging diseases and pests

35. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had exchanged information concerning ongoing research and studies on new and emerging diseases and pests, such as *Liberibacter* and the tomato potato psyllid. The Specialized Section decided to keep the item on the agenda and to work on gathering diagnostic information on *Liberibacter* from New Zealand, the United States, and other countries where the pathogen had been detected.

36. The Specialized Section were invited to share information on new and emerging diseases and pests. The United States asked other countries to share experiences of to which degree potato leafroll virus (PLRV) is starting to spread with neonicotinoids being phased out. Exchanges were made based on the delegates' observations of increased PLRV in crops, increased Potato Spindle Tuber Viroid (PSTVd) and other Solanaceous diseases.

(d) Update on development of a knowledge-sharing and resource reference page on seed potato certification

37. At the 2021 session of the Specialized Section, the delegate from Australia had informed the meeting about a newly established knowledge-sharing platform for experts of the Specialized Section, allowing registered experts to upload relevant material. At the 2022 session, the Specialized Section reviewed progress and discussed possible contributions and additions to the knowledge-sharing platform. It requested the secretariat to explore whether it would be possible to store the material on a document-sharing platform hosted by the secretariat.

38. The secretariat presented its proposed solutions for a common knowledge-sharing and collaboration platform, based on open-source software and already in use by other units in the ECE secretariat. The Specialized Section discussed the use and possible contributions to the platform. The delegate from Australia proposed that the platform be used for collaborating on documents, such as the review of the standard and the guide for minitubers, development of joint presentations, and for storing photos.

39. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to trial a platform in collaboration with the Bureau, and showcase it at the next meeting of the Specialized Section.

(e) Seed potato information on the website

40. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section had discussed recommendations for improving the user-friendliness of the seed potato page on the ECE website. It decided that the secretariat would update the website in consultation with the Bureau of the Specialized Section.

41. The secretariat updated the Specialized Section on changes to the seed potato page of the ECE website. The delegation of Germany proposed including an archive section for older material. The secretariat and the Bureau will look at the issue of presentations on the website.

42. The Specialized Section was asked if it wanted to share any other information about capacity-building. The delegate from Australia shared information of capacity-building work it was undertaking in Vanuatu.

XII. Terms of Reference and Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections (agenda item 10)

43. As per its Terms of Reference, the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards shall review its Terms of Reference every five years and submit them for approval to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the Executive Committee of ECE. At its meeting in November 2022 the Working Party decided to set up an open working group consisting of Brazil, Poland, Spain, and the United States to review the Terms of Reference and Working Procedures and prepare a proposal for discussion in the Specialized Sections, followed by consideration by the Working Party at its seventy-eighth session in November 2023.

44. The secretariat provided an update on the progress of the work of the open working group, and invited comments from the Specialized Section on the Terms of Reference and Working Procedures.

45. As there were no comments, delegations were invited to send comments in writing, if any, by the end of March 2023 to the secretariat.

XIII. Future work (agenda item 11)

46. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items in its 2024 agenda:

- Revision of the entire Standard for Seed Potatoes
- Guide on minituber production
- Capacity-building (webinars, knowledge-sharing platform, update of the website)
- Revision of the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes
- Development of the position paper on herbicide carry-over
- True potato seeds and plantlets
- New and emerging diseases and issues (potato mop-top virus, testing dormant tubers for viruses, PSTVd, potato wart, *Liberibacter*, PLRV and insecticides, etc.)
- Sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification
- Impact of climate change on potato production

XIV. Other business (agenda item 12)

47. The delegation of France confirmed its intention to host a rapporteur's meeting in the autumn of 2023. The meeting would be held in Brest in Brittany, and would include visits to technical facilities. It announced two potential timings, either 19–21 September or 10–12

October 2023. It was currently looking into the availability of hotels, after which it would confirm the dates. The Specialized Section warmly welcomed the proposal and agreed to hold the meeting as proposed.

48. The Specialized Section took note of the tentative dates of the 2024 session of the Specialized Section (26–28(a.m.) March 2024).

49. The delegate from Australia suggested also holding a rapporteur’s meeting in connection with the upcoming World Potato Congress, to be held in Adelaide, Australia in June 2024. The delegation of the United States suggested it be held before the World Potato Congress.

50. The delegation of the United Kingdom asked if there was an update on the possible announcement of a World Potato Day. The delegate from Australia answered that it is in the final stages of approval.

XV. Election of officers (agenda item 13)

51. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair, and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) and Ms. Nina Zidack (United States) as its Vice-Chairs for a one-year period.

XVI. Adoption of the report (agenda item 14)

52. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its fiftieth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/2) in session.
