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Executive Committee

Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business**Twenty-eighth session**

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Recommendations and standards:**Support to capacity building and technical cooperation****Executive Guide on an Electronic Certification
Management System for Fresh Fruit and
Vegetables****Submitted by the secretariat***Summary*

This document provides an executive guide to the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) electronic quality certificates and the “Specifications for an Electronic Quality Certification System for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables”, jointly developed by Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The specifications provide a generic, best praxis description for the workflow, with the goal of supporting government officials and traders in controlling export of fresh fruit and vegetables in an electronic environment.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2022/18 is submitted by the secretariat to the twenty-eighth UN/CEFACT Plenary for information.



I. Background

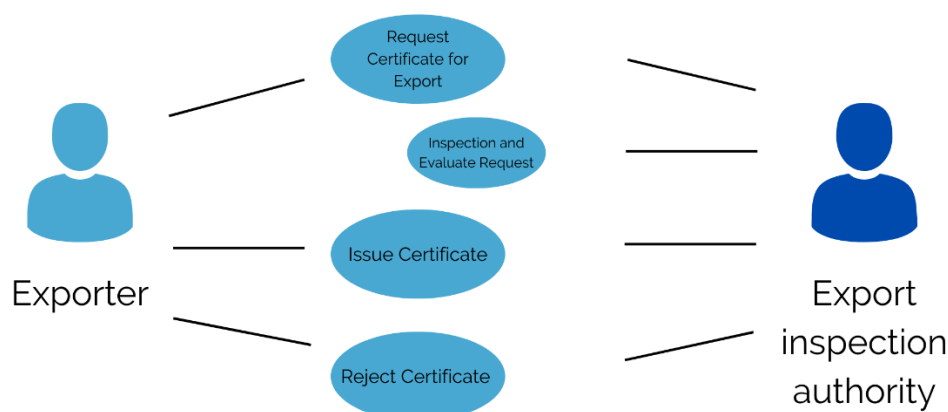
1. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) develops internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce, helps with their interpretation and promotes their practical application. The standards are based on existing national standards and industry and trade practices. In this process, ECE cooperates with the World Trade Organization (WTO) to ensure that the standard-setting process is consistent with WTO rules, as well as with other standard-setting bodies such as the FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards.
2. Through its United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), ECE develops standards for electronic agriculture licences, permits and certificates—for example the United Nations eCert standard for exchange of electronic sanitary and phytosanitary certificates, the UN/FLUX standard for exchange of electronic fisheries management information, and standards for electronic exchange for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).
3. UNCTAD, through its ASYCUDA Programme is directed at reforming the customs clearance process to speed up customs clearance by introducing computerization and simplifying procedures, thereby minimizing administrative costs to the business community and the economies of countries. ASYCUDA provides a computerized customs-management system that covers most foreign trade procedures. The system handles manifests and customs declarations, accounting procedures and warehousing manifest and suspense procedures. It generates detailed information about foreign trade transactions that can be used for economic analysis and planning.

II. ECE work on standards for the quality of fresh fruit and vegetables

4. ECE develops quality specifications for fresh fruit and vegetables through its Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. These standards assure that buyers receive a product of marketable quality that is suitable for human consumption. The application of ECE standards helps to market products, provides income opportunities to farmers and producers, and prevents food loss in the supply chain.
5. To further increase the benefits of ECE standards for agricultural trade UN/CEFACT recently developed the eQuality standard¹. This standard allows for the exchange of electronic quality certificates for fresh fruit and vegetables. The use of e-certificates instead of paper-based certification allows government agencies and traders to implement highly efficient electronic management and control processes for trade in fresh fruit and vegetables, thus increasing the freshness of the traded produce, reducing food waste along the supply chain, and introducing risk-based management process in the control of food safety.

¹ Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/uncefact/BRS/BRS-AGRI-eQuality_v1.pdf.

Figure 1:
Process of requesting a ECE eQuality certificate, UN/CEFACT



Source: ECE/UNCTAD

6. To further promote the use of e-business technology in agricultural trade ECE and UNCTAD have now developed the “Specifications for an Electronic Quality Certification System for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables”².

7. The aforementioned document provides a high-level functional description of the main business processes to be managed by an electronic conformity certificate management system for fresh fruit and vegetables.

8. The functional specification was developed jointly by ECE and UNCTAD and in close collaboration with government agencies from leading countries in agricultural exports. The processes described in this document are an example of international best practice in managing the certification process for fresh fruit and vegetables and introduces state-of-the-art control processes and electronic information exchange for this sector, including the following:

- Risk analysis process
- Decision-making and notification process
- Managing the conformance check process
 - Handle control results, including
 - Reporting compliance, defects, waivers, split lots
 - Automatic exchange of electronic data with national customs authorities (conformity certificate, waiver declaration and certificate of non-conformance data)
 - Automatic exchange of electronic data with competent authority in the country of importation (conformity certificate data)
 - Manage complaints process—follow-up inspection of the defective lot (reinspection)
- Issuance of (paper) conformity certificates process

9. The main beneficiaries of an e-quality certificate management system are the following:

- **Exporters** who can request certificates directly through an electronic system and receive updated information about the inspection and approval process. All

² Available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/eQualityCertificationSystem_0.pdf.

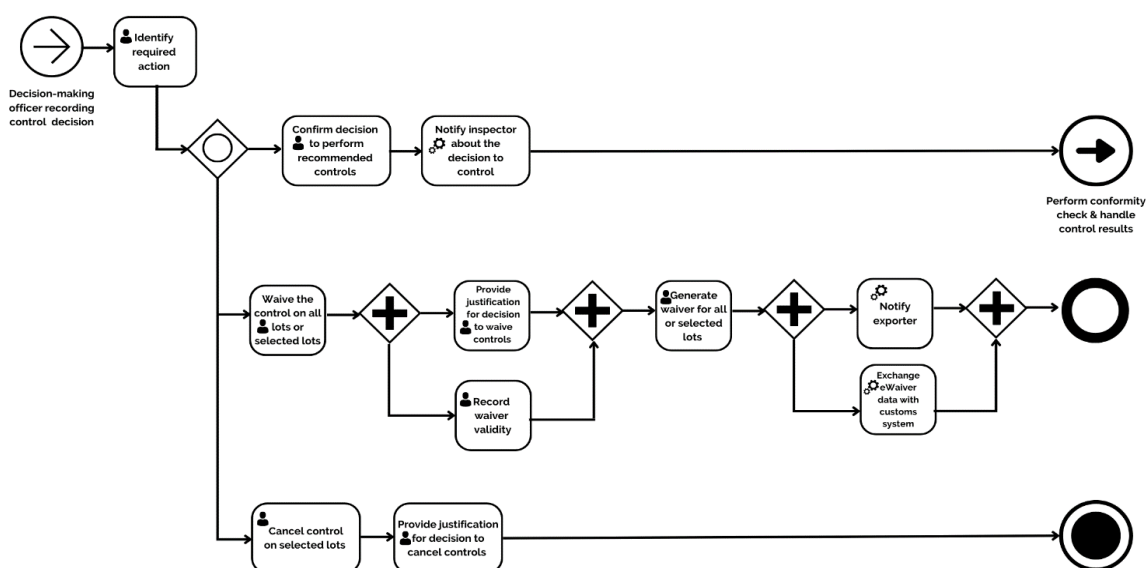
transactions and payments can be made online and certificates can be issued in electronic format.

- **Competent authorities** who can manage the inspection and approval process in an electronic workflow and use modern inspection and management approaches to focus their resources on the high-risk transactions. They also can interact with the economic operators in the process of presenting and inspecting the goods and national customs authorities in the process of sending certificate or waiver data.
- **National customs authorities** who interact with the competent authority via the system to request and receive conformity certificate information or waiver declarations. They also interact with the exporters (or their legal representatives) by receiving and processing the relevant customs declarations in electronic format.

10. The ECE and UNCTAD specification describes in a structured manner, the workflow, control processes, information exchanges and collaboration between the different actors in an efficient and well-managed quality control process for fresh fruit and vegetables.

Figure 2:

Example: workflow in the “decision making and control” process



Source: ECE/UNCTAD

III. How countries can use the ECE and UNCTAD Specifications for Electronic Quality Certification System for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

11. The specification provides a generic, best practice description for the workflow to control the export of fresh fruit and vegetables in an electronic environment. Government agencies and traders can use these specifications to analyse their existing control processes (as-is situation) and compare them with the best practice process descriptions, as provided in this document. This gap analysis can lead to trade facilitation improvements. The specification can also be used by government agencies as a high-level functional specification to develop a national electronic certification management system.

12. ECE and UNCTAD are also planning to seek funding for the development of a cloud-based electronic certification management system that can be made available to interested national government agencies to better manage certification of fresh fruits and vegetables.
