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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

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**Specialized Section on Standardization
of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables****Revised Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and
Vegetables****Submitted by the secretariat***Summary*

The following document is submitted to the Working Party for adoption as the revised United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.

The document is based on the document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2020/7 adopted by the Working Party through an intersessional approval procedure following the Virtual Informal Consultations of the Working Party in 2020. It incorporates revisions agreed by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (GE.1) as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/13 as well as modifications agreed during the seventy-first session of GE.1 in 2023, as reflected in ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2. It also integrates the proposed modification to the standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables as agreed by GE.1 at its 2023 session and contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2.



Scope

The UNECE Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (UNECE-MQS) provides a simple trading language that is easy to apply. UNECE-MQS assures when applied at certain marketing stages or all along the marketing chain that the recipient of the produce will receive a product of marketable quality and suitable for human consumption. Thus, the application of UNECE-MQS helps to prevent food loss; while providing all the necessary information about the product including country of origin.

The application of UNECE-MQS is voluntary. The application of UNECE-MQS does not replace or compete with any existing standard or legal provision in any country.

UNECE-MQS could

- be a first step of a country to introduce minimum marketing quality on all or specific marketing stages or
- be for voluntary application by producers and/or traders in countries where no national quality standards exist or
- facilitate the checking of the minimum quality.

Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables

I. Definition of produce

This minimum quality specifications apply to fresh fruit and vegetables (hereafter: produce) to be supplied fresh to the consumer, produce for industrial processing being excluded.

II. Provisions concerning quality

The purpose of the UNECE Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (UNECE-MQS) is to define the quality requirements for the produce after preparation and packaging.

However, if applied at stages following packing and/or export/dispatch, produce may show in relation to the requirements of the minimum marketing quality:

- a slight lack of freshness and turgidity
- a slight deterioration due to its development and tendency to perish.

The holder/seller of products may not display such products or offer them for sale, or deliver or market them in any manner other than in conformity with this minimum quality specifications. The holder/seller shall be responsible for observing such conformity.

A. Minimum requirements

The produce must be:

- intact; however, the following is allowed, provided the edibility and keeping quality is not affected:
 - hollowness provided the surrounding tissue is sound, fresh and not discoloured
 - slight damages and cracks
 - missing peduncle/calyx provided the adjacent tissue is not damaged
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption is excluded

- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter
- practically free from pests
- practically free from damage caused by pests
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste.

The development and condition of the produce must be such as to enable it:

- to withstand transportation and handling
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

B. Maturity requirements

Produce must be sufficiently developed and ripe for the intended purpose, but not overdeveloped or overripe.

III. Provisions concerning quality tolerances

At all marketing stages, tolerances in respect of quality shall be allowed in each lot for produce not satisfying the requirements of these specifications.

A total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of produce not satisfying the minimum requirements is allowed. Within this tolerance not more than 2 per cent in total may consist of produce affected by decay.

IV. Provisions concerning presentation

A. Uniformity

The contents of each package must contain only produce of the same botanical species and origin.

The visible part of the contents of the package must be representative of the entire contents.

B. Packaging

The produce must be packed in such a way as to protect the produce properly.

The package and/or materials used inside the package must be clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or stamps bearing trade specifications, is allowed, provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Stickers individually affixed to the produce shall be such that, when removed, they neither leave visible traces of glue nor lead to skin defects. Information lasered on single produce should not lead to flesh or skin defects.

Packages must be free of all foreign matter except for particles of packaging/cushioning material.

V. Provisions concerning marking

Each package¹ must bear the following particulars, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside.

A. Identification

Packer and/or dispatcher/exporter:

Name and physical address (e.g. street/city/region/postal code and, if different from the country of origin, the country) or a code mark officially recognized by the national authority² if the country applying such a system is listed in the UNECE Code Mark Registry.³ In the case where there is no street address available, the physical address can be made up of the name of the farm or facility, the nearest village, town, region, and postal code; or GPS coordinates and a PO Box address together with nearest town, region and country shall be accepted as a physical address.⁴

B. Nature of produce

- “Name of the produce” if the contents are not visible from the outside.

C. Origin of produce

- Country of origin⁵ and, optionally, district where grown, or national, regional or local place name.

D. Commercial specifications

- UNECE Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (UNECE-MQS).

E. Official control mark (optional)

Adopted 2020

Revised 2023

Note: Information on application of quality provisions and tolerances may be obtained from the OECD Scheme for the application of international standards for fruit and vegetables: <http://www.oecd.org/agriculture/fruit-vegetables/>.

¹ These marking provisions do not apply to sales packages presented in packages bearing these particulars. However, they do apply to sales packages (pre-packages) presented individually.

² The national legislation of a number of countries requires the explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/or dispatcher (or equivalent abbreviations)” has to be indicated in close connection with the code mark, and the code mark should be preceded by the ISO 3166 (alpha-2) country/area code of the recognizing country, if not the country of origin.

³ See <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/codemarkregistry.html>.

⁴ Reservation by the United States of America on the use of a PO Box address, as it may not allow facility inspections or rapid intervention in case of recalls, and is not part of its national labelling requirement related to packer and/or dispatcher/exporter.

⁵ The full or a commonly used name should be indicated.