



---

**Economic Commission for Europe****Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards****Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Specialized Section on Standardization  
of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables****Seventy-first session**

Geneva, 9–11 May 2023

**Report of the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section  
on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables****I. Introduction**

1. The seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables was chaired by Mr. Cyril Julius (South Africa).
2. Mr. Ariel Ivanier, 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), welcomed delegates to the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. 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 since 2022, including on the preparation of a draft standard for sweet potatoes. He highlighted the importance of the agenda items that would be discussed in the next two days including the recommendation for certain small fruits, the proposed revisions to several existing standards as well as to the standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables, on issues related to the World Customs Organization (WCO) Harmonized System (HS) codes for fruit and vegetables that are relevant for standards, as well as on the presentations by experts of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) on its ongoing work related to the digitalization of agricultural trade processes.

**II. Attendance**

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Brazil, Estonia (online), Finland (online), France (online), Germany, Hungary (online), Italy, Morocco, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Poland, Slovenia (online), South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America.
5. A representative of the European Commission participated in the session (online).



6. The following specialized programme participated in the session: Joint Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) Food Standards Programme (Codex Secretariat) (online).

7. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, and the World Customs Organization (WCO) (online).

8. Representatives from the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in the session: Committee Linking Entrepreneurship-Agriculture-Development (COLEAD), Hilfswerk International (online).

9. Representatives of the following associations, private sector organizations and research corporations also participated: AMV – Servicos e Consultoria Ltda (Brazil) (online), Central Asian Working Group to Promote Exports of Agricultural Produce from Central Asia (CAWG) (online), Embrapa (Brazil) (online), Freshfel Europe (online), Interfel (online).

### **III. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)**

10. The Specialized Section adopted the revised annotated provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/1/Rev.1) with a change in the timing of agenda item 4, to enable participation of WCO in the discussion.

11. The secretariat informed that an online channel with interpretation to English language had been made available, through a contribution by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to enable participation of experts from countries in Central Asia. Due to the technical nature of the meeting, the Specialized Section agreed to allow interventions by delegations participating online to be reflected in the report of the session.

### **IV. Matters arising since the last session (agenda item 2)**

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

12. The Officer in Charge of the Market Access Section informed of the outcomes of events since the last session of the Specialized Section, notably the session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which had been held on 27 and 28 June 2022 in a hybrid mode, and the seventy-seventh session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards held on 14–16 November 2022, also in hybrid mode. 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, as well as one new recommendation and four revised standards for fresh fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2022/2).

13. He drew attention to the seventieth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which was 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”. Prior to that, on 28 March 2023 a regional preparatory meeting for the 2023 Food Systems Stocktaking Moment had been held in collaboration with the United Nations Food Systems Coordination Hub and the Issue-based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems, of which ECE is a member, followed by the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development on 29 and 30 March 2023.

14. Looking ahead, 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.

**(b) Recent developments in other organizations**

15. The Specialized Section received an update from the representative of OECD, including on the publication in 2023 of new brochures on green bananas and passion fruit, as well as forthcoming brochures on berry fruits, broccoli, cauliflower, and papaya. She also informed of the upcoming peer review of the system for fruit and vegetable quality inspection in Germany, to be undertaken on 19–23 June 2023. OECD is also working with COLEAD on online learning and joint webinars.

16. The Specialized Section received an update from the Codex Secretariat of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme. She summarized the key outcomes of the 2022 session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables held on 25–29 April 2022. She informed that the 45th session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission (CAC45), which took place in November and December 2022, had adopted an amendment to the standard for bananas, the standards for onions and shallots and berry fruits at Step 5/8, and the draft standard for fresh dates at Step 5. The proposal for new work on developing a worldwide standard for Castilla lulo was not approved due to the limited volume of international trade. However, CAC45 had approved new work on developing a regional standard for Castilla lulo under the Codex Coordinating Committee for Latin America and Caribbean.

17. The Specialized Section received an update from the European Commission, in particular related to the revision of European Union (EU) marketing standards. The Commission had recently notified third countries of the draft regulations on marketing standards for fruit and vegetables as foreseen by the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade of the World Trade Organization. The alignment to ECE standards was also part of the draft regulations that was notified.

**V. Impact of agricultural quality standards on trade (agenda item 3)**

18. The ECE secretariat reported on the preliminary results of the survey launched in consultation with the Working Party Bureau to document the use of ECE standards and their link to relevant legislative frameworks in participating countries.

19. The Specialized Section took note of the summary of the survey findings. It requested delegations to send additional input to the secretariat via email by 31 May 2023.

**VI. Harmonized System codes for fresh fruits and vegetables relevant to the work of the Specialized Section (agenda item 4)**

20. The delegation of Brazil presented its proposal concerning Harmonized System (HS) codes for fresh fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/3). The proposal highlighted challenges linked to how HS codes for fresh and dried fruit and vegetables were structured and the impact this had on the ability to analyse trade at individual product level. The delegation of Brazil suggested that the Specialized Section seek to collaborate with WCO to improve the consistency and usability of the Harmonized System codification for fruit and vegetable products.

21. The representative of WCO referred to the five-year review cycle for HS codes, emphasizing the limited time left for submitting proposals for consideration within the current cycle. According to established procedures, proposals for revisions can be submitted to the Review Sub-Committee (RSC) by all Contracting Parties to the Harmonized System Convention. International organizations can also submit proposals. The deadline for submitting proposals to RSC is eight weeks before the starting date of each session. RSC would hold its next meeting in June 2023 and the last meeting of this cycle in November 2023, with changes considered for approval by the Harmonized System Committee in March 2024 and final approval by the Council in June 2024. The resulting revised nomenclature would enter into force on 1 January 2027. The representative of WCO suggested that the

delegation of Brazil works with the Brazilian customs authority in order to submit a proposal for revisions that could address the challenges encountered.

22. The Specialized Section thanked the representative of WCO for the useful explanation of how the HS code nomenclature is revised. The Specialized Section agreed with the assessment of the delegation of Brazil on the need for more granular HS codes for fresh and dried fruit and vegetables to enable better analysis of trade.

## **VII. Sustainable Development Goal 12 and sustainable practices (agenda item 5)**

### **(a) Food loss and waste prevention related to standards**

23. The delegation of Sweden informed the Specialized Section that the working group established in 2022 to conduct a review of selected ECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables from a food loss and waste prevention perspective met twice over the past year and started its work by discussing the standard for carrots. However, the work had not yet reached conclusions that could be presented to the Specialized Section.

24. The Specialized Section agreed for the continuation of the working group.

### **(b) Climate change – impacts on fruit and vegetable quality**

25. The representative of South Africa presented key results of a study on the impacts of climate change on the quality of fruit and vegetables produced in South Africa. The study had focused on citrus, plums, apples (key export products) and potatoes in three provinces of South Africa: Limpopo, Western and Eastern Cape.

26. The study included a qualitative survey, through which growers reported experiencing rising temperatures, less rainfall and an increasing frequency of extreme weather events. Respondents indicated having experienced reduced productivity and changes in fruit quality, including higher sunburn, higher acid values, and higher °Brix values. Three out of four growers indicated they found it necessary to use more advanced or more scientific production techniques to succeed in production, with 50 per cent of growers reporting using de-greening methods to improve the colour of citrus fruit, and 44 per cent reporting that they already had some orchards covered by nets.

27. The findings indicated that climate change may affect fruit phenology and result in a change in the time of ripening of fruit. It may also affect fruit quality, in some cases negatively and in some cases positively, as there are differences in how fruit of different types and in different geographical areas respond to climate change.

28. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation of South Africa for their presentation, noting the need for further studies on this topic.

## **VIII. Development of new standards (agenda item 6)**

### **(a) Certain small fruits**

29. The delegation of Brazil introduced the recommendation on certain small fruit (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/4), adopted at the 2022 session of the Working Party, and the editorial revisions proposed by the delegations of Brazil and Germany in the sections on definition of produce and on nature of produce, to ensure alignment of species/variety names.

30. The Specialized Section reviewed the recommendation, with the revisions proposed by Brazil and Germany. The delegation of Sweden suggested to delete the last sentence under definition of produce, which referred to surface to weight ratio. The delegation of Spain suggested changing the common name for *Spondias purpurea* L. from “Spanish plum” to

“Jocote”. An extensive discussion followed on use of country name terminology in common names of produce, with some delegations opposed to using them and others advocating keeping geographic names that are already widely used in trade.

31. The delegation of the United States raised the issue that the standard may need to indicate the non-edible nature of some skins or seeds of some of the small fruits. After some discussion, it was agreed that the issue of some small fruits having non-edible skin or seeds could be dealt with in connection with possible development of an OECD brochure on the standard.

32. The Specialized Section agreed to change the common name for *Spondias purpurea* L. in the standard from “Spanish plum” to “Jocote”, to delete the last sentence under definition of produce, and to include sizing as optional under commercial specifications. It decided to submit the recommendation with those changes to the Working Party for adoption as a new ECE standard for certain small fruits.

## **(b) Sweet potato**

33. The delegation of Germany introduced the draft standard on sweet potato (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/5), developed by a working group set up at the seventieth session of the Specialized Section in 2022. The group was chaired by Germany, and included France, South Africa, Spain, United States and COLEAD.

34. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposed standard paragraph by paragraph. It agreed to accept the proposal by Germany to move the bullet on broken and missing tips from classes to minimum requirements, and to add bullets on dehydrated tips under Class I and Class II. It further agreed to delete the reference to turgidity and to remove the bullet on practically free from sprouts in minimum requirements (as allowances for sprouts are mentioned under the classes), as proposed by Sweden. It also agreed to use the terms elongated and spherical/round shape, and to add a footnote to define spherical/round shape. The delegation of Belgium further proposed to reduce the minimum size to 25 mm if sized by diameter, or 50 mm if sized by length. After some discussion, it was agreed to maintain 38 mm if sized by diameter, and to revisit the standard again in three years to see if it needed changing. The 50 mm if sized by length was accepted by the Specialized Section.

35. The Specialized Section agreed to submit the draft standard with those changes to the Working Party for adoption as a new ECE standard for sweet potatoes.

## **IX. Review of existing standards (agenda item 7)**

### **(a) Discussion of proposals resulting from the last session**

36. Following discussions at its 2022 session, the Specialized Section considered revised proposals for amendments to the standards for peas and onions, and to the standard layout.

#### **(i) Peas**

37. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Sweden to amend the standard for peas (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/6). The proposal had been developed in line with the discussions in the 2022 session of the Specialized Section, which had agreed that instead of revising the standard for beans to allow for the trimming of ends of beans, it would revise the standard for peas to change that provision, to avoid food loss and waste.

38. The delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands suggested to add into the standard on peas the footnote on harvesting damage that exist in the standard on beans. The delegation of Belgium supported this and also suggested copying in the related paragraphs on quality tolerances related to harvesting damage from the standard on beans.

39. The Specialized Section agreed to the proposed revisions. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(ii) Onions**

40. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Spain to amend the provisions on sizing in the standard for onions (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/14). The proposal allows for an increased range in sizes of onions permitted in the same package, to make it easier to combine onions into one kilo packages.

41. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standard for onions accordingly. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(iii) Standard layout**

42. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to amend the Standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/15). The proposal was to allow GPS coordinates in the Standard layout under Section VI. Provisions concerning marking, part A. Identification.

43. The Specialized Section had an extensive discussion on the need for, and in some countries lack of, physical address, and on acceptable ways of identifying the location of the packer and/or dispatcher/exporter. In the end it agreed to add the text: "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.". The delegation of the United States expressed its reservation to the use of a PO Box address and requested that this reservation be included in the report of the session and in the Standard layout.

44. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the text of the Standard layout accordingly, with the reservation by the United States. It decided to forward the text of the revised Standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables to the Working Party for approval.

**(b) New proposals****(i) Asparagus**

45. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Germany to amend the standard for asparagus (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/7). The proposal aims to reduce food waste, as new production methods had enabled improving the quality of longer asparagus shoots. Therefore, it suggested to increase the maximum length of white and violet asparagus from 22 cm to 24 cm.

46. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standard for asparagus accordingly. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(ii) Broccoli**

47. The delegation of Germany introduced its proposal for revisions to the standard for broccoli (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/8). The delegation proposed to allow for slight defects in development in Class I and defects in development in Class II such as "cat eyes", or purplish colouring during winter months. These defects in development do not have an impact on the general quality conditions of the product but, if not clearly classified, could lead to rejections and thus food loss.

48. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standard for broccoli accordingly. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(iii) Kiwifruit**

49. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Germany to amend the standard for kiwifruit (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/9) allowing kiwifruits of different flesh colours to be packed together in a sales package.

50. Italy expressed some concerns about the proposal due to the different characteristics of the produce intended for the mixed package. The delegation will consult the national industry for further information to improve the standard.

51. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standard for kiwifruit accordingly. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(iv) Informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties**

52. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Germany to amend the informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/10). The delegation of South Africa highlighted that although it is an informal document, it is used by many traders and inspection bodies as a guide. It noted, however, that the document contained some inconsistencies, and suggested that a thorough review of it be undertaken.

53. The Specialized Section agreed to establish a working group consisting of Brazil, Germany, South Africa (rapporteur) and Spain to conduct a review of the informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties and report to the next session of the Specialized Section in 2024.

**(v) Pears**

54. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of France to amend the non-exhaustive list of large-fruited and summer pear varieties annexed to the standard for pears (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/11). The proposal was to list the Celina variety as a summer pear variety.

55. The Specialized Section decided to set up a working group to review the non-exhaustive list of large-fruited and summer pear varieties annexed to the standard for pears, and to identify alternative terminology and/or categories if needed. The working group would be composed of Belgium (rapporteur), France, Germany, Spain and United States.

**(vi) Sweet chestnuts**

56. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Germany to amend the standard for sweet chestnuts (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/12). The delegation proposed to include the species *Castanea mollissima* Blume (Chinese chestnut). It had also proposed to add the common name “Spanish chestnut” to sweet chestnut. The delegation of Spain requested not to include “Spanish chestnut” as a common name for sweet chestnuts. The session agreed to this request.

57. The Specialized Section agreed to include the species *Castanea mollissima* Blume (Chinese chestnut) in the standard for sweet chestnuts and not to add “Spanish chestnuts” as a common name for sweet chestnuts. It decided to forward the text of the revised standard to the Working Party for approval.

**(vii) Minimum Quality Specifications**

58. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of Belgium to amend the Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/13). The proposal, which was mainly of an editorial nature, was to remove the reference to classes under minimum requirements, as the Minimum Quality Specifications does not include any classes. Similarly, the delegation of Belgium proposed to remove the reference to size under tolerances.

59. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables accordingly, and to submit the revised text to the Working Party for approval.

**(c) Alignment of standards with the revised standard layout**

60. In November 2021, the Working Party adopted a revised Standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables. The existing standards thus need to be aligned with the new Standard layout.

61. The Specialized Section discussed the timing of this review. In view of the additional revisions to the Standard layout agreed by the Specialized Section at this session, it decided to undertake this review during the autumn of 2023.

## **X. Capacity-building and promotional activities (agenda item 8)**

62. The Specialized Section discussed how to increase awareness and use of the guidance contained in the “Code of Good Practice: Reducing food loss and ensuring optimum handling of fresh fruit and vegetables along the value chain”, which had been issued in January 2023 as an ECE publication in English, with French and Russian versions forthcoming (ECE/TRADE/470).

63. The delegation of Sweden informed that Sweden was considering a pilot project using a value chain approach. COLEAD offered to collaborate to transform the code into an e-learning tool, similar to what it was doing with OECD. The delegation of South Africa informed that it organizes training of farmers, and that it could use the Code in those trainings. The delegation of the United States suggested partnering with FAO for outreach purposes.

64. The representative of COLEAD informed about its recent name change, and its ongoing capacity-building activities. This included the new online platform AGRINFO (EU-funded programme), which compiles information on recent and upcoming EU regulatory changes. These are accessible by competent authorities, business membership and national farmer organizations from 143 low, lower-middle and upper-middle-income economies linked to the EU markets. The presentation would be made available on the web page of the meeting.

## **XI. Terms of Reference and Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections (agenda item 9)**

65. The secretariat provided an update on the progress of the work of the open working group set up to review the Terms of Reference and Working Procedures and invited the views of delegations on the Terms of Reference (ECE/CTCS/2019/12) and the initial proposals for revisions to it (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/INF.2), as well as proposals for the Working Procedures, as input to the work of the open working group.

66. The Specialized Section reviewed the initial proposals for revisions to the Terms of Reference and provided some suggestions for rewording. The secretariat will convey the suggestions to the open working group. Delegations were invited to provide proposals for the Working Procedures in writing to the secretariat by 31 May 2023.

## **XII. Electronic quality certificates and digitalization (agenda item 10)**

67. The Specialized Section heard a presentation of UN/CEFACT work in the agricultural domain and discussed with UN/CEFACT experts on the digitalization of agricultural trade processes.

68. The Specialized Section thanked the UN/CEFACT experts for the presentation. It welcomed the exchange of experiences on issues of relevance to both intergovernmental bodies, in light of cross-cutting priorities on digitalization and green transformations advanced by ECE at the seventieth session of the Commission.



### **XIII. Future work (agenda item 11)**

69. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for its 2024 session:

- an evaluation of the ECE standards for cut flowers for possible revision
- continuation of the work in the working group to review standards from a food loss and waste perspective
- a review of the non-exhaustive list of large-fruited and summer pear varieties annexed to the standard for pears by the working group consisting of Belgium (rapporteur), France, Germany, Spain and United States
- a review of the informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties by the working group consisting of Brazil, Germany, South Africa (rapporteur) and Spain.

70. Any other proposals for future work should be sent to the secretariat by 15 January 2024.

### **XIV. Other business (agenda item 12)**

71. The coordinator of the Central Asian Working Group to Promote Exports of Agricultural Produce from Central Asia (CAWG) informed the Specialized Section that the group had developed explanatory posters which it had shared with the secretariat. The posters covered primarily dry and dried produce, but also included some fresh produce.

72. The delegation of Switzerland informed that Switzerland had banned the use of some pesticides, and as a result was currently reviewing the provisions of standards for over 60 types of vegetables.

73. The secretariat highlighted the issue of outdated versions of standards available on the website in languages other than three ECE official languages. The Specialized Section suggested to remove outdated versions, after consulting the respective delegations. In future, when a standard is updated, the secretariat would inform delegations about the update and agree with relevant delegations on the timeline for the update of translated versions.

### **XV. Election of officers (agenda item 13)**

74. The Specialized Section re-elected Mr. Cyril Julius (South Africa) as its Chairperson and Ms. Karen Spruijt-de Gelder (Kingdom of the Netherlands) as its Vice-Chairperson for a one-year period.

### **XVI. Adoption of the report (agenda item 14)**

75. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its seventy-first session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2) in session.

---