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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

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Terms of Reference and Working Procedures of the Working Party

Revised Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards*

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The document contains the proposed revised Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. It is submitted to the Working Party for discussion and adoption.

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 (SCTCS) and the Executive Committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. With the next revision due for consideration by SCTCS at its 2024 meeting, in 2022 the Working Party decided to set up an open working group to review the Terms of Reference (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2022/2).

The open working group prepared a proposal and shared it with all Specialized Sections for comments and suggestions. The current document includes proposed revisions as agreed by the open working group at its meeting on 28 February 2023 and additional changes proposed by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables on 9–11 May 2023.

* This document was submitted late for processing due to resource constraints.



Terms of Reference

1. Mission Statement: The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards develops, interprets and promotes the application of internationally agreed commercial quality standards for meat and eggs, seed potatoes, fresh fruit and vegetables, and for dry and dried produce. It also develops explanatory guidance for the agricultural produce standards to facilitate national and international trade of agricultural products.
2. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (hereinafter referred to as WP.7), acting within the framework of the mandates and policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and subject to the general supervision of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the Trade subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards, related guidance material, training, sustainable production and consumption patterns for an inclusive economic growth, as well as promotion of greater uptake of international standards by countries in order to enable the implementation of internationally harmonized regulatory processes.
3. In order to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), WP.7 considers the needs of Governments, the private sector and consumers. Its activities along with those of its Specialized Sections contribute directly to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs. The normative work of WP.7 is primarily technical in nature and complements that of its member countries. WP.7 work is undertaken and carried out in partnership with other policy- and standard-setting international bodies, where appropriate.
4. The aim of its work is to develop:
 - Market transparency – define a common trading language, with minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce that facilitate fair and sustainable trade, reduce technical barriers to trade and contribute to economic growth [SDG 8].
 - Food security – promote the sustainable production, trade, and consumption of quality agricultural produce, including practices to prevent and/or reduce food loss and waste [SDG 2, 12].
 - Collaboration – undertake capacity-building activities in cooperation with other public and private sector international bodies (in support of the previous two activities) [SDG 17].
5. The Working Party operates under the ECE Rules of Procedure and the Guidelines on procedures and practices for ECE bodies, as agreed in Commission Decision A(65) (E/2013/37-E/ECE/1464, Annex III, Appendix III).
6. 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.
7. Relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector can also be invited as observers in compliance with the relevant United Nations rules and practices.
8. The Working Party defines its working procedures and those of its Specialized Sections.
9. The Working Party shall:
 - Develop internationally agreed commercial quality standards for agricultural produce taking into consideration national standards and industry and trade practices for fresh fruit and vegetables (including early and ware potatoes); dry and dried produce (dried fruits and nuts); seed potatoes; meat; and eggs. The Working Party develops standards and may develop explanatory guidance on request from member countries. However, some of this work may be subject to the availability of resources.
 - Revise and amend existing standards to reflect changing production, trading and marketing conditions, taking SDG targets into consideration.

- Undertake activities to harmonize the international application of its standards by developing and disseminating interpretative and guidance material.
- Collect, communicate, and analyse, when necessary, production, trade and inspection practices and other areas relevant to sustainable development, implementation and promotion of its standards and guidance material.
- Undertake training activities targeted at public and private sectors to support sustainable development of agricultural production and trade.
- Promote uniform quality-control procedures, including the use of a common quality conformity certificate in cooperation with governmental, intergovernmental and other organizations implementing standards to achieve uniformity of inspection methods and comparability of results.
- Cooperate with other international organizations and standard-setting bodies that develop and interpret agricultural quality standards for trade facilitation and consumer protection, such as relevant commodity committees of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, to avoid duplication of work and divergence in standards and their interpretation. Ensure that the standard-setting process is consistent with relevant international rules such as those by the World Trade Organization and the International Plant Protection Convention.
- Facilitate communication between private and public stakeholder organizations with an interest in the agricultural standards, thereby providing for the best and modern trade practices in the standard development process that facilitates transparency along with fair and sustainable trade.

10. The Working Party 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.
