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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

### Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

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Item 12 of the provisional agenda

**Programme of work of the Working Party for 2024**

## **Programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2024\***

**Submitted by the secretariat**

### *Summary*

This document is submitted to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for adoption.

The document contains the programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and its Specialized Sections on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, Dry and Dried Produce, Seed Potatoes and Meat for 2024. It is based on the Trade subprogramme's draft programme of work for 2024, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/2023/10, endorsed at the eighth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards on 26 and 27 June 2023.

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



## I. Introduction

1. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (hereinafter referred to as the Working Party), established by the Geneva Protocol/Geneva Understanding on Agricultural Quality Standards<sup>1</sup> (1958. Rev. 1965, 1985 and 2015) and acting within the framework of the mandates and policies of the United Nations and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), and under the overall guidance of the ECE Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards, is entrusted with the implementation of the work under the ECE Trade subprogramme covering agricultural quality standards taking into account sustainable production, trade and consumption patterns. The work complements and is carried out in partnership with work undertaken by other international bodies.

2. The objective, the strategy, the planned results and the deliverables in the programme of work correspond to those contained in the Proposed programme budget for 2024 for ECE (A/78/6 (Sect. 20)) (see deliverables in Annex). The work of the subprogramme is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work is vested in and serviced by the Agricultural Quality Standards Unit, Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division.

3. As per the Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (2018), contained in document ECE/CTCS/2019/12 endorsed by the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards at its fifth session, the aim of its work is to foster:

- (a) Market transparency – define a common trading language, with minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce that facilitate fair and sustainable trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and contribute to economic growth (SDG 8);
- (b) Food security – promote the sustainable production and consumption of quality agricultural produce, including the prevention of food loss (SDG 2, SDG 12);
- (c) Collaboration – undertake capacity-building activities in cooperation with other public and private sector international bodies (in support of the previous two activities) (SDG 17).

4. As outlined in the Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (2018), 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). Moreover, in accordance with Rule 20 of the ECE Rules of Procedure,<sup>2</sup> the Working Party has established Working Procedures for its work, last revised in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

5. 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. In addition, representatives from relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, can also be invited as observers, in compliance with the United Nations rules and practices in this respect.

6. The Working Party implements its programme of work in light of decisions taken by its parent bodies, including member States' decisions on cross-cutting priority themes adopted at the biennial sessions of the Commission. This includes decision B(69) on circular economy and the sustainable use of natural resources (sixty-ninth session of the Commission, held on 20 and 21 April 2021, (E/ECE/1494)), and decision B(70) on digital and green transformations in support of the sustainable development in the region of the Economic

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<sup>1</sup> Geneva Protocol on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Fruit, since 2015 replaced and superseded by the Geneva Understanding on Agricultural Quality Standards.

<sup>2</sup> Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure of the Economic Commission for Europe (E/ECE/778/Rev.6, 2006). Rule 20: "Subsidiary Bodies shall adopt their own rules of procedure unless otherwise decided by the Commission".

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see the Geneva Understanding on Agricultural Quality Standards, the Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (2018), and the Working Procedures available at: <https://unece.org/working-procedures-and-terms-reference>.

Commission for Europe (seventieth session of the Commission, held on 18 and 19 April 2023 (E/ECE/1503)).

## **II. Draft programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2024**

### **A. Market transparency: define a common trading language, with minimum quality requirements for agricultural produce that facilitate fair and sustainable trade, prevent technical barriers to trade and contribute to economic growth**

7. During 2024, the Working Party will provide guidance on the priorities for future work identified by the Specialized Sections, including potential synergies and, whenever possible, additional areas of work. The Working Party shall review and adopt proposed new and revised agricultural quality standards arising from the Specialized Sections and associated guidance material, thus ensuring that the ECE agricultural quality standards remain relevant and continue to facilitate trade, while simultaneously supporting the achievement of SDGs.

### **B. Food security and sustainability: promote sustainable production and consumption of quality agricultural produce, including the prevention of food loss and waste**

8. The Working Party has aligned its work with SDGs and, where possible, focus on improving sustainable production and trade, particularly through its focus on the prevention of food loss and waste and related areas of work, in cooperation with other international organizations, the private sector and civil society. This has resulted in the organization of international conferences on cross-cutting themes involving all four Specialized Sections and the promotion of traceability of agricultural produce, food loss prevention, sustainable food production and standards at fora at national and international levels. This work supports SDG Target 12.3 which sets out to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses by 2030.

9. In 2024, the Working Party will continue its work related to the implementation of Goal 12 and its Target 12.3 and related SDGs. In particular, the Working Party will work:

- with its Specialized Sections on intensifying efforts to review and compile practical measures and tools to help agricultural supply chain participants, in products covered by the Specialized Sections, to prevent and avoid food loss and waste
- in cooperation with its Specialized Sections encourage the development of new tools and guidelines and to organize international conferences/workshops to promote the implementation and use of standards by both private and public sectors.

Note: Additional emerging topics under section B. in line with the Working Party's mandate may be introduced and/or defined by delegations during in-session discussions.

### **C. Collaboration: undertake capacity-building and awareness-raising activities in cooperation with other public and private sector international bodies (in support of the previous two activities)**

10. In 2024, the Working Party will undertake at least three days of capacity-building activities in collaboration with its Specialized Sections, subject to available resources. The Specialized Sections will do so in cooperation with relevant ECE partners, other international organizations, the private sector and civil society to achieve synergies, coherence and impact for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **III. Planned activities during 2024**

#### **A. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**

11. At its seventy-first session, held on 9–11 May 2023, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables decided to place the following items on its agenda for 2024:

- 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
- Review of the non-exhaustive list of large-fruited and summer pear varieties annexed to the standard for pears
- Review of the informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties.

#### **B. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce**

12. At its seventieth session, held on 14–16 June 2023, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce decided to place the following items on its agenda for 2024:

- Development of a draft standard on whole dried rosehip
- Finalization of explanatory posters developed by the Central Asian Working Group to Promote Exports of Agricultural Produce (CAWG) (covering dried persimmons, dried melons, raw and roasted inshell peanuts, raw and roasted peanut kernels), for adoption as ECE posters
- Alignment of existing standards with the standard layout, starting with the most used older standards (almonds (inshell and blanched kernels), hazelnuts (inshell and kernels), macadamia nuts (inshell and kernels), dried tomatoes)
- Development of a Code of Good Practice for food loss and waste reduction in dry and dried produce
- Capacity-building in Central Asia in response to the request from CAWG, with Hilfswerk International and the United Nations Development Programme, and in Valencia, Spain, with the International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC)
- Ad hoc working group to discuss how to further document the impact of the standards.

#### **C. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes**

13. At its fiftieth session, held on 16 and 17 March 2023, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes decided to place the following items on its agenda for 2024:

- Revision of the entire Standard for Seed Potatoes
- Finalization of the 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 a position paper on herbicide carry-over
- Discussions on true potato seeds and plantlets, and on new and emerging diseases and issues (potato mop-top virus, testing dormant tubers for viruses, Potato Spindle Tuber Viroid (PSTVd), potato wart, *Liberibacter*, potato leafroll virus (PLRV) and insecticides, etc.)
- Sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification

- Impact of climate change on potato production.

#### **D. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat**

14. At its thirty-first session, held on 28 and 29 August 2023, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat decided to place the following items on its agenda for 2024:

- Review of the Standard for ovine meat – carcasses and cuts
- Review of the Standard for chicken meat – carcasses and parts
- Continued work on integrating HS codes into meat standards
- Follow-up to the survey on the use of meat standards
- Development of a proposal for full digitization of the Standard on bovine meat – carcasses and cuts
- Seminar on sustainable meat and livestock, broadening to other types of meat and including economic and animal welfare aspects.

#### **E. Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**

15. At its seventy-eighth session, to be held on 13–15 November 2023, the Working Party will review the work of the Specialized Sections, and review standards presented for adoption. The Working Party will also discuss and agree on its future activities to be prioritized, including in support of guidance and policy advice for food loss and waste reduction, as well as potential activities in support of the theme of the 2023 session of ECE “Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe”.

### **IV. Additional resources being sought**

16. In 2022, the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability, and integration of cross-cutting issues in subprogramme 6 for 2018–2021. The evaluation was part of the United Nations Secretariat’s regular programme periodically evaluating selected aspects of its operations. Amongst recommendations, it was suggested that the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of ECE develop divisional action plans to operationalize ECE strategies on resource mobilization, partnerships, and technical cooperation. In response to these findings, the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards at its eighth session (Geneva, 26 and 27 June 2023) encouraged the secretariat to continue seeking extrabudgetary funding for demand-driven capacity-building and technical assistance activities.

17. ECE member States and other prospective donors are encouraged to contribute additional resources to facilitate response to the increasing demand to deliver technical cooperation in the areas covered by WP.7. This includes, among others, to:

- respond to requests for capacity-building by member States, and expand online learning resources;
- expand the work on food loss and waste and sustainable consumption and production, as appropriate.

## Annex

### Deliverables to be implemented in 2024

1. The mandate of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and its Specialized Sections provide the legislative framework for its deliverables. The table below lists all deliverables, by category and subcategory, for the year 2024 that are expected to contribute to the attainment of the objective of WP.7 stated above. This table is an excerpt from the table of deliverables for 2024 for the subprogramme 6 Trade as contained in the Proposed programme budget for 2024 for ECE (A/78/6 (Sect. 20)).

2. The deliverables of the subprogramme fall into the following main categories: (a) facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert groups; (b) generation and transfer of knowledge, including field and technical cooperation projects, seminars, workshops and training events, and publications and technical material; (c) other substantive deliverables; and (d) communication deliverables.

<i>Deliverables</i>	<i>2024 (planned)</i>
<b>A. Facilitation of the intergovernmental process and expert bodies</b>	
<b>Parliamentary documentation</b> (number of documents)	
3. Documentation for the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards	60
<b>Substantive services for meetings</b> (number of three-hour meetings)	
7. Meetings of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its specialized sections	26
<b>B. Generation and transfer of knowledge</b>	
<b>Field and technical cooperation projects</b> (number of projects)	
11. Project on food loss reduction in agriculture supply chains	1
<b>Seminars, workshops and training events</b> (number of days)	
14. Seminars for standardization and inspection agencies and other stakeholders in transition economies and developing countries in the ECE region or beyond on ECE agricultural quality standards	3
<b>Publications</b> (number of publications)	
20. On agricultural trade and supply chains	1
<b>Technical materials</b> (number of materials)	
25. Standards and guidelines on agricultural quality	4
<b>C. Substantive deliverables</b>	
<b>Consultation, advice and advocacy:</b> advisory services to government officials and other stakeholders in ECE member States on trade facilitation and electronic business, agricultural quality standards, regulatory cooperation and standardization and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade	
<b>Fact-finding, monitoring and investigating missions:</b> fact-finding missions in ECE member States on trade facilitation and electronic business, agricultural quality standards, regulatory cooperation and standardization and regulatory and procedural barriers to trade	
<b>D. Communication deliverables</b>	
<b>Outreach programmes, special events and information materials:</b> Booklets, fact sheets, information brochures.	
<b>External and media relations:</b> press releases, publication launch events and articles in external newsletters intended for government officials and experts working on trade.	
<b>Digital platforms and multimedia content:</b> update and maintenance of the subprogramme's website.	