



---

**Economic Commission for Europe****Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards****Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Seventy-eighth session**

Geneva, 13–15 November 2023

**Report of the seventy-eighth session of the Working Party on  
Agricultural Quality Standards****I. Introduction**

1. The seventy-eighth session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) was chaired by Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland). The session was held in person with the possibility of remote connection for the seminar/roundtable discussions under agenda item 10.
2. The Chairperson welcomed participants to the meeting. She thanked delegates for travelling and reinforced the importance of in-person attendance for approving decisions on the programme of work.
3. Mr. Ariel Ivanier, Chief (Officer in Charge) of the Market Access Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), welcomed delegates to the session. He recalled the history of the Working Party and highlighted the continued relevance of the WP.7 work on agricultural quality standards for facilitating trade and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He recalled that WP.7 is one of the longest-standing work streams of ECE, with meetings tracing back seven decades, and some of the standards celebrating 60-year anniversaries recently. It is also one that is clearly impactful. The standards that WP.7 develops facilitate trade and bring clarity to consumers, while helping to match expectations between buyers and sellers. He further highlighted the importance of the work of the Working Party for the sustainability of food systems, which has been a core focus of the United Nations since the initial Food Systems Summit held in 2021, especially with regards to food loss and waste (FLW). He also referred to efforts to incorporate the theme of the recent ECE session – digital and green transformations – in the workstream of the Working Party and referred that joint work has been undergoing with the sister body the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and in cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in developing a functional specification for an electronic conformity certificate management system (eQuality). The functional specification, which was finalized at the end of 2021, can be used by Governments to develop or enhance their in-house systems for conformity certificate management. He thanked delegates for their active involvement and support to this work.



## II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following United Nations Member States attended the meeting: Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nigeria, Poland, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States of America.

5. A representative of the European Commission participated in the session.

6. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: Joint Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)/World Health Organization (WHO) Food Standards Programme (Codex Secretariat), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables.

7. Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations, business associations, academia, and private sector entities also attended: Central Asian Working Group to Promote Exports of Agricultural Produce from Central Asia (CAWG) (pre-recorded video), Committee Linking Entrepreneurship-Agriculture-Development (COLEAD), International Nut and Dried Fruit Council (INC), One Goal Initiative.

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

8. **Decision 1:** The Working Party adopted the revised annotated provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/1/Rev.1). The Working Party also agreed to allow for online interventions under the seminar portion of agenda item 10 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

9. The Chief (Officer in Charge) of the Market Access Section, ECTD of ECE provided an overview of the achievements of the Working Party over the past years, and of recent and forthcoming intergovernmental meetings and other matters of relevance to the work of the Working Party. He informed that in 2022, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted a regular evaluation of subprogrammes 4 (Economic cooperation and integration) and 6 (Trade). The report was published in March 2023. The objective was to assess the relevance, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability and integration of cross-cutting considerations. He informed that according to the findings of the evaluation, the work of ECTD was considered aligned with its mandate. The Division largely responded to specific member States' requests and had "found its niche in a crowded space of trade and economic cooperation". Of relevance to the work of the Working Party the evaluation found that the Division's work on facilitating norms and standards setting was largely effective, and that there were numerous instances of norms and standards being adopted into national policies and legislation, such as in the case of fresh fruit and vegetables standards in the European Union.

10. He informed that the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards had met on 26 and 27 June 2023 and had endorsed the standards and recommendations adopted by the Working Party at its 2022 session. Prior to that, the seventieth session of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe had been held under the theme "Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe" (Geneva, 18 and 19 April 2023), the outcomes of which will shape the work of ECE normative work and technical assistance pillars in the coming two years. A regional preparatory meeting for the 2023 Food Systems Stocktaking Moment (28 March 2023) was also 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.

11. He also informed about the work of the secretariat on circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources. As part of an ECE project on circular economy, several policy papers had been prepared and a regional policy dialogue had been held in Serbia on 18 and 19 October 2023. Under the project, a policy paper on circular economy in agriculture and food with a focus on FLW reduction and management had been developed, and will be finalized in 2024. The secretariat will also be supporting the Government of Serbia in developing a national road map on circular economy in the agri-food sector.

12. Next year, the ninth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards is scheduled to take place on 26–28 June 2024 in Geneva. The Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards will also meet in Geneva on 11–13 November 2024.

13. **Decision 2:** The Working Party took note of the evaluation by the Office of Internal Oversight Services as contained in document E/AC.51/2023/5 and welcomed the findings and recommendations of the evaluation. It noted with satisfaction that the evaluation had found that the work of the Division was “considered aligned with its mandate”, that it “had found its niche in a crowded space of trade and economic cooperation”, that “the Division’s work on facilitating norms and standards setting was largely effective”, and that “there were numerous instances of norms and standards being adopted into national policies and legislation”, such as in the case of fresh fruit and vegetables standards in the European Union.

## (b) Recent developments in other organizations

14. The representative of the Codex Secretariat indicated that ongoing work of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CCFFV) had been reported to the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and that no work on dry and dried produce was currently underway due to the Codex Committee on Processed Fruits and Vegetables (CCPFV) having been adjourned *sine die*. The representative further informed on cross-sectoral discussions at the level of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and its Executive Committee that may impact the work of its subsidiary bodies, including those related to agricultural quality standards such as CCFFV. She referred in particular to: the blueprint on the future of Codex related to new working modalities available to facilitate work progress in Codex committees based on the experience gained and changes needed for Codex to remain active and responsive during the COVID-19 pandemic; the need for committees to consider new food and production systems within the current structures and procedures in order for Codex to remain relevant as an international standards setting organization; and the ongoing exercise on monitoring the use and impact of Codex standards with a view to facilitate the understanding and implementation of Codex standards by members and other stakeholders. The representative invited countries to comment on these cross-sectoral issues through their Codex Contact Points in order to improve Codex work for the future.

15. The representative of OECD provided an update on activities of the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme, emphasizing the importance of ECE standards for global trade and highlighting the complementary nature of the work of ECE and OECD, with OECD developing material that helps countries have a uniform interpretation of the standards. Over the past year, OECD had finalized new brochures on passion fruit, papaya, root vegetables and bananas, and worked on developing a brochure on cauliflower. It had also conducted several in-person trainings on inspections in collaboration with partners, including its first regional capacity-building workshop for the Africa region, organized with the Kenya Plant Health Inspectorate Service (KEPHIS) in Kenya, and is working with COLEAD on online learning and joint webinars. In 2023, it conducted a peer review of the German inspection system, with the participation of experts from Italy and Kenya as peer reviewers. New areas of work include Internet sales, AI/applications, e-learning, and joint studies.

16. The representative of the European Commission delivered a presentation on the revisions to European Union (EU) legislation on marketing standards. In June 2023, the European Commission launched a consultation process on 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 (WTO). The revised legislation was published on 3

November 2023. The revised document maintained the dynamic link with ECE standards. He elaborated on the adopted changes, which include a requirement for origin labelling to be extended to products that used to be exempted, such as dry and dried produce. The revised legislation also clarifies that fresh products having undergone preparations beyond the extent of trimming should bear the indication of origin. To limit confusion, the indication of origin needs to be larger/more visible than that of packer/dispatcher or variety when that variety recalls a location. To reduce food waste, the legislation now allows for exemptions from the application of marketing standards by the retailer for products intended for processing provided it is indicated, or for products that are sold by the producer directly to consumers in a defined area. The third case where general rules do not apply is in the case of *force majeure*. The new legislation also stipulates that products intended for donation only need to comply with the general marketing standards except for the labelling provisions. Those products need to bear a clear indication that they are for donation to prevent a return on the market. To give some time for the sector to adjust, the new legislation will only enter into force on 1 January 2025 (except for the provisions on donation, which enter into force on 23 November 2023).

17. The Working Party received an update (via pre-recorded video) from CAWG, whose membership consists of public and private organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, on activities and results of the regional platform in 2023. CAWG has developed several explanatory posters on dry and dried produce, which were discussed in the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce and which will be shared in 2024 for review and comments. CAWG has also proposed the development of an ECE standard for whole dried rosehip and is now taking the lead on developing a draft standard to be discussed at the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce in 2024. The CAWG annual meeting was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 9 and 10 October 2023, discussing the organization of information sessions, seminars and training on commodity quality standards for fresh horticultural products and for dry and dried products, as well as the preparation of explanatory and illustrative materials and publications on commodity quality and food safety of agricultural products. Regarding future plans, CAWG is planning to organize information sessions, training, and workshops with groups of agricultural producers. It also plans to organize joint regional trainings on sustainable quality assurance for dried and dried products for producers and consultants from Central Asian countries jointly with ECE and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

18. The representatives of INC informed the Working Party of their recent activities to promote nuts and dried fruit and to advance sustainability in the industry. INC has been taking action on several fronts, including establishing consumer campaigns and initiating nut and health research. INC is also arguing for lowering trade barriers on nuts and dried fruit. INC experts expressed their strong support for the ECE standards as the internationally accepted minimum quality standards. They also informed that, as agreed in the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, a small group led by INC will work to develop a code of good practice for dry and dried produce. INC informed that it provides value-added services through the collection of global statistics and reporting on nuts and dried fruit production and trade. INC will hold its next congress in Vancouver, Canada, in May 2024. The INC expressed that it was proud of its long-term collaboration with ECE, dating back some 40 years. They also informed that the sector is now approaching 3 billion consumers worldwide.

## **V. Terms of Reference and Working Procedures of the Working Party (agenda item 3)**

19. The Chairperson introduced the item, informing that as per its Terms of Reference, the Working Party shall review its Terms of Reference every five years and submit it for approval to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and the Executive Committee of ECE. With the review due for consideration by the Steering Committee at its 2024 session, the Working Party in 2022 decided to set up an open working group to review the Terms of Reference. It also decided to review its Working Procedures and prepare a

proposal for discussion in the Specialized Sections. The meetings of the open working group included Brazil, Germany, Poland, Spain, and the United States of America.

20. The Chairperson introduced the proposed changes to the Terms of Reference, highlighting that the revised document is clearer in terms of the technical scope of the work of WP.7. She informed that as a final step, an informal meeting was held on the morning of 13 November 2023 which all delegations present at the WP.7 session had been invited to attend, in which delegates proposed some additional changes to the document. WP.7 reviewed the document on the screen, with the changes proposed in track-change mode. The Working Party agreed with the changes proposed in the informal meeting and did not propose any further amendments.

21. **Decision 3:** The Working Party approved the revised Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/3, with the changes agreed in session, and recommended the renewal of its mandate until the end of 2028. The revised Terms of Reference will be submitted to the ninth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards in June 2024 for adoption.

22. The Chairperson informed that while the Terms of Reference of the Working Party need to be reviewed every 5 years, its working procedures are not required to undergo this periodic review. She informed that the open working group worked on this document in several online meetings, with the support of the secretariat. Key changes included clarifying the meaning of consensus in the context of decision-making between official delegations in WP.7 and clearer timelines for document preparations. The last meeting of the open working group had been held just before the WP.7 session. Thus, the Chairperson informed the meeting that the open working group plans to collect comments at this WP.7 session, and in writing after the session and to continue working on the document over the coming year.

23. **Decision 4:** The Working Party thanked the open working group for its work on the draft revised Working Procedures as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/INF.2. It requested the Specialized Sections to send comments in the coming year and requested the open working group with the assistance of the secretariat to prepare the draft revised Working Procedures and submit them for consideration by the Working Party at its session in 2024.

## **VI. Use and impact of the agricultural quality standards and links to legislative frameworks (agenda item 4)**

24. The secretariat reported on the findings of the survey launched in consultation with the Bureau of the Working Party to document the use of ECE standards and their link to relevant legislative frameworks in participating countries (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/5). The Working Party was invited to provide suggestions for how to further document the use and impact of the standards.

25. The delegation of Slovakia indicated that many non-EU countries exporting to Europe are interested in ECE standards and need capacity-building on them, including countries in Africa. Similarly, some countries in the Western Balkan region are starting to introduce ECE standards, while working to harmonize legislation with EU. The delegation of Germany supported the suggestion of capacity-building in the Western Balkan region to facilitate trade and economic integration. The delegation of South Africa noted that currently in Africa ECE standards are used to access the EU market, but that ECE standards are not used in domestic markets. It also supported the need for increased promotion of the standards, as the standards can potentially increase income for producers. This was also highlighted by the delegation of Sweden.

26. The delegation of the United States commended the survey for being timely and very informative. It suggested to assess impact through looking at import data for products for which inspections are mandatory. It also noted that many countries adopting standards for meat cuts and dry and dried produce use ECE standards as reference standards, as seen through the WTO notification process.

27. The representative of INC also expressed support for the need for capacity-building in non-EU countries, noting they are also becoming importers. INC also offered to circulate the questionnaire to its network of 74 “INC ambassadors” to survey the use of ECE standards in commercial contracts. It further noted that globalization has increased the importance of global standards, as per INC experience with China and India, who are both major exporters and importers.

28. The representative of COLEAD offered the organization’s support in carrying out surveys through their network to collect data. He noted that the ECE standards are very much used by exporters in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, as operators use the most advantageous standards. He suggested that ECE and OECD work together on capacity-building in other regions, including Africa, for which COLEAD stands ready to provide assistance.

29. **Decision 5:** The Working Party took note of the results of the survey of WP.7 delegates on the use of ECE standards and their link to relevant legislative frameworks in participating countries, conducted in early 2023 by the secretariat in consultation with the Working Party Bureau. It emphasized the importance and continued relevance of the standards for facilitating trade.

## **VII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (agenda item 5)**

30. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables reported on progress over the past year and the outcome of its seventy-first session held on 9–11 May 2023, as reflected in the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2).

31. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section finalized a new standard for sweet potatoes and agreed to submit the recommendation for certain small fruits for adoption as a standard. It also agreed on revisions to the standards for asparagus, broccoli, kiwifruit, onions, peas, sweet chestnuts and to the Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. Finally, it agreed on changes to the Standard layout for United Nations Economic Commission for Europe standards on fresh fruit and vegetables.

32. As regards future work, the Specialized Section decided to set up a working group to review the standard for pears, and a working group to review the informal reference list of citrus fruit varieties. It also decided to continue the work to review standards from a FLW perspective and to evaluate whether the standards for cut flowers needed revision.

33. The delegation of Sweden proposed that the future work on cut flowers of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables be undertaken in a working group of the Specialized Section. The proposal was supported by several delegations.

34. The delegation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands commended the development of a draft standard for sweet potatoes and suggested adopting it as a recommendation for a one-year trial, to enable its evaluation within less than three years. The delegations of Germany, South Africa and the United States expressed support for this proposal.

35. The delegation of France expressed concern about the possible implications of modifying the maximum length requirements for white or violet asparagus in the standard due to fibrosity concerns. France will carry out a study on fibrosity and the impact of new provisions on consumer perceptions next spring with results expected in 2024. At the end of the study, it will provide a summary to the Specialized Section, and requested to be able to review the standard again following the study. The Working Party agreed to this proposal.

36. The delegation of Italy expressed its concerns about the implications of modifying the flesh colour uniformity provisions in the standard for kiwifruit. Italy will carry out a study with its industry to assess uniformity implications.

37. The United States maintained its reservation to the use of PO box and GPS coordinates as exporter address in the fresh fruit and vegetables standards and in the revised Standard layout, as integrated in the document.

38. **Decision 6:** The Working Party thanked the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables for the work accomplished. It adopted the following documents:

- Report of the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2)
- Standard for certain small fruits (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/6)
- Standard for sweet potatoes, as a recommendation for one-year trial (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/7)
- Revised standard for asparagus (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/8)
- Revised standard for broccoli (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/9)
- Revised standard for kiwifruit (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/10)
- Revised standard for onions (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/11)
- Revised standard for peas (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/12)
- Revised standard for sweet chestnuts (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/13)
- Revised Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/14)
- Revised Standard layout for United Nations Economic Commission for Europe standards on fresh fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/15).

## VIII. Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (agenda item 6)

39. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce reported on progress over the past year and the outcome of its seventieth session held on 14–16 June 2023, as reflected in the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2023/2).

40. The Specialized Section in its annual session agreed to recommend the standards for inshell pecans and pecan kernels to the Working Party for adoption. It also discussed revisions to the standards for cashew kernels and almond kernels and related explanatory material. It reviewed draft explanatory material for dried melons, dried persimmons, raw and roasted inshell peanuts, raw and roasted peanut kernels submitted by CAWG and proposed changes. The Chairperson informed that the proposed revisions to the standard for almond kernels were withdrawn from the agenda by the Bureau of the Specialized Section to enable a full review of the standard in the Specialized Section. The reservation of the United States to the standard for inshell pecan and standard for pecan kernels was noted.

41. The Specialized Section's future work includes: developing a standard for whole dried rosehip as proposed by CAWG; finalizing explanatory material for dried persimmons, dried melons, raw inshell peanuts, roasted inshell peanuts, raw peanut kernels, roasted peanut kernels, and cashew kernels; and aligning existing standards with the Standard layout. It would also initiate work to develop a guidance document similar to the Code of Good Practice: Reducing food loss and ensuring optimum handling of fresh fruit and vegetables along the value chain, to facilitate FLW reduction (Sustainable Development Goal 12) in dry and dried produce, and to organize capacity-building in Central Asia in response to the request from CAWG with ECE, Hilfswerk International and UNDP, and in Valencia, Spain with INC.

42. The delegation of Sweden enquired about the purpose of the proposed whole dried rosehip standard and whether the purpose was to cover products intended for processing or not, as in Sweden most rosehip is sold for the purpose of processing. It was decided to seek

clarification on the purpose to be covered by the standard for whole dried rosehip from CAWG at the upcoming meeting of the Specialized Section on Dry and Dried Produce.

43. **Decision 7:** The Working Party thanked the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce for the work accomplished. It adopted the following documents:

- Report of the seventieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2023/2)
- Standard for inshell pecans (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/16)
- Standard for pecan kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/17)
- Revised standard for cashew kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/19).

## **IX. Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes (agenda item 7)**

44. The Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes reported on progress and the outcome of its fiftieth session held on 16 and 17 March 2023, as reflected in the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/2).

45. The Specialized Section continued its work to conduct a full review of the ECE standard for seed potatoes and had met in several online meetings for this purpose. It conducted a survey on lot and sample size of seed potatoes, reviewed the position papers of the Specialized Section, and developed a draft position paper on herbicide carry-over. The Specialized Section also held a rapporteur's meeting in Brest, France, in October 2023 hosted by the French Interprofessional Organisation for Seeds and Plants (SEMAE). The meeting included discussions on the standard, a presentation of the French seed potatoes certification system, a lecture on climate change impacts on seed potato production, a roundtable discussion on potato plantlets, as well as technical visits.

46. As regards future work, the Specialized Section would continue the revision of the entire standard for seed potatoes, finalize the draft guide on minituber production, revise the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes and finalize a position paper on herbicide carry-over, work on capacity-building tools, and discuss true potato seeds, potato plantlets, new and emerging diseases, sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification, and the impact of climate change on potato production.

47. **Decision 8:** The Working Party thanked the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes for the work accomplished. It adopted the following documents:

- Report of the fiftieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2023/2)
- Revised position papers of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/23).

## **X. Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat (agenda item 8)**

48. The Vice-Chairperson of WP.7, on behalf of the Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, reported on progress and the outcome of its thirty-first session held on 28 and 29 August 2023, as reflected in the report of the session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2022/2).

49. The Specialized Section over the past year conducted a review of the ECE Standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts. In a series of informal meetings, it also explored the feasibility and possible ways to fully digitize the standard. As part of its annual session, the Specialized Section held a seminar on Sustainable Meat and Livestock Production. The seminar discussed the positive and negative impacts of livestock on the sustainability of food systems and emphasized the importance of a balanced assessment underpinned by science,

and the need for circular approaches. The Specialized Section agreed that continued dialogue and collaboration were needed on these topics.

50. As regards future work, the Specialized Section would undertake reviews of the standard for ovine meat and the standard for chicken meat. It also decided to establish a rapporteur's group to work on the full digitization of the standard for bovine meat, and to continue the earlier work to integrate Harmonized System (HS) codes into its meat standards. Finally, it would continue the seminar series on sustainable meat and livestock, broadening it to other types of meat and including economic and animal welfare aspects.

51. **Decision 9:** The Working Party thanked the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat for the work accomplished. It adopted the following documents:

- Report of the thirty-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2023/2)
- Revised Standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/24).

## XI. Capacity-building and promotional activities (agenda item 9)

52. The secretariat informed about upcoming plans for capacity-building in Central Asia, organized in collaboration with UNDP, Hilfswerk International and OECD in response to the request of CAWG at the 2022 meeting of WP.7.

53. The delegate of the United States proposed that INC may wish to contribute an expert to the event in Central Asia. He also noted the importance of major importing countries to allow their inspectors to participate in these events, to further facilitate trade.

54. The representative of INC expressed its willingness to contribute to capacity-building and informed about its academia event in May 2024. INC is increasingly focused on capacity-building and is also conducting a global promotion campaign for nuts aiming to help reduce the current oversupply of 20 per cent.

55. The delegate of Slovakia informed about their annual training course in Slovakia, last held in June 2023. She informed that the next training will be held in September 2024, with a focus on citrus fruit and walnuts, and extended an open invitation to WP.7 delegates to attend and to propose additional products for the training. The delegation of Spain expressed their willingness to participate in the training in Slovakia, in particular as regards citrus fruit.

56. The representative of COLEAD informed about its resource centre platform, which makes expertise available on the COLEAD website. It includes information on statistics, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, traceability, etc. In addition, their Agrinfo website<sup>1</sup> provides information on EU regulations to national authorities and the private sector who use the regulations. The information is open to all. Finally, COLEAD has developed an e-learning platform and also provides training on demand.

57. The delegation of Germany informed about its International Meeting on Quality Control of Fruit and Vegetables held in Bonn in March 2023 in collaboration with OECD, with 200 participants. The meeting discussions focused on climate change, and on asparagus and berry fruits. The next meeting will be in 2025, with more details to be provided at the 2024 session of the Working Party.

58. The Chairperson remarked that the discussions at the WP.7 session show that it is essential to promote the application and use of the standards and to invite information on the use of the standards. Several delegations agreed on the need for more capacity-building, and the need to seek more resources for the secretariat in this regard.

59. The delegation of the United States remarked that WP.7 is the working party within the ECE having the largest utility, impacting billions of dollars in trade. Therefore, financial support should be made available to the work of the secretariat to undertake promotion and

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.colead.link/fr/programmes-en-cours/agrinfo-fr/>.

capacity-building activities. The delegation of South Africa supported the statement that the Working Party needs more resources.

60. **Decision 10:** The Working Party requested the secretariat to seek extrabudgetary resources to continue and expand capacity-building on ECE standards and to expand resources and capacity-building on food loss and waste in agricultural supply chains. It was stressed that the participation of the secretariat in various meetings organized by countries to promote the work of WP.7 is important for capacity-building and promotional activities.

## **XII. Sustainable food systems and resource efficiency (agenda item 10)**

61. The Chairperson of the Working Party welcomed delegates and speakers to the roundtable on FLW prevention and reduction, noting the importance of both food loss reduction and digitalization. She recalled the strong focus of WP.7 on this issue over the past years and the different tools developed on FLW.

62. Ms. Elisabeth Türk, Director of ECTD highlighted the importance of the two topics of the roundtable, digitalization and FLW, and their link to the decisions of ECE at its last two sessions. She highlighted the opportunity for synergies as a related body serviced by ECTD – UN/CEFACT – is focused on developing standards for digitalization.

### **(a) Food loss and waste prevention and reduction**

63. Mr. Asad Naqvi, Head of the Economic and Trade Policy Unit of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) noted that while the wealth in the world and the production capacity for food is unprecedented, still a lot of people are hungry and 90 per cent of smallholder farmers do not have access to finance. He highlighted that while the contribution of agriculture sector is 3–5 per cent of GDP, its contribution to the poor is 50–80 per cent. UNEP has thus been developing its programme on food and agricultural sector around smallholder farmers. Ms. Beatriz Fernandez, Associate Programme Management Officer of UNEP Trade and Markets Division emphasized the organization's commitment to establishing a sustainable food system that supports ecosystem integrity, climate stability, a pollution-free planet, and healthy diets for all. In achieving this objective, she highlighted the need for a “smart mix” of policies, combining mandatory regulations to ensure a level playing field across the entire business sector with voluntary standards that implement these regulations by collecting and providing data and information, enabling collective action, and creating sector-wide consistency.

64. Mr. Robert van Otterdijk, Agro-Industry Officer at the regional office for Europe and Central Asia of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) highlighted the crucial role of minimizing FLW for efficiently meeting the rising food demand by 2050, suggesting it as a more effective solution than increasing food production. He presented FAO work, which aligns with the FLW management hierarchy, emphasizing that the most important is to reduce FLW at its source, before looking at options to redistribute, feed animals, composting, and lastly conversion into energy. He talked about solutions and barriers for food recovery and redistribution, such as date marking and liability issues, and pointed to the need for a supportive policy and regulatory framework for tackling FLW, advocating for legislative changes if necessary. He mentioned the Ex-Ante Carbon-balance Tool as an example of information and communication technologies (ICT) supporting policymakers in identifying off-farm greenhouse gas emissions and assessing socioeconomic benefits in creating low-carbon value chains. There is also a potential to use ICT in accurately calculating the environmental and economic impact of FLW reduction. Finally, he emphasized the importance of understanding and incentivizing behaviour change for FLW reduction.

65. Ms. Celine Giner, Policy Analyst at the Agro-Food and Markets Division, Trade and Agriculture Directorate of OECD, presented ongoing analysis of OECD on policies to reduce FLW. The work aims to help OECD Member and Accession countries and key partners

identify good FLW policies. Launched earlier this year, the work includes a questionnaire on FLW policies in OECD Member and Accession countries and key partners, which will result in a draft paper stocktaking FLW policies, with the report expected to be finalized in mid-2024.

66. Ms. Snežana Savčić-Petrić, Senior Advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Management of the Republic of Serbia, presented past and ongoing activities on FLW reduction undertaken jointly with international partners, including the recent Regional Policy Dialogue co-organized with ECE (Circular STEP). While addressing the FLW issue in Serbia, she identified major challenges in FLW reduction and prevention such as inadequate FLW data, insufficient equipment for utility companies, low awareness of the consequences of food rotting in landfills, a lack of coordination among public and private stakeholders, and the absence of a robust institutional and regulatory framework to address FLW. She outlined steps in line with the EU Farm to Fork strategy to combat FLW, including setting EU-level targets for FLW reduction, revising EU date marking rules, integrating FLW prevention into all relevant EU policies, investigating FLW at the production stage, and scaling up actions to mobilize key players across EU.

67. Mr. Olivier Valet, Vice-Chairperson of the ECE Working Party on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs (WP.11) presented on the Agreement on the International Carriage of Perishable Foodstuffs and on the Special Equipment to be Used for such Carriage (ATP) and its role in protecting food safety and preventing threats to human health from unsafe food. The ATP agreement, recognized by all 52 contracting parties, mandates specific certification conditions such as effective thermal appliances, adequate insulating capacity of equipment, compliance test requirements, and specific equipment divided into classes based on cooling means and insulation types (simple or reinforced). He noted the lack of a definition for perishable foodstuffs in the ATP agreement, with some countries advocating for the inclusion of fresh fruit and vegetables in the agreement and others remaining reluctant. At recent WP.11 meetings on the Transport of Perishable Foodstuffs, amendments to ATP included testing requirements for new multi-temperature and multi-compartment equipment. Mr. Valet emphasized the importance of improved preservation methods in reducing FLW, highlighting the necessity for enhanced infrastructure, expertise, and education in this field.

68. Ms. Anne-Laure Gassin, Team Leader at the Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety of the European Commission noted that EU is not on track for SDG target 12.3 on reducing FLW. Food waste levels are stable in EU, with 130 kg of food waste generated per capita, most of it at household levels. This corresponds to 16 per cent of total greenhouse gas emissions from the EU food systems, or 132 billion Euro in associated market value lost. To step up its contribution to SDG target 12.3 EU is considering the adoption of legally binding targets for food waste reduction, with proposed targets requiring a 10 per cent reduction at processing and manufacturing level and 30 per cent at restaurants and retail levels. She introduced the EU Platform on Food Losses and Food Waste. Consumer food waste reduction is a key focus of the work, with a compendium of best practices recently published.

## **(b) Digital and green transformations for sustainable development**

69. Mr. Constantin Ciuta, Programme Management Officer at UNCTAD, informed about the earlier joint work between ECE, UN/CEFACT and UNCTAD to develop a functional specification for electronic quality certificates (eQuality), and discussed ways of incorporating such digital tools into agricultural trade. He focused on the potential implementation through the UNCTAD Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) programme, which is currently used for managing permits for various products. Implementing an eQuality Certification System for fresh fruit and vegetables could enhance shipment targeting and inspections by enabling electronic risk analysis processes and facilitating the automatic management of data to be exchanged with other relevant authorities, including customs authorities and competent authorities in the countries of importation and exportation. Such a system would automate the decision-making process for issuing conformity certificates or waivers.

70. Mr. Steve Capell, Vice-Chairperson (Agri) of UN/CEFACT presented on UN/CEFACT recommendations regarding digital product conformity certificate exchange (recommendation 49). He noted that many digitalization efforts are failing, including many of the transparency and traceability pilots. UN/CEFACT was looking for solutions for how this may be solved. He proposed that the exchange of data can be improved through a digital product passport, supported by an architecture consisting of simple standards along with an IT architecture that can be scaled.

71. Mr. Cyril Julius, Chief Operations Officer of the Perishable Products Export Control Board (PPECB) of South Africa and Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, presented on PPECB and its Digital Inspection Platform in South Africa. This system integrates with those of clients and introduces an automatic product validation procedure to the inspection process, significantly saving time and improving inspection quality. It also enhances the security and environmental friendliness of the inspection and certification process. The system is about 10 years old and is in its second iteration. He noted that having such a system is expensive but critical for staying relevant as it is expected by clients, ensures integration, reduces turnaround time, decreases errors, and eliminates the need for physical pick-up of paper certificates.

72. Ms. Agnieszka Sudol, Deputy Chief Inspector at the Agricultural and Food Quality Inspection of Poland (IJHARS), and Chairperson of WP.7, introduced the Central Registry, a digital system designed for inspecting and assessing the conformity of food products in Poland. This system is built on national legislation that mandates the maintenance of a registry and data collection for food business operators (FBOs), as well as EU legislation that encourages regular controls of FBOs by competent national authorities on a risk basis and the establishment of a database for them. The system is used for registering FBOs, collecting control requests, conducting risk analysis, evaluating previous activities of FBOs, and for statistical and reporting purposes. Special attention is given to data protection, with data sharing restricted to courts, law enforcement agencies, public administration authorities, and to scientific, historical, and research entities under strict conditions of anonymity. In the future, the system is planned to be modernized with microservices, and with enhanced connectivity between public administrations and businesses. The system is planned to be integrated with the customs system next year. The system independently generates risk analysis data for official controls, helping inspectors decide which traders to inspect.

73. Mr. Sebastian Winkel, Head of the Division of Marketing Standards and Conformity Controls at the Federal Office for Agriculture and Food of Germany, presented QUAKON, a digital system in Germany for monitoring compliance with marketing standards for food products imported from non-EU countries. This system mandates importers to register import-bound products, perform a risk analysis, and provide online waivers and conformity certificates to importers prior to customs clearance. In terms of risk analysis, QUAKON classifies risks as low (for lots under 300 kg), medium (for produce outside a control quota), and high (in cases of previous non-conformity, unmet control quotas, or first notifications at the beginning of the season). QUAKON also includes features for risk analysis, information on notification status, exchange with customs, a trader database, and the usage of international codes, however, it lacks features such as exchange with the importing country, automatic waiver, and an approved trader system.

74. Ms. Paula de la Cruz Rodriguez, Head of Division, Deputy Directorate for Foreign Trade, Inspection, Certification, and Technical Assistance of the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Tourism of Spain, introduced the inspection service of the Servicio Oficial de Inspección, Vigilancia y Regulación de las Exportaciones (SOIVRE), the competent authority responsible for coordination of checks on conformity to marketing standards. Its digital system for conformity checks on fruits and vegetables includes several components: the Inspectors Desk, which provides inspectors with a shared website, Legisla for legislation searches, GARFYH as a trader database and risk analysis tool, ESTACICE VUA for import and export inspections, and Rehúsofor managing non-conformities. Operators use this system to submit applications for conformity checks, and upon approval inspectors issue a certificate with a unique code to them for customs clearance. Currently, new developments of the system are underway, such as ESTACICE PUE for improved and direct inspector-

customs communication, and Movilidad, which allows inspectors to conduct onsite checks with a tablet and record the conformity checks made.

**(c) Working Party discussion**

75. In the discussion that followed the roundtable, the Chairperson reflected that the Working Party is on the right path as regards ongoing work on FLW in relation to standards. As regards sustainability standards, and the proposal on “smart mix”, she highlighted that standards do not have to be mandatory to facilitate trade. She expressed appreciation for the discussion on the food waste and the OECD survey in this regard, and for the discussion on the digitalization solutions by inspection bodies.

76. The delegation of the United States stated that the discussion on digitalization was very informative and relevant to WP.7. The delegation suggested discussion on this topic should continue at the Working Party’s next session, using the entire seminar time allocation. The delegation found this experience sharing very educational and encouraged devoting more time to such exchanges within the Working Party. It also suggested that virtual sessions could be organized to share experiences on how to make the inspection process faster.

77. The delegation of Spain supported the ideas proposed by the United States, noting that in EU some countries have digitalized systems and some not.

78. The delegation of Italy found the presentations of what other countries were doing on digitalization very interesting and explained that it was on the same path. The digitalization process is quite advanced, and their main challenge is now to go paperless. It suggested exchanging information and experiences about going paperless.

79. The delegation of South Africa explained it still does work that is paper based, as they did not make the process compulsory since some clients do not have funds to integrate digitalization into their systems. It reflected that holding such discussions in WP.7 stimulate thoughts on how to improve their own systems. It further suggested to devote some time to discuss how inspection bodies can reduce carbon footprint.

80. The representative of COLEAD requested clarifications on the WP.11 certification process. The secretariat offered to provide more information after the session.

81. The delegation of France informed the meeting that certificates are digital in France and are widely used. However, there is need for physical certificates in emergency situations. It emphasized the need to keep in mind that we cannot be entirely dependent on digital systems.

82. The delegation of Poland also expressed that the discussions were very interesting and asked for more time on these topics at the next meeting.

83. The delegation of Sweden highlighted that the Working Party also provides an opportunity to learn from each other on what countries can do to reduce FLW. It noted that WP.7 delegations have a very good overview of the whole food chain and can learn from each other where waste is produced. Noting that the roundtable discussions covered overarching issues, she remarked that where WP.7 can best contribute is at the level of detail.

84. The delegation of Germany suggested that half a day for digitalization would be enough, and that FLW be addressed in the Specialized Sections. This was supported by the delegation of Sweden.

85. The Chairperson suggested having fewer speakers and more time allocated for discussions in the future.

86. The representative from the Codex Secretariat noted that digitalization was high on the agenda of the Codex Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), some examples being the recently revised Codex Guidelines for Design, Production, Issuance and Use of Generic Official Certification and the inclusion of an Annex II on Paperless Exchange of Official Certification and the recently finalized work on Principles and Guidelines on the Use of Remote Audit and Inspection in Regulatory Frameworks. The representative suggested that the Codex and ECE secretariats could discuss

a possible time slot for the next seminar on digitalization to inform ECE on Codex, and in particular CCFICS, work in this area.

87. The delegation of the United States highlighted that WP.7 should continue being a forum for dialogue between member States, and for discussion between public and private sectors, on a range of issues that affect agricultural trade. It should continue its work on information dissemination to a broad range of stakeholders. It should also focus on capacity-building at a level that is appropriate for the targeted audience. It should continue to work with other parts of ECE, United Nations entities, non-governmental organizations and other groups involved with food production and management.

88. The Chairperson indicated that WP.7 will continue working on SDG 12 and will also take into consideration the importance of the digitalization process, with a focus on the needs and solutions for national inspection bodies.

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

89. The delegation of Sweden summarized the progress made in the FLW working group under the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. The Chairperson suggested including a presentation about this work in the next session of the Specialized Section. The delegation also informed about ongoing work in Sweden to study FLW in individual supply chains and offered to share the report of that work.

90. The delegation of France informed that it plans to propose amending the Standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables to allow promoting cultural practices by producers by indicating the production mode (e.g. greenhouse, field). That would enable to certify objectives set out on key areas of the circular economy and the food system, thus promoting transparency.

91. The delegation of Italy stressed the need to find a good balance between work on standardization and on food waste.

92. The delegation of Slovakia proposed to develop a strategy for WP.7 capacity-building, identifying objectives and beneficiaries. The Chairperson suggested an open working group might be set up for that purpose. The secretariat welcomed that proposal, and the involvement of all interested delegates in developing such strategy, which would also be helpful for resource mobilization purposes.

93. The delegation of Germany emphasized that it does not believe there is a trade-off between focusing work on quality standards and FLW, because produce that does not comply with marketing standards can still be used for human consumption (e.g. industrial processing). It also emphasized, as shown in the presentation during the roundtable, that approximately half of FLW occur at consumer level. However, there is a need to continuously and in detail evaluate if standards can be improved to address FLW. Therefore, Germany expressed support for the work of the working group on FLW under the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.

94. The delegation of Slovakia highlighted that when standards are weak, consumers get low quality products which become waste. She noted that there is not enough education for consumers, stressing the importance of such education. Concerning capacity-building, she noted the need to attract other countries to the use of quality standards and procedures.

95. The delegation of Sweden highlighted the importance of how produce is treated along the value chain for reducing FLW.

96. The delegation of Spain volunteered to be part of the open working group for developing a capacity-building strategy. It supported the comments by Germany on FLW, noting that it is the choice of consumers what category of fruit to buy, and that Class II produce can have a shorter shelf life. It emphasized the supply chain challenge for private sector marketing fresh fruit and vegetables of Class II.

97. The delegation of Germany enquired about the proposal by the delegation of France on production process/method, noting the challenges for inspection bodies to verify this. It

suggested to consider if this was to be done within marketing standards or through other means. The delegations of Spain and Sweden also noted it is a difficult subject, requiring in-depth discussions in the Specialized Section.

98. The delegation of the United States informed that the United States has standards for field-grown and for greenhouse-grown tomatoes, noting that having different standards for different production methods is increasingly causing problems. It also supported the proposal by the delegation of Slovakia on capacity-building.

99. The Chairperson noted that WP.7 provides a very useful forum for discussion and suggested that in 2024 the seminar on digitalization will be organized during the WP.7 session. FLW should be included as an item in the agenda of the WP.7 session, to sum up the discussion under Specialized Sections. On the proposed open working group to prepare a capacity-building strategy, she invited volunteers. Poland, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain and the United States volunteered to join the group. The Chairperson noted that additional countries were welcome to volunteer to join after the session.

100. **Decision 11:** The Working Party decided to include the following items in its future work:

- Continued work in Specialized Sections.
- Continued work on food loss and waste/Sustainable Development Goal 12.
- Capacity-building for countries on the standards, and establishment of an open working group to prepare a strategy for capacity-building.
- Continued discussions on digitalization needs and solutions to ensure efficient agricultural trade, in response to decision B (70) of the Economic Commission for Europe on “Digital and green transformations in support of the sustainable development in the region of the Economic Commission for Europe” (E/2023/37-E/ECE/1503), including the organization of a seminar at the next session.

#### **XIV. Programme of work of the Working Party for 2024 (agenda item 12)**

101. The secretariat presented the draft programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2024 (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/25), which was based on the programme of work of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards and included future work items agreed at the 2023 sessions of the Specialized Sections of WP.7.

102. **Decision 12:** The Working Party adopted the programme of work of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for 2024 (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/25) with the changes agreed in session.

#### **XV. Other business (agenda item 13)**

103. The secretariat informed that the provisional dates for WP.7 meetings in 2024 were:

- Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes: 26–28 (a.m.) March 2024
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables: 6–8 May 2024
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce: 15 (p.m.)–17 May 2024
- Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat: 28 (p.m.)–30 August 2024
- Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards: 11–13 (a.m.) November 2024.

104. The secretariat invited views of efficient ways of scheduling the meetings in the future. The following input was provided:

- The delegation of Germany suggested organizing meetings during the same week, e.g. the sessions of the Specialized Sections on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and

Vegetables and Dry and Dried Produce. The delegation of the United States suggested to instead organize them on two sides of a weekend. The delegations of Germany and Poland noted that would be challenge for them. The delegation of Spain noted it preferred to keep sessions of these Specialized Sections in separate weeks.

- The delegation of the United States suggested to include separate time for informal meetings prior to the sessions. This was supported by the delegation of Sweden.
- The delegation of the United States proposed that the Bureau of WP.7 and the Bureaus of Specialized Sections meet online to discuss the issue. This was supported by other delegations.

105. **Decision 13:** The Working Party decided that the Bureau of WP.7 and the Bureaus of Specialized Sections discuss Specialized Sections meeting options in an online meeting.

## **XVI. Election of officers (agenda item 14)**

106. **Decision 14:** The Working Party elected Ms. Agnieszka Sudol (Poland) as Chairperson and Mr. Bucky Gwartney (United States of America) as Vice-Chairperson for a one-year term.

## **XVII. Adoption of the report (agenda item 15)**

107. **Decision 15:** The Working Party adopted the report of its seventy-eighth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/2) in session.

---