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Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

Thirtieth session

Geneva, 28 (p.m.) – 30 September 2022

Report of the thirtieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat

I. Introduction

1. The thirtieth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat was convened in a hybrid format, in Geneva and online, with simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Russian. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ian King (Australia). The Chair commended the progress and achievements of the Specialized Section over the past decades, including the development of 15 standards on meat.
2. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk, opened the session by welcoming the delegates, and highlighting the importance of the agricultural quality standards in ensuring efficient trade and in reducing food loss along supply chains, thus contributing to sustainable food systems and resource efficient and circular economies. She expressed her gratitude to the delegates for their work and support as well as the progress made and wished the Specialized Section fruitful deliberations.

II. Attendance

3. Representatives of the following United Nations Member States attended the meeting: Australia, Czech Republic, Germany, Mongolia, Morocco, Panama, Philippines, Poland, and the United States of America.
4. A representative of the European Union (EU) attended the meeting.
5. A representative of the following intergovernmental organization participated in the session: the World Customs Organization (WCO).
6. Representatives from the following observer organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, academia, and private sector groups also attended: AUS-MEAT (Australia), Chinese Academy of Customs Administration, Confederation Nationale de l'Élevage (France), Department of Veterinary Services (Malaysia), Devenish Nutrition, Federal Research Center for Food Systems (Russian Federation), Federal University of Goiás (Brazil), FutureFeed (Australia), Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) Kyrgyzstan, Global Food and Agribusiness Network, Haute école des sciences



agronomiques, forestières et alimentaires (Switzerland), Institut de l'Élevage (France), Institut national de recherche pour l'agriculture, l'alimentation et l'environnement (INRAE, France), Instituto Nacional de Carnes (Uruguay), International Meat Research 3G Foundation, Meat & Livestock Australia, Murdoch University (Australia), Organic Systems and Solutions Pty Ltd (Australia), Polish Beef Association, Teagasc Food Research Centre, University of California, Davis (United States of America), University of Novi Sad (Serbia).

III. Adoption of the agenda (agenda item 1)

7. The delegates adopted the agenda.

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

United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies (agenda item 2 (a))

8. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of ECE provided an overview of the achievements of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) and the Specialized Section over the past five years, and of recent and forthcoming intergovernmental meetings and other matters of relevance to the work of the Specialized Section.

9. Since the last meeting of the Specialized Section the United Nations Food Systems Summit was held on 23 September 2021, in preparation for which ECE and the four other regional commissions of the United Nations had produced a joint policy brief highlighting the role of regional cooperation in food systems transformation. The seventy-sixth session of WP.7 met on 15–17 November 2021 and adopted 18 new and revised standards and recommendations. These were endorsed by the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards at its seventh session on 27 and 28 June 2022. An e-learning course on agricultural quality standards and food loss reduction in fresh produce supply chains was developed and made available on the ECE website in June 2022.

10. Key forthcoming meetings include the seventy-seventh session of WP.7 on 14–16 November 2022, and the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe which will be held in April 2023 under the theme “Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region”.

V. Alignment of the Economic Commission for Europe cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS codes) (agenda item 3)

11. Following discussions at its 2020 and 2021 sessions on alignment between ECE cut codes to the six-digit HS codes, the 2021 session of the Specialized Section decided to establish a rapporteur's group consisting of Australia, Poland, the United States and the secretariat to develop a proposal on how to progress.

12. Mr. Tim Ryan, manager – Global Trade Development, Meat & Livestock Australia, presented the background, context, and proposal developed by the rapporteur's group (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2022/3). He described the three levels of cut codes that are available to be used in the trade of meat: the 6-digit HS codes developed by WCO and its members, the 8-digit national tariff line codes, and the ECE cut codes. The proposal by the rapporteur's group was to start by including a column with the six-digit HS codes in the ECE standards on meat, to show the HS code equivalent to the ECE cut codes (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2022/3, paragraph 5).

13. The representative of WCO supported the idea and highlighted that there was a required timeline for implementing changes under HS codes by WCO. He clarified that

recommendations from Specialized Section would have to be developed within the next 1.5 years, should they wish to be implemented in the 2027 review cycle of the HS codes.

14. The secretariat informed delegations about changes to the Russian language terminology in the multilingual table that is part of the Bovine standard (document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2022/4/Corr.1), which had been done to correspond to the terminology used in more recent meat standards in the Russian Federation.

15. The Specialized Section agreed to proceed with the work on alignment between the HS codes system and the ECE standard cut codes, as proposed by the rapporteur's group. It decided to submit the proposal for how HS codes could be included in the ECE standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts (ECE/CTCS/GE.11/2022/4 and ECE/CTCS/GE.11/2022/4/Corr.1) to the Working Party for approval.

VI. Fat content in meat (agenda item 4)

16. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section discussed the issue of how much fat meat could contain to still be considered meat. This impacted among others the determination of customs duties. It was decided to explore this further and determine whether parameters would be needed to define the acceptable fat content. Conversely, there was interest from WCO in determining how much meat could be attached to fat to still be classified as fat in HS codes.

17. The Specialized Section discussed fat content in meat and related HS code classification issues. It decided not to pursue the issue at this point.

VII. Marbling assessment and technology (agenda item 5)

18. Mr. Christophe Denoyelle, Head of meat quality department, Institut de l'Élevage (France), presented recent work done by the beef sector in France on marbling, including the building of a new marbling scale, development of a new smartphone application (Meat@ppli) to assess marbling, and work on new feed systems to facilitate marbling deposits.

19. Recent studies in France on marbling showed that while 75 per cent of consumers preferred more lean meat when making purchase decisions, in blind-tasting of cooked meat they preferred meat with a higher degree of marbling. The objective of the work conducted in France was to better understand variations in marbling, how production measures can impact marbling, and how to increase consumer awareness of the quality effects of marbling. They also presented a smartphone application Meat@ppli, which helps analyse lipid content in meat using photographs, used for grading in France.

20. The Specialized Section took note of and commended the interesting work done in France on marbling, noting its close relationship with work on eating quality.

VIII. Revision of standards: Porcine meat – carcasses and cuts (agenda item 6)

21. At its 2020 meeting, the Specialized Section decided to establish a rapporteur's group to review the standard for Porcine meat with respect to marbling, and to include it on its agenda for 2021. As no progress had been made, the agenda item was postponed to 2022.

22. Since no proposal was received for the 2022 session, the Specialized Section decided to close the item.

IX. Development of new standards: International standard for animal protein derived from connective tissue (agenda item 7)

23. At its 2020 session, the Specialized Section decided to establish a rapporteur's group to explore the need for an international standard for animal protein derived from connective tissue and to present a proposal to the 2021 session. As no proposal was received in 2021 the item was placed on the agenda for the 2022 meeting.

24. Since no proposal was received for the 2022 session, the Specialized Section decided to close the item.

X. Eating quality (agenda item 8)

25. Mr. Jean-Francois Hoquette, senior scientist, INRAE, Mr. Rod Polkinghorne, Chair, and Ms. Alix Neveu, project manager, International Meat Research 3G Foundation, provided an update on new developments in eating quality research and the eating quality database.

26. Eating quality research aims to enable predicting eating quality outcomes of meat, and thus related pricing of meat products. The aim is to have a simpler consumer offer, so the consumer can expect what quality to get on a consistent basis. While conventional language for meat describes animal and carcass detail, eating quality language aims to help consumers and industry predict the eating quality experience of the product. For this to occur, they need easily comprehensible information to help their purchase decision. The research consists of consumer sensory testing of beef, using guidelines developed under the Specialized Section and endorsed by the Working Party (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2018/8). The research is based on many data points collected from such testing, and compiled in a large common database, enabling sharing of data for research and commercial purposes. The individual scores of the model are used in a predictive model for eating quality, aiming to enable labelling meat cuts in relation to the cooking method, and mark them as premium, special or good.

27. The delegation of the United States enquired about the costs for implementation of the predictive model and was informed that the model can be used free of charge for research purposes, while for commercial purposes there is a fee that depends on the use and the quantity of data used. The delegation of Poland proposed to update the standards to enable digital use.

28. The Specialized Section decided to continue to include updates on eating quality research in its agenda for the coming session.

XI. Discussion on the possible development of a livestock language (agenda item 9)

29. Ms. Sarah Strachan, Group manager – Adoption & Commercialisation, Meat & Livestock Australia, provided an update of its work to develop guidelines for livestock language. The guidelines will work as a voluntary standard, providing a harmonized language for describing live cattle. They had been developed through a robust process, which had started in 2016 with a white paper and a global scan on language used to describe cattle, followed by thorough consultation process, including industry review.

30. The representative of Poland asked if information on the project was available online. The delegation of Australia informed that guidelines would be shared with members of the Specialized Section after they had been fully endorsed, hopefully at the end of 2022, and that in the meanwhile they could share the white paper that had been developed at the start of the process.¹

¹ The document is available at: www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/news-and-events/documents/aust-beef-language-white-paper_web-updated.pdf.

31. The Specialized Section decided to continue the discussion on the development of guidelines for livestock language, to explore if there is an opportunity to harmonize such language under the auspices of ECE.

XII. Sustainable Development Goal 12 and sustainable practices: International minimum sustainability guidelines for the meat sector (agenda item 10)

32. The Director of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of ECE welcomed delegates to the hybrid seminar. She informed about the decision of the sixty-ninth session of ECE to step up the circular economy and sustainable management of natural resources and referred to the work of the secretariat to support member States within the mandate. She noted that meat and livestock form an important part of food systems as a key source of nutrients and vitamins, but that the sector is facing increased pressure to find solutions for lowering its environmental footprint, including as regards greenhouse gas emissions. She further noted that food systems are complex to analyse, including as regards climate and impacts, and that the aim of the seminar was to discuss estimation issues and mitigation options in more detail.

33. The Chair emphasized the commitment of the Specialized Section to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the objectives of ECE and acknowledged that the SDGs are now integral to the quality standards maintaining relevance in the global marketplace. He highlighted that the sustainability of food systems is central to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and that the global meat system needs to become more productive, inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and resilient so that it can continue to deliver healthy and nutritious diets for all. Noting that the development of sustainability frameworks for the meat sector is a critical area for the meat industry and livestock production, he informed that the aim of the seminar was to explore sustainability issues related to meat production, including carbon emissions and mitigation options.

34. Mr. Peer Ederer, Global Observatory on Accurate Livestock (GOAL) Sciences, and Director of the Global Food and Agribusiness Network, delivered a presentation “Biomass Valorisation – The Overlooked Sustainability Function of Livestock”. The presentation consisted of live guidance of the PLANET food system explorer,² which had been based on the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) data and provided a tool to explore in detail how biomass flows between different sectors of the value chain. The aim is to provide data for analysts, scientists, and strategists to create local solutions. The tool can be used to analyse flows by type of biomass, country, or species, and identify solutions for ensuring more efficient and circular use of biomass, such as for feed and other higher value purposes.

35. Mr. Frank Mitloehner, Professor, University of California Davis and Director of the CLEAR Center, delivered a presentation “How managing livestock methane can be part of a climate solution”. He explained that contrary to carbon dioxide, which is a stock gas that accumulates in the atmosphere, methane is a flow gas that undergoes a destruction process in the atmosphere and for which a constant output does not increase warming. He highlighted that the models used until present in climate research to calculate the global warming potential (GWP) of methane (GWP100) did not accurately consider the destruction process and the different impacts on atmospheric build-up. Recently, researchers at the Oxford University had developed a new method called GWP* to account for these impacts. He also provided a practical example of work conducted with the livestock and dairy sector in California, involving the production of biogas from the manure of large dairies, and turning it into biogas for trucks, thus enabling a 30 per cent reduction of emissions from the sector in only three years.

36. Mr. John Gilliland, Director of Agriculture & Sustainability, Devenish Nutrition, gave a presentation “Achieving Net Zero – the role of increasing carbon stocks on farm”. He highlighted the importance of building a carbon stock (sequestration), and the need to better measure the contribution of agriculture land in terms of carbon stock in order to enable better

² <https://goalsciences.org/planet-food-system-explorer>.

management of it. He shared examples of a project in Northern Ireland that uses modern technology to create a baseline of carbon stock for all land. The project involved a number of farmers for whom measurements were being conducted to create a baseline. The aim was to enable measuring and thus management, but also to enable the ability to trade additionality. He stressed the importance of continued dialogue on this topic, as more knowledge exchange was needed.

37. Ms. Joanne Barber, Chief Operating Officer, FutureFeed, delivered a presentation “*Asparagopsis* seaweed: All-natural dietary solution for methane reduction in cattle and sheep”. She informed that adding as little as 2 per cent of the seaweed *Asparagopsis* to the livestock feed can lead to a 98 per cent reduction of methane emissions from cattle. She informed that large-scale productivity trials are ongoing and emphasized the need for a collaborative approach. She also informed that currently there are seven licenses globally for commercial rollout of *Asparagopsis* seaweed as feed.

38. Ms. Marg Will, Chief Executive Officer, Organic Systems & Solutions, delivered a presentation “Verification, validation and the role of standards in ESG and SDG claims”. She highlighted the need for standards to provide assurance for stakeholders, to verify and validate claims and to avoid greenwashing. She called for the need of regular review of standards to be in line with science and developments.

39. The Specialized Section commended the speakers on the interesting presentations, and the Chair and the secretariat on the organization of the seminar. It noted the importance of looking at the balance sheet of emissions from agriculture, remarking that the benefits of carbon sequestration in soil were an issue that was not sufficiently discussed and reflected in life-cycle assessments. It agreed that continued dialogue and collaboration were needed on these topics.

XIII. Capacity-building and promotional activities (agenda item 11)

40. Mr. Ben Robinson, General manager – Meat Standards & Training Services, AUS-MEAT, shared information about capacity-building and promotional activities, new tools and methodologies facilitating the implementation of standards, and their use in Australia. He informed about the conduct of training courses on the Australian Beef Carcase Appraisal System (ABCAS), which trains carcase assessors regularly, with the data from their assessments being fed into the databank for eating quality. To ensure consistent assessments and gradings, the On-Site Correlation and Practice System (OsCap) is used. While this system was earlier hardware-based, it has now become web-based and is currently being rolled out in Australia. He further informed that the Handbook of Australian Meat, an international meat trading resource used by exporters and importers, has been developed into an application which is freely available for download.

41. Mr. Robinson further informed about the meat messaging system that AUS-MEAT have been developing over the past decades, and which was expected to go live on 30 September 2022 as a web-based portal for the electronic transfer of data related to consignments of meat. Based on GS1 barcoding and electronic message standards, the system has been used for determining authenticity, verification and traceability. The system has enabled a 75 per cent reduction in the number of product rejections by Australian processors at the point of entry into the United States.

42. Finally, Graham Gardner, Professor, School of Veterinary and Life Sciences, Murdoch University, Australia, presented updates on developments in intramuscular fat (IMF) measurements, and a new method to assess marbling and thus eating quality. The measurement method had provided accurate assessments of the percentage of IMF, enabling industry to trade on IMF percentages as a product trait.

XIV. Other business (agenda item 12)

43. The delegate of the United States highlighted several events which may be of interest to the delegations, including the International Livestock Congress to be held in Houston, the United States, on 1 and 2 March 2023, as well as the International Congress on Meat Science and Technology, to be held in Padova, Italy, on 20–25 August 2023.

44. The Chair informed about the provisional dates for the 2023 session of the Specialized Section, scheduled to be held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 28 and 29 August 2023. He noted the proximity in dates and location with the congress in Padova and the opportunity for cross-promotion.

XV. Future work (agenda item 13)

45. The delegation of Poland proposed to include as future work the establishment of a rapporteur's group to look into the digitization of the ECE standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts and volunteered to take the lead on developing a proposed work plan and initiate the establishment of a rapporteur's group.

46. The Specialized Section decided to place the following items on the agenda for 2023:

- Continued work on the alignment of the ECE cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS codes), as outlined in the proposal by the rapporteur's group
- An update on eating quality
- An update on the development of a livestock language
- Continued discussions on sustainability framework and issues for the meat sector
- Review of the ECE standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts
- Digitization of the ECE standard for Bovine Meat – Carcasses and Cuts

47. Any other proposals for future work should be sent to the secretariat as early as possible, preferably by 1 November 2022.

XVI. Election of officers (agenda item 14)

48. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Ian King (Australia) as Chairperson and Ms. Jacqueline Mason (United States) as Vice-Chairperson.

49. The Specialized Section congratulated the outgoing Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Mark Lobstein, on his retirement acknowledging his important contribution to the work of the Specialized Section.

XVII. Adoption of the report (agenda item 15)

50. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its thirtieth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2022/2).
