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**Economic Commission for Europe**

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

**Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards****Specialized Section on Standardization  
of Dry and Dried Produce  
Seventy-first session  
Geneva, 15–17 May 2024****Report of the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section  
on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce****I. Introduction**

1. The seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce was chaired by Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America).
2. The Chairperson welcomed the delegates highlighting the importance of standardization and the value of the work undertaken by the Specialized Section. He noted that dried fruit and nuts allow producers to add value and shelf-life for produce. It also reduces food loss and food waste. Importantly, in terms of Government policies, it allows greater income for farmers, increasing income-generating opportunities in the rural areas. He highlighted that one advantage of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) standards is that they allow for a trial period.
3. The Chief *ad interim* of the Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) of ECE, Mr. Ariel Ivanier, noted that the sustainability of food systems is critical for health, environment, climate, and livelihoods, and thus the achievement of many of the Sustainable Development Goals. He emphasized the central role of nuts and dried fruit for sustainable and healthy diets and highlighted their advantages in terms of nutritional content and longer shelf-life. He noted that the standards developed by the Specialized Section play an important role in facilitating the trade of these products and expressed appreciation for the ongoing work to develop guidance for food loss and waste reduction in dry and dried produce value chains.

**II. Attendance**

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Burkina Faso, Croatia, France, Germany, Russian Federation, Spain, United States of America, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.
5. Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated in the session: International Trade Centre (ITC).

6. Representatives from the following non-governmental organizations, academia, business associations and private sector entities also attended: National Certification Bureau LLC (Uzbekistan).

7. The Chairperson conveyed regrets from the International Nuts and Dried Fruit Council (INC) for not being able to attend the session, due to its annual congress.

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

8. The Specialized Section adopted the revised annotated provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/1/Rev.1).

### **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 *ad interim* of the Market Access Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD) informed of developments since the last session of the Specialized Section in June 2023, notably the session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which was held on 26 and 27 June 2023, and the seventy-eighth session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards, held on 13–15 November 2023. The Working Party adopted one recommendation, three new standards and eight revised standards (including new standards for inshell pecans and pecan kernels, as well as the revised standard for cashew kernels).

10. He further informed of the results of the programmatic evaluation of the work of the ECTD, conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) of the United Nations in 2022 and for which the report was published in March 2023 (E/AC.51/2023/5). The evaluators found that the work of ECTD was aligned with its mandate, that the Division largely responded to specific member States' requests, and that it "found its niche in a crowded space of trade and economic cooperation". On effectiveness, the evaluators concluded that the Division's work on facilitating norms and standards setting was largely effective, noting 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. The evaluators recommended that ECTD should establish a technical cooperation request tracking mechanism; develop divisional action plans to operationalize ECE strategies on resource mobilization, partnerships, and technical cooperation; and ensure integration of gender, environment, disability inclusion, and human rights considerations in its various workstreams.

11. Finally, he informed on future events of relevance to the work of the Specialised Section, including the upcoming meeting of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards that will be held on 26–28 June 2024, and the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on 11–13 November 2024.

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

12. The representative of the International Trade Center (ITC) secretariat shared information on its capacity-building work on fresh fruits and vegetables and dried fruit and nuts. ITCs works on export promotion, focused on supporting small businesses as they engage in international trade. The organization works with farmers, exporters, importers, trade support institutions and policymakers. It supports countries to develop strategic plans for fruit and vegetable market development, and capacity-building on how to overcome existing challenges, including trainings on European market requirements, export quality management, competitiveness, branding and market visibility, trade fair preparations and participation. Examples of sector roadmaps developed for dried fruit and nuts included: a

roadmap for nuts for Ukraine, and ongoing work to develop a dried fruits roadmap for Uzbekistan.

13. The representative of the Central Asian Working Group to Promote Exports of Agricultural Produce (CAWG), an association of public and private sector stakeholders from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan tasked with promoting the exports of agricultural produce, provided an update on its activities. CAWG began its work in 2016, and the four countries work together to promote quality standards. Each country has a technical working group, which includes standardization agencies, ministries of economic development, and private sector representatives. Decisions are discussed at four-party meetings once a year (the latest was held in Kazakhstan in 2023). Over the years, CAWG has submitted several proposals to the Specialized Section, organized several training workshops for producers, primary processors, and exporters, and developed many explanatory posters and related material in local languages. Currently, CAWG is focusing on inspection systems.

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

14. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section discussed the preliminary results of a survey launched by the secretariat in consultation with the Working Party Bureau to document the use of ECE standards and their link to relevant legislative frameworks in participating countries. The Specialized Section agreed to set up a small group, consisting of the United States, the International Nuts and Dried Fruit Council (INC), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Fruit and Vegetables Scheme, and the secretariat, to discuss how to further document the impact of the standards. As the group had not yet started its work, delegations were invited to provide information on the impact of ECE standards on DDP in their countries to the secretariat.

15. The Chairperson highlighted that the ECE dry and dried produce standards were one of the most used internationally, often used as basis for national standards. For example, Kenya recently notified the WTO of new draft national standards for almond kernels, hazelnut kernels and walnut kernels, all of which were referencing the respective ECE standards. Similarly, the Standardization Organization for the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GSO) frequently references ECE standards when developing its standards.

16. The representative of the CAWG informed that its explanatory posters and guidelines on the use of ECE standards, which were available on the CAWG website, had received more than one million downloads, including from countries outside the CAWG region, showing great interest in the topic.

17. The delegation of the United States expressed appreciation for the important work of ECE on standards. The delegation highlighted that while third countries often use the ECE standards as a basis when developing their own standards, sometimes they decide to make their own standards tighter which poses some challenges for the industry. It suggested that in capacity building workshops ECE should emphasize the intended purpose of the standards, i.e., to facilitate trade by ensuring harmonized quality requirements.

## **VI. Capacity-building and promotional activities (agenda item 4)**

18. The secretariat informed about the upcoming capacity building on standards and inspection of fresh and dried fruit and vegetables to be organized on 4-6 June 2024 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The training was organized jointly by ECE, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), OECD and Hilfswerk International. As requested by CAWG members, the training would cover both fresh and dried produce, including apples, dried apples, peaches and nectarines, prunes, tomatoes, and walnut kernels.

19. The delegation of Germany announced that its next international meeting on Quality Control would be held in Bonn on 25-27 March 2025. The meeting would also have a section focused on nuts.

## **VII. Sustainable Development Goal 12 and sustainable food systems: food loss and waste prevention (agenda item 5)**

20. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section decided to establish an ad-hoc drafting group consisting of France, United States, CAWG, the International Nuts and Dried Fruit Council (INC) to work on developing a code of good practice for reducing food loss in nuts and dried fruit value chains. At its 2023 meeting, the Specialized Section reconfirmed its intention to develop such guidelines and decided that the drafting group would be led by the INC. In early 2024, INC developed a draft text of the first chapter for primary producers which was further refined in three meetings of the ad-hoc drafting group during February-April 2024.

21. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft text of the first chapter, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.1. It provided several comments and suggestions for the consideration of the ad-hoc drafting group, recorded in track-change in session.

22. The Specialized Section congratulated the ad-hoc drafting group on progress achieved and requested it to continue its work and to submit an expanded draft to the next session of the Specialized Section.

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

### **Whole dried rosehip**

23. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section agreed to develop a draft standard on whole dried rosehip as proposed by CAWG. Over the past year, CAWG has worked on its development.

24. The representative of the CAWG introduced the draft standard, informing that rosehip is becoming an important crop in Central Asia, traded in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Due to a shortage of water over the last 2-3 years, the crop is growing in importance and the volume is growing in CAWG countries. Over 500 varieties exist, and over the past year 2500 hectares were planted. The draft standard was developed using the standard layout, which significantly facilitated the work in terms of identifying defects.

25. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft standard for whole dried rosehip. The Specialized Section enquired how to assess the provision for “sufficiently developed” under minimum requirements. It further suggested that the proposed minimum size was too small, and suggested including a tolerance for broken/splits, revised the list of extraneous matter, and provided some editorial suggestions, which were recorded as track-change in session.

26. The Specialized Section agreed to finalize the draft standard through an intersessional procedure. It requested CAWG to provide a revised proposal for the minimum size and a proposed tolerance for broken/splits within four weeks to the secretariat, after which it would be circulated to members for a four-week intersessional approval process. If agreement is reached, the draft standard will be submitted to the Working Party for adoption as a recommendation in 2024.

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

### **(a) Almonds**

27. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposals to amend the standards for almond kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/4), blanched almond kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/5) and inshell almonds (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/6) submitted by the delegation of the United States.

28. For the three standards, the Specialized Section had an extensive discussion on the proposed changes to the provisions for gummy resinous substance, for brown spot, and for chipped and scratched, in particular the proposed revised area measurements. Several delegations noted that it is difficult to measure parts of a millimetre with existing tools. After some discussion, the Specialized Section agreed to only refer to measurements in whole millimetres (for diameter), and to delete the reference to inches.

29. For almond kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/4), it agreed to retain most of the text of the existing standard, keeping the measurements for gummy and brown spots in the table of tolerances with a small modification of the measurement to 7mm in diameter, and removing the reference to inches.

30. For blanched almond kernels (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/5) and inshell almonds (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/6) it agreed to harmonize the phrasing of the provisions on gummy resinous substance and brown spots under minimum requirements to read: “free from gummy resinous substance exceeding an aggregate area of 7mm in diameter”, and “free from brown spots (slightly depressed brown spots), exceeding an aggregate area of 4mm in diameter”. It also agreed to delete the reference to the cause of brown spots in both standards.

31. For blanched almond kernels, it further agreed to include a reference to skins in the table for tolerances, and to revise the tolerance for chipped and scratched to 20 in class II. The Specialized Section also discussed whether the indication of crop year should be optional or mandatory in the standard. Delegations noted that while it is difficult for inspection services to verify crop year, other than through traceability, there can be quality differences in terms of organoleptic qualities. The delegation of France requested to retain its reservation on crop year (under section VI.D Commercial specifications).

32. In the standard on inshell almonds, the Specialized Section also agreed to increase tolerances for size for Class II.

33. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standards for almond kernels, blanched almond kernels, and inshell almonds and to submit the revised texts to the Working Party for adoption at its 2024 session.

## **(b) Dried tomatoes**

34. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal by the delegation of the United States to amend the standard for dried tomatoes (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/7).

35. The Specialized Section agreed with the proposed changes, and introduced some additional revisions, including specifying that the standard does not apply to dried tomatoes intended for industrial processing. The Specialized Section agreed to amend the standard for dried tomatoes and to submit the revised text to the Working Party for adoption at its 2024 session.

## **(c) Dates**

36. The delegation of Germany introduced the proposal, informing that the standard for dates, last revised in 2021, has a footnote that refers to a non-exhaustive list of varieties classified by the nature of their principal sugar component contained in the annex to the standard. However, the annex was not included in the 2021 nor the 2015 versions of the standard. As no record of a decision to remove the annex could be found, the secretariat consulted the Bureau of the Specialized Section, which decided to table the standard for review by the Specialized Section (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/8), which would decide whether to reattach the annex or remove the related footnote in the standard for dates.

37. The Specialized Section agreed to reattach the annex to the standard, and to submit the revised text to the Working Party for adoption at its 2024 session.

**(d) Inshell walnuts**

38. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposal to amend the standard for inshell walnuts (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/10) submitted by the delegation of the United States.

39. The Specialized Section noted that assessing tolerances by count or by weight of the edible part would produce very different results. On crop year, it noted that walnuts are one of the nuts that oxidizes quicker, and thus there can be differences in taste between crop years, as rancidity can appear quickly. It thus noted that it is important for both consumers and producers that the crop year be marked, as it can impact on the value of stocks.

40. The Specialized Section decided to amend the definition of produce, remove the footnote on how tolerances are assessed in Turkey from the table on tolerances, and keep crop year as mandatory for “Extra” Class and Class I, and optional for Class II. It agreed to submit the revised standard to the 2024 session of the Working Party for adoption.

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

41. The Chairperson provided an update on the progress made regarding the alignment of existing standards with the 2022 standard layout for ECE standards on dry and dried produce. As agreed at the 2023 session of the Specialized Section, the secretariat started by aligning the standards for almond kernels, blanched almond kernels, inshell almonds, inshell hazelnuts, hazelnut kernels, inshell macadamia nuts, macadamia nut kernels, and dried tomatoes. The work, which has been completed for the English language versions, was reviewed and endorsed by the Bureau (during February-May 2024).

42. The Specialized Section agreed that the secretariat would continue working with the Bureau on alignment of standards.

**X. Explanatory materials (agenda item 8)****(a) Explanatory material for cashew kernels**

43. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft explanatory material for cashew kernels, which included the updated photo for superficial damage provided by the International Nuts and Dried Fruit Council after last year’s session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.2), along with editorial changes discussed in the informal working session held on 15 May 2024.

44. The Specialized Section finalized the explanatory material for cashew kernels and agreed to submit it to the Working Party for adoption at its 2024 session.

**(b) Explanatory material for almond kernels**

45. The Specialized Section reviewed the revised draft explanatory material for almond kernels submitted by the delegation of the United States (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.3), along with the changes discussed in the informal working session held on 15 May 2024.

46. The Specialized Section agreed to remove the images for large and small pieces, as the standard only refers to pieces in the table of tolerances, where it doesn’t distinguish between large and small pieces. The delegation of the United States agreed to send a revised picture for whole kernels.

47. The Specialized Section agreed to finalize the explanatory material for almond kernels using the intersessional procedure and to submit it to the Working Party for adoption at its 2024 session.

**(c) Explanatory material for dried melons, dried persimmons, inshell peanuts and peanut kernels**

48. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft explanatory materials for dried melons, dried persimmons, raw and roasted inshell peanuts, and raw and roasted peanut kernels which had been revised by the CAWG to address comments provided by at the 2023 session of the Specialized Section (documents ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.4, ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.5, ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.6, and ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/INF.7) along with the changes discussed in the informal working session held on 15 May 2024.

49. Delegations provided several suggestions in the informal meeting for the four posters, in particular as regards replacing photos, including suggestions for new photos for depiction of mould and signs of fermentation for the explanatory material on dried melons and dried persimmon. The CAWG aimed to provide revised photos for the posters within three months.

50. The Specialized Section expressed appreciation for the work done by the CAWG and invited the CAWG to continue to develop the draft posters, with input from other delegations, for submission to the 2025 session of the Specialized Section.

**XI. Harmonized System codes relevant to the work of the Specialized Section (agenda item 9)**

51. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section discussed the inconsistency and lack of granularity for some Harmonized System (HS) codes for fresh and dried fruit and the impact this has on the ability to analyse trade at the level of individual products.

52. After the 2023 session, the secretariat was informed that FAO had submitted a proposal to the World Customs Organization (WCO) for changes to HS codes for tropical fruit. The Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables on 6-8 May 2024, thus included a discussion in which a representative of FAO gave a presentation on its proposal to revise HS codes for tropical fresh fruit. The FAO proposal consists of two parts: firstly, to separate the produce that is currently clustered under HS code 0804.50, which currently comprises guavas, mangoes and mangosteens, into separate HS codes for the three products. Secondly, it proposed to create separate HS codes for five other tropical fruits currently reported under HS code 0810.90, i.e. lychees, longans, dragon fruit, pomegranate, and passion fruit. The proposal received a positive response from several delegations and the Harmonized System Review Sub-Committee (RSC) of the WCO provisionally adopted it. The proposal is expected to be formally adopted by the Harmonized System Committee in 2025, with the resulting revised nomenclature entering into force on 1 January 2028.

53. FAO had further informed that suggesting changes to HS codes requires empirical evidence showing the importance of products in international trade, as products that are traded below 50 million USD would generally remain clustered under the same HS code.

54. The Specialized Section noted the issue of joint HS codes for fresh and dried fruit under HS code headings 0803-0805. Delegations took note that proposing any changes to the HS code structure would require empirical evidence showing the importance of the products in international trade, and that working with FAO would be a potential channel.

**XII. Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections (agenda item 10)**

55. The secretariat provided an update on the progress of work undertaken to review the Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections and invited views on the proposed revisions (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/4, and ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/INF.2), developed by an open working group consisting of

Brazil, Poland, Spain and the United States for discussion at the Working Party session in 2023.

56. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposed revisions to the Working Procedures, along with the proposed changes provided by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables at its session held the previous week (6-8 May 2024). Delegations were invited to provide additional proposals in writing to the secretariat by 30 June 2024.

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

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

- Finalization of the draft standard on whole dried rosehip.
- Finalization of explanatory posters developed by CAWG (dried persimmons, dried melons, raw and roasted inshell peanuts, raw and roasted peanut kernels).
- Continuation of the work on the Code of Good Practice for food loss and waste reduction in dry and dried produce (working group led by INC and including France, United States and CAWG)
- Ad hoc working group to discuss how to further document the impact of the standards (United States, INC, OECD and the secretariat).
- Continued alignment of existing standards with the standard layout

58. Other proposals for future work were invited in writing by 15 January 2025.

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

59. The representatives of CAWG requested to be informed about the dates of workshops well in advance, as there is a lot of interest in the CAWG region to participate, but many countries are facing long delays for visas.

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

60. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Sebastian Winkel (Germany) as its Chairperson, and Mr. Dorian LaFond (United States of America) and Mr. Umed Aslanov (CAWG) as its Vice-Chairpersons for a one-year period.

61. The Specialized Section thanked the outgoing Chairperson, Mr. Dorian LaFond, for his leadership and many years of valuable contributions, having served as Chairperson of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce since 2007, and expressed gratitude for his willingness to remain on the Bureau as Vice-Chairperson for the coming year.

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

62. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its seventy-first session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/2) in session.

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