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Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce

Revised standard for dates

Submitted by the secretariat

Summary

The following document is submitted to the Working Party for adoption as the revised United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) standard DDP-08 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of dates.

The document is based on the document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/12 and integrates modifications agreed during the seventy-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce (GE.2) in 2024 as reflected in ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.2/2024/8.



UNECE standard DDP-08 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of dates¹

I. Definition of produce

This standard applies to pitted and unpitted dates in their natural state or washed, rehydrated, and/or coated and/or pasteurised from varieties (cultivars) grown from *Phoenix dactylifera* L. intended for direct consumption. It does not apply to dates for industrial processing.

II. Provisions concerning quality

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements of dates after preparation and packaging.

However, if applied at stages following export or dispatch, the holder/seller shall be responsible for observing the requirements of the standard. The holder/seller of products may not display such products or offer them for sale, or deliver or market them in any manner other than in conformity with this standard.

A. Minimum requirements²

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, the dates must display the following characteristics observed by the naked eye or corrected 20/20 vision³ when appropriate:

- intact; dates affected by mashing, tearing, breaking of the skin, leaving the pit visible so that the appearance of the fruit is noticeably affected is excluded
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for human consumption is excluded
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter; excluding coating ingredients
- free from living pests whatever their stage of development
- free from pest damage visible to the naked eye, including the presence of dead insects and/or mites, their debris or excreta
- free from mould filaments visible to the naked eye
- free of fermentation
- free of unripe fruit, i.e. fruit light in weight, stunted or distinctly rubbery in texture
- free of unpollinated fruit, i.e. fruit not pollinated, as indicated by stunted growth, immature characteristics and absence of pit
- free of blemished fruit, i.e. fruit scarred, discoloured or sunburnt, or having blacknose (noticeable darkening of the head, generally accompanied by severe checking or cracking of the flesh) or side-spot (a very dark patch extending into the flesh) or similar abnormalities affecting an area at least as large as a circle of 7 mm diameter
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of foreign smell and/or taste.

¹ Dates in this standard are those having the typical characteristics of dried fruit. They are naturally dried while still attached to the date palm and must be at the tamar stage, i.e., soft fruit, dull brownish in colour.

² Definitions of terms and defects are listed in Annex III of the Standard Layout – Recommended terms and definitions of defects for standards of dry (inshell nuts and nut kernels) and dried produce <https://unece.org/trade/wp7/DDP-Standards>.

³ Loupe, binocular or other magnifying equipment should not be used when assessing defects.

The condition of the dates must be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transportation and handling
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

B. Moisture content⁴

The dates shall have a moisture content not exceeding 26.0 per cent for cane sugar varieties and 30.0 per cent for invert sugar varieties.⁵ In their natural state, however, for the variety Deglet Nour the maximum moisture content shall be 30.0 per cent.

C. Classification

In accordance with the defects allowed in section “IV. Provisions concerning tolerances”, dates are classified into the following three classes:

“Extra” Class, Class I and Class II.

The defects allowed must not affect the general appearance of the produce as regards quality, keeping quality and presentation in the package.

III. Provisions concerning sizing

Size is determined by the unit weight of the fruit.

The minimum weight of dates shall be 4.0 g.

IV. Provisions concerning tolerances

At all marketing stages, tolerances in respect of quality and size shall be allowed in each lot for produce not satisfying the minimum requirements of the class indicated.

| <i>Defects allowed</i> | <i>Tolerances allowed, percentage of defective produce, by number or weight</i> | | |
|---|---|----------------|-----------------|
| | <i>“Extra”</i> | <i>Class I</i> | <i>Class II</i> |
| (a) Tolerances for produce not satisfying the minimum requirements | 5 | 10 | 20 |
| of which no more than | | | |
| Immature or unpollinated fruit | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| Sour, decayed or mouldy fruit | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Fermented or damaged by pests, ^{a, b, c} rotten or deteriorated | 3 | 8 | 12 |
| Blemished, discoloured or blacknose, sunburnt, cracking of the flesh | 3 | 5 | 7 |
| Living pests | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| (b) Size tolerances (if sized) | | | |
| For produce not conforming to the minimum size, in total, depending on the characteristics of the product | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| (c) Tolerances for other defects | | | |

⁴ The moisture content is determined by Method 1 and/or 2 in Annex I of the Standard Layout for UNECE Standards on Dry and Dried Produce. The laboratory reference method shall be used in cases of dispute.

⁵ A non-exhaustive list of varieties classified by the nature of their principal sugar component is given in the annex to this standard.

| <i>Defects allowed</i> | <i>Tolerances allowed, percentage of defective produce, by number or weight</i> | | |
|--|---|----------------|-----------------|
| | <i>"Extra"</i> | <i>Class I</i> | <i>Class II</i> |
| Unpitted among pitted fruit (by number) | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| Extraneous matter (of organic origin) such as loose shells, shell fragments, fragments of hull, leaves, dust (by weight) [and] | | | |
| Foreign matter (of inorganic origin) such as stones, metal, and glass (by weight) | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Dates belonging to varieties or commercial types other than that indicated – depending on the characteristics of the product | 10 | 10 | 10 |

^a Reservations of Poland and the United Kingdom, which wish to retain the former tolerances: Extra, 2 per cent; Class I, 4 per cent; Class II, 6 per cent.

^b When applying its national legislation, Switzerland does not admit a tolerance higher than 6 per cent for produce damaged by pests.

^c When applying its national legislation, the United States of America does not admit a tolerance higher than 5 per cent for produce damaged by pests.

V. Provisions concerning presentation

A. Uniformity

The contents of each package⁶ must be uniform and contain only dates of the same origin, quality, variety (if indicated).

The visible part of the contents of the package must be representative of its entire contents.

B. Packaging

Dates must be packed in such a way as to protect the produce properly.

The materials used inside the package must be clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or stamps bearing trade specifications, is allowed, provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Packages must be practically free of all foreign and extraneous matter, excluding decorated material (rachis, stems, plastic forks, etc.), in accordance with the table of tolerances in section "IV. Provisions concerning tolerances".

C. Presentation

Dates must be presented in bags or solid containers. All sales packages within each package must be of the same weight.

Dates may be presented:

- in clusters (consisting mainly of the rachis and the stems to which the fruit is attached naturally)
- in stems (stems which are separated from the rachis and to which the fruit is attached naturally)
- separated in individual fruit, arranged in layers, or loose in the package.

⁶ The term "packages" is defined in Annex III of the Standard Layout for UNECE Standards on Dry and Dried Produce.

Stems presented in clusters or separated from the rachis must be at least 10 cm in length and carry an average of four fruits per 10 cm of length.

Where the dates are presented in stems or clusters, there may be a maximum of 10 per cent of loose dates.

The ends of the stems must be cleanly cut.

VI. Provisions concerning marking

Each package⁷ must bear the following particulars in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked and visible from the outside:

A. Identification

Packer and/or dispatcher:

Name and physical address (e.g. street/city/region/postal code and, if different from the country of origin, the country) or a code mark officially recognized by the national authority⁸ if a country applying such a system is listed in the UNECE Code Mark Registry.

B. Nature of produce

- “Dates”, when the contents are not visible from the outside
- Name of the variety and/or commercial type (optional)
- “Cluster” or “stems”, where appropriate
- “Pitted”, where appropriate.

C. Origin of produce

- Country of origin⁹ and, optionally, district where grown, or national, regional or local place name.

D. Commercial specifications

- Class
- Crop year (optional)
- “Best before” followed by the date (optional).

E. Official control mark (optional)

Adopted 1987

Last revised 2024

Aligned with the Standard Layout 2022.

⁷ These marking provisions do not apply to sales packages presented in packages.

⁸ The national legislation of a number of countries requires the explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in cases where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/or dispatcher” (or equivalent abbreviations) must be indicated in close connection with the code mark, and the code mark should be preceded with the ISO 3166 alpha country code of the recognizing country, if not the country of origin.

⁹ The full or a commonly used name should be indicated.

Annex

Non-exhaustive list of cane sugar and invert sugar varieties of dates

A. Cane sugar varieties

Varieties which contain mainly sucrose, including:

Name of the variety

Deglet Nour

Deglet Beidha

B. Invert sugar varieties

Varieties which contain mainly invert sugar (glucose and fructose), including:

Name of the variety

Barhi

Saiidi

Khadhraawi

Hallaawi

Zahdi

Sayir

Amri

Deri

Alig

Medjoul

Khouet Alig

Kenta
