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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 Seed Potatoes

Fifty-first session

Geneva, 26–28 March 2024

## Report of the fifty-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

### I. Introduction

1. The fifty-first session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was held in person at the Palais des Nations in Geneva. The session was chaired by the two vice-chairs, Mr. Nigel Crump (Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority) and Ms. Nina Zidack (United States of America).
2. The Chief *ad interim* of the Market Access Section of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Mr. Ariel Ivanier, welcomed the delegates and expressed appreciation for their continuous engagement as well as for the valuable work in the past year. He emphasized the importance of potatoes for food security, as a key staple crop which is drought resistant, geographically adaptable and have a long shelf-life, and highlighted the importance of certified seed potatoes for ensuring quality planting materials, thus keeping diseases and pests at bay, increasing harvests and reducing spoilage.
3. He noted that the ECE standard is unique as it is the only international standard for seed potatoes and that it has had a clear impact since it was first adopted in 1963. He commended the progress made in 2023, including on the full review of the standard, and the outcomes of the rapporteur's meeting held in Brest, France.

### II. Attendance

4. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.
5. Representatives of the following non-governmental and private sector organizations participated in the session: Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, Potato Certification Service (South Africa), Potatoes New Zealand.



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

6. The Specialized Section adopted the provisional agenda (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/1).

### IV. Matters arising (agenda item 2)

#### (a) Recent developments in the United Nations, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and its subsidiary bodies

7. The Chief *ad interim* of the Market Access Section informed of developments since the last session of the Specialized Section in March 2023, notably the seventieth session of the Economic Commission for Europe, held on 18-19 April 2023 under the theme Digital and Green Transformations for Sustainable Development in the Region of the Economic Commission for Europe, the eighth session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards which had been 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. He informed that the upcoming meeting of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would be held on 26–28 June 2024, and the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on 11–13 November 2024.

8. He further informed of the results of the programmatic evaluation of the work of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Division (ECTD), conducted by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in 2022 and for which the report was published in March 2023 (E/AC.51/2023/5). The evaluators had found that the work of ECTD is relevant and aligned with its mandate, that the Division largely responded to specific member States' requests, and that it had "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.

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

9. The delegation of France informed that the revised European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO) Standard PM4/28 Certification Scheme for Seed Potatoes<sup>1</sup> had been approved in September 2023. The revision took into consideration the compatibility with the ECE Standard.

### V. Report of the rapporteur's meeting in 2023 (agenda item 3)

10. The delegation of France informed the Specialized Section of the discussion held at the rapporteur's meeting in Brest, France, on 10–12 October 2023, hosted by the French Interprofessional Organization for Seeds and Plants (SEMAE). The meeting had been held in-person, with online participation for the agenda item discussing proposed revisions to the Standard for Seed Potatoes. In addition to the discussions on the standard, the meeting had included technical visits to a seed potato testing laboratory, an in-vitro production laboratory, and a farm growing and exporting seed potatoes. It also featured a roundtable discussion on potato plantlets and a presentation by a climate change expert. Presentations delivered at the

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.eppo.int/RESOURCES/eppo\\_standards/pm4\\_certification](https://www.eppo.int/RESOURCES/eppo_standards/pm4_certification)

meeting are available on the ECE website<sup>2</sup>. A summary report of the meeting had been made available as an informal document for this session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/INF.1).

11. The Specialized Section thanked the delegation of France for successfully organizing the rapporteur's meeting and encouraged other delegations to volunteer to host similar meetings in the future.

## **VI. Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes (agenda item 4)**

12. At its 2022 session, the Specialized Section decided to undertake a full review of the ECE Standard S-1 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of seed potatoes. The review was assigned to a rapporteur's group consisting of Finland (rapporteur), France, Germany, the Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Spain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority, Euroseeds, and Potato Certification Service (South Africa).

13. Over the course of 2022 and 2023, the rapporteur's group worked on the revisions in seven half-day online meetings, facilitated by the secretariat, the last of which was held on 13 December 2023. The proposed revisions were also discussed at the rapporteur's meeting in Brest in October 2023. In addition, the rapporteur's group held a meeting on 25 March 2024, the day before the start of the Specialized Section meeting, in which it started reviewing the annexes to the standard.

14. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposals for revisions to the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes submitted by the rapporteur's group (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/3). It reviewed the changes section by section, with no additional changes proposed to the main text. Following this, the Specialized Section reviewed annexes I-VII, including the changes to the annexes that were discussed by the rapporteur's group on 25 March 2024.

15. The Specialized Section agreed with the work done by the rapporteur's group, and also agreed on additional changes proposed in session as recorded in track-change during the session. It requested the rapporteur's group to continue the review, with the aim of presenting a final version for consideration of the Specialized Section at its 2025 session. It suggested that the rapporteur's group also review the two-page information leaflet about the standard. The Specialized Section invited additional interested countries to join the work, by contacting the secretariat.

## **VII. Guide on minituber production (agenda item 5)**

16. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section reviewed and provided comments the draft guide on minituber production which had been developed in a rapporteur's group consisting of France, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), the United Kingdom, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority (rapporteur), Euroseeds, Potato Certification Service (South Africa) and Potatoes New Zealand and which was nearly finalized.

17. The Specialized Section agreed to finalize the minituber guide in conjunction with the revision of the standard and submit it for consideration at the 2025 session of the Specialized Section.

## **VIII. Development of a position of the Specialized Section on herbicide carry-over (agenda item 6)**

18. At the 2023 meeting, the Specialized Section decided to postpone the review of the draft position paper on herbicide carry-over, developed by a rapporteur's group (France, the United Kingdom (rapporteur), the United States, Australian Seed Potato Industry

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<sup>2</sup> <https://unece.org/info/events/event/383555>

Certification Authority), Potato Certification Service (South Africa) and Potatoes New Zealand, to its 2024 session.

19. The Specialized Section reviewed and discussed the draft position paper on herbicide carry-over (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/4) and suggested some modifications which were recorded in session.

20. The Specialized Section completed the review of its draft position on herbicide carryover, as contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/4 with the changes introduced in session, and agreed to submit it to the Working Party for approval.

## **IX. Revision of the position of the Specialized Section on vigour of seed potatoes (agenda item 7)**

21. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section reviewed its position paper on vigour of seed potatoes and agreed that more research would be required to update it.

22. Ahead of its 2024 session, the representative of Potato Certification Service (South Africa) had provided initial input for the review (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/6).

23. The Specialized Section reviewed the current position paper (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/5) along with the input provided by Potato Certification Service (South Africa) (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/6).

24. The Specialized Section agreed to establish a rapporteur's group led by Potato Certification Service (South Africa) and consisting of France, Netherlands (Kingdom of), and United Kingdom to review the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes and provide a proposal to the 2025 session of the Specialized Section.

## **X. True potato seeds and plantlets (agenda item 8)**

25. The 2023 session of the Specialized Section featured a presentation by an external expert and shared experiences on the topic of true potato seeds (TPS). Following that, at the rapporteur's meeting in Brest, France, in October 2023, participants discussed the issue of potato plantlets, and agreed to continue the discussion at the Specialized Section session in 2024.

26. The Specialized Section discussed its potential future work related to TPS and potato plantlets. Delegations remarked that TPS was an important issue which should be kept on the agenda. It was suggested to organize a seminar/webinar on the issue, and to discuss potential challenges related to seed certification and how to integrate TPS in normal certification schemes. The delegation of the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) offered to send a note on their experiences on TPS.

27. The Specialized Section welcomed the proposal by the delegation of the Netherlands (Kingdom of the) to send a note on TPS for discussion at its 2025 session.

## **XI. New and emerging diseases and issues (agenda item 9)**

28. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section agreed to continue sharing information about new and emerging diseases and issues such as potato mop-top virus, testing dormant tubers for viruses, Potato Spindle Tuber Viroid (PSTVd) and other Solanaceous diseases, potato wart, Liberibacter, potato leafroll virus, and impacts of the phase-out of insecticides.

29. Delegations were invited to share information and experiences on new and emerging diseases and pests. Potato Certification Service (South Africa) shared experiences with pepper ring spot virus. Switzerland shared that it had received a first report of *Candidatus arsenophonus phytopathogenicus* in ware potatoes. Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority shared concerns about PSTVd and fungicidal resistance. Potatoes New Zealand also noted the issue of fungicidal resistance. The United States raised concerns

regarding the potential increase in potato leafroll virus if neonicotinoids are banned. There was a general discussion on the topic of leafroll, potato wart, and Potato virus Y.

30. The Specialized Section agreed to continue sharing information on this topic and keep the item on the agenda for its 2025 session.

## **XII. Sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification (agenda item 10)**

31. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section discussed the results of a survey on lot size and sample size of seed potatoes and agreed to use the findings of the survey when revising the relevant paragraphs of the standard. It further decided to include sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification in its list of future work.

32. The Specialized Section discussed potential future work relating to sample size and interpretation of diagnostics used to support certification.

33. The Specialized Section agreed to delete annex VI and IX from the standard and move them into separate documents. It further agreed to establish a rapporteur's group consisting of the Netherlands (Kingdom of), United Kingdom, United States, and Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority to review the text of the removed annexes and propose in what form to make them available. It further agreed that additional countries wishing to join the group should contact the secretariat.

## **XIII. Impact of climate change on seed potato production (agenda item 11)**

34. At its 2023 session, the Specialized Section agreed to include the impact of climate change on seed potato production in the agenda for its 2024 session. At the rapporteur's meeting in Brest, France, in October 2023 an external expert presented on the topic.

35. The delegation of France provided a presentation on the topic based on the discussions held in Brest. It noted that research showed that climate change is causing notable shifts in the environmental suitability of regions involved in potato cultivation, and that projected potato yields were expected to decline by the end of the century due to climate change related causes. Potential impacts due to global warming included: more energy needed for cooling of potato storages due to warmer autumns, impact on dormancy, increased risk of physiological blocking on hot days, non-adaptation of many varieties to high temperatures, warmer winters may lead to risk of diseases and insects not dying during winter. Potential impacts related to water included: risks of erosion due to heavy rain, increased need for watering during growing seasons, increased water stress, impact on potato quality from increased rain. Several other potential impacts were mentioned including potential risk for new insects and weeds, virus strains, return of old pests, and more defects and misshape of tubers.

36. The Specialized Section agreed to establish a rapporteur's group led by France and including Finland, Netherlands (Kingdom of), United Kingdom, Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority and Europatat, to discuss the impact of climate change on seed potato production and propose potential actions for consideration by the Specialized Section at its 2025 session.

## **XIV. Capacity-building (agenda item 12)**

### **(a) Seed potato webinar series**

37. During 2023, the Bureau of the Specialized Section approached the World Potato Congress (WPC) for the potential co-organization of a webinar series. WPC had agreed to a

session on the ECE Standard for Seed Potatoes, potentially followed by other joint webinars. The webinar would be held in the next 6-8 months.

38. The Specialized Section discussed options for organizing webinars and additional proposals for capacity-building. In addition to the topics suggested at last year's session, the following topics were suggested: pepper ring spot virus, tobacco rattle virus, *Liberobacter*, fungicidal resistance, and the impact of the phaseout of neonicotinoids on diseases and pests. It was suggested that the focus of the webinars would be a technical overview of the impact on certification. Delegations were invited to provide suggestions for experts to speak at webinars. The Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority suggested holding a webinar on the challenges of adoption of seed potato schemes in developing countries. The secretariat also proposed to do a series of short video-clips under the headings of expert talks, starting with a recording about the standard.

39. The Specialized Section agreed to proceed with the organization of a webinar with WPC about the standard, to do the expert talk video-clips about the standard, and to explore the organization of additional webinars.

#### **(b) Information-sharing on capacity-building and use of standards**

40. Delegations were invited to share information on ongoing and planned capacity-building activities, and to propose future activities.

41. The Specialized Section suggested reviewing the two-page information leaflet on the standard in connection with the standard review and including QR codes in the material to link to the different guides developed by the Specialized Section.

42. The Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority proposed to do more capacity-building activities for developing countries and to identify gaps and update the online Guide on Potato Diseases, Pests and Defects. The Specialized Section agreed to set up a rapporteur's group consisting of Czechia, France, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Sweden, United Kingdom and the Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority to update the guide. The delegation of France suggested to also update it in the book format, which was seconded by other delegations who emphasized the guide was very useful for capacity building.

#### **(c) Document-sharing platform and website**

43. The secretariat provided an update on options for document-sharing and collaboration platforms hosted by the secretariat. It suggested sharing documents within rapporteur's groups in a cloud-based database hosted by the secretariat, as already done for some rapporteur's groups of other Specialized Sections. The Specialized Section supported this approach.

### **XV. Working Procedures of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards and its Specialized Sections (agenda item 13)**

44. At its 2023 session, the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards agreed on revisions to its Terms of Reference which will be submitted to the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards for approval at its upcoming session on 26-28 June 2024. As regards its Working Procedures, the Working Party decided to continue the review and to invite the views of the Specialized Sections in the process.

45. The Specialized Section reviewed the draft revised Working Procedures as discussed by the Working Party at its 2023 session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/4 and ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2023/INF.2). No comments or suggestions were received.

## **XVI. Future work (agenda item 14)**

46. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2025 agenda:
- Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes and the two-page information leaflet about the standard (Rapporteur's group)
  - Revision of the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes (Rapporteur's group)
  - Finalization of the minituber guide (Rapporteur's group)
  - Impact of climate change on seed potato production (Rapporteur's group)
  - True potato seeds and plantlets (note to be developed by the delegation of the Netherlands)
  - New and emerging diseases and issues (sharing of information)
  - Review the text of the annexes VI and IX, to be moved from the standard into separate documents (Rapporteur's group)
  - Online guide on diseases and pests – identification of gaps and provision of additional information (Rapporteur's group)
  - Soil-borne vectored viruses – identification of key experts and development of a position paper (Rapporteur's group)
  - Capacity-building – webinar series and expert talks.

## **XVII. Other business (agenda item 15)**

47. The Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority informed about the first International Day of Potato, to be held on 30 May 2024 under the theme “Harvesting diversity, feeding hope”. The secretariat suggested developing a social media campaign for this day, to increase awareness of the Seed Potato Standard and the work of the Specialized Section. The Specialized Section agreed to organize a series of social media events.

48. The secretariat informed that the next session of the Specialized Section would tentatively be held on 18–20 March 2025.

49. The Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority informed about the upcoming World Potato Congress, to be held in Adelaide, Australia on 23–26 June 2024 and invited delegations to attend the meeting. Australia will submit the poster on the benefits of certified seed potatoes, developed by the Specialized Section, to be showcased at the WPC.

## **XVIII. Election of officers (agenda item 16)**

50. The Specialized Section re-elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair, and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australian Seed Potato Industry Certification Authority) and Ms. Nina Zidack (United States) as its Vice-Chairs for a one-year period.

## **XIX. Adoption of the report (agenda item 17)**

51. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its fifty-first session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2024/2) in session.