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COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-fourth session
Geneva, 3-6 November 2008

**REPORT OF THE WORKING PARTY ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY
STANDARDS ON ITS SIXTY-FOURTH SESSION**

Summary

The Working Party adopted: (a) revised standard layouts for fresh fruit and vegetables and for dry and dried produce as new standard layouts; (b) new/revised standards for seed potatoes, early and ware potatoes, apples, pears, lettuce, avocados, tomatoes, cucumbers, dried peaches, edible meat co-products and duck meat; (c) revised texts on apricots, peaches and nectarines, pistachio kernels and peeled pistachio kernels, blanched almond kernels, hazelnut kernels and the 2002 version of the Standard on Inshell Walnuts as recommendations on trial through 2009; (d) new texts on inshell macadamia nuts and macadamia kernels as recommendations on trial through 2010.

The Working Party approved the colour gauge for walnut kernels.

To accelerate the development and adoption of standards, the Working Party decided to start a discussion on restructuring its work, taking into consideration implications of the draft Commission Regulation on marketing standards for fruits and vegetables on the work of UNECE on agricultural quality standards.

The Working Party submitted its draft Programme of Work for 2010-2011 to the Committee on Trade for approval.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was opened by Ms. Virginia Cram-Martos, Director of the UNECE Trade and Timber Division. It was chaired by Ms. Viera Baričičová (Slovakia).

II. ATTENDANCE

2. Representatives of the following countries attended: Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America. Apologies were received from the representative of Switzerland.

3. The European Commission (EC) was also represented.

4. The following specialized agencies/programmes participated in the session: Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme.

5. A representative of the following intergovernmental organization also participated in the session: the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables.

6. A representative of the following non-governmental organization participated in the meeting as an observer: International Nut Council (INC).

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (Agenda item 1)

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/1

7. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with changes in the order of consideration of the agenda items.

IV. MATTERS OF INTEREST SINCE THE LAST SESSION (Agenda item 2)

A. Revised terms of reference and working procedures

Documentation: Terms of reference (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/23)
Working procedures (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/24)

8. The Working Party took note of the amendments proposed by the delegation of the United States to the terms of reference document (paragraph 5(c)), and to the working procedures (paragraph 11 and a new paragraph 16). The consideration of these amendments prompted the delegations to start a broader discussion on restructuring the work of the Working Party and its specialized sections. Many participants stressed the need to accelerate the development and adoption of standards. One possible way of doing that might be by giving the authority of approving the standards to the specialized sections, while the Working Party annual sessions could concentrate on items of general and policy-making nature.

9. The Working Party asked the secretariat and chairpersons of the specialized sections to collect and summarize country proposals on how the UNECE work on agricultural quality standards could be made more effective and efficient. A summary paper should be ready to be submitted to the February 2009 meeting of the Committee on Trade and subsequently to the November 2009 session of the Working Party.

B. Recent developments in other organizations

10. The EC delegation informed the meeting about the draft Commission Regulation on marketing standards for fruits and vegetables. The draft Regulation introduces new implementing rules on marketing standards and associated checks, following the reform of the common market organization in the fruit and vegetable sector, and amends Regulation (EC) No 1580/2007, laying down implementing rules for marketing standards in the fruit and vegetable sector.

11. More specifically, the draft Regulation:

(a) Introduces a definition of "sound, fair and of marketable quality" corresponding to a general marketing standard for all fresh fruit and vegetables, which also includes the provision that the full name of the country of origin must be indicated for all fresh fruit and vegetables. Eight products are excluded from the general marketing standard;

(b) Reduces the number of specific marketing standards from 36 to 10 (apples; citrus fruit; kiwifruit; lettuces, curled leaved and broad-leaved endives; peaches and nectarines; pears; strawberries; sweet peppers; table grapes and tomatoes). These products represent 75 per cent in value of the intra-EU trade in fresh fruit and vegetables, currently covered by the marketing standards. Fruits and vegetables not covered by a specific marketing standard shall conform to the general marketing standard. However, where the holder is able to show they are in conformity with any applicable standards adopted by the UNECE, the product shall be considered as conforming to the general marketing standard;

(c) Simplifies and rationalizes the checking operations, which should lead to a significant reduction of the administrative burden for inspection and customs services and facilitate the work of approved exporters and importers.

12. The draft Regulation was subject to WTO-TBT notification. The definition of "sound, fair and of marketable quality", including the specification of the country of origin and the reduction of the number of specific marketing standards, is considered to be a technical rule. On 12 November, the Members States will hold a vote on this proposal. The implementation of the Regulation is foreseen for July 2009.

13. The adoption of the new Regulation may affect the work of UNECE on agricultural quality standards. Traders in many EU countries have indicated that they would use UNECE standards. For those products for which there are no UNECE standards, it would be desirable to develop a general marketing standard that would provide for quality classes. The Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables could use the Standard Layout to draw up such a standard.

14. Countries may wish to publish standards on the UNECE website in languages other than the three official ones. The following disclaimer on the website should make it clear which is the official version of the standard: “The standards are published in the three official languages of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Should any discrepancies be found between the language versions or between versions in other, unofficial, languages, the English version should normally prevail, unless the original version of the standard was in French or Russian, in which case the French or Russian version should prevail”.

15. The Working Party asked the secretariat to separate standards from recommendations on the UNECE web pages.

16. The OECD representative informed the meeting about the activities that OECD had carried out or planned since the 2007 session of WP.7. In 2007-2008, the OECD Fruit and Vegetables Scheme continued to implement its Reform Plan, which had been adopted in 2004. The OECD Peer Review on the Slovakian Inspection System was undertaken in 2008 and the report will be discussed at the 67th Plenary Meeting on 3 and 4 December. The Peer Review of Fruit and Vegetables Quality Inspection System in Hungary will be published in early November 2008.

17. The OECD Scheme has published the explanatory brochures on kiwifruit and cucumbers, which are available in hard copy and electronically. Work continued on brochures for apples, apricots, citrus fruit, hazelnuts, peaches and nectarines, pears and potatoes. Good progress was made on the brochure for citrus fruit at the working group in Israel in April 2008. At the 66th Plenary Meeting, the OECD Scheme Member Countries recognized the need for an explanatory brochure on pineapples, as international trade flows in this product have increased significantly in recent years.

18. Kenya and Serbia have applied for the OECD Scheme membership and OECD evaluation missions were organized to these countries in 2008. The evaluation reports will be discussed at the 67th Plenary Meeting.

19. The next OECD Meeting of the Heads of National Inspection Services will be organized by Finland from 2 to 4 June 2009. All member countries of the UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards are invited to participate.

20. The representative of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme provided information on the status of work in the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables since the May 2008 session of the UNECE Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. At its 31st session (Geneva, 30 June – 4 July 2008) the Codex Alimentarius Commission adopted the Codex Standard for Tomatoes and provisionally adopted the Draft Standard for Bitter Cassava (final adoption) and apples (preliminary adoption). The labelling section of the Draft Standard for Bitter Cassava was returned to the Codex Committee on Fruit and Vegetables for further consideration. The Commission approved new work proposals on avocados, fresh chili peppers and tree tomatoes (tamarillo). The proposal on durians was referred back to the Codex Committee in order to review the need for a worldwide standard.

AGENDA ITEMS 3-6

21. The chairpersons of the specialized sections presented their work since the 2007 meeting of the Working Party.

**V. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF SEED POTATOES
(Agenda item 3)**

Documentation: Report of the thirty-eighth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.6/2008/9)
Standard on seed potatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/2)

22. The Working Party approved the amended text of the Standard on seed potatoes. It also took note of the revised list of diseases and pests with illustrative photographs, accessible at: http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/pot_e.htm.

**VI. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF FRESH FRUIT AND
VEGETABLES (Agenda item 4)**

Documentation: Report of the fifty-fourth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2008/6)

A. Revised Standard Layout for UNECE standards on fresh fruit and vegetables

Documentation: Standard Layout (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/3)

23. The delegations agreed to change in section V.A (Uniformity) provisions concerning mixtures of products to read as follows:

<However, a mixture of *{name of produce}* of distinctly different varieties may be packed together in a sales unit¹, provided they are uniform in quality and, for each variety concerned, in origin.>

<However, a mixture of *{name of produce}* of distinctly different colours and/or commercial types may be packed together in a sales unit, provided they are uniform in quality and, for each colour and/or commercial type concerned, in origin.>

24. The delegations agreed to change in section VI.B provisions concerning nature of produce to read as follows:

<- name of the variety>

<- name of the variety (optional)>

¹ The sales unit should be designed to be purchased in its entirety.

- <- name of the variety. In the case of sales units containing a mixture of *{name of produce}* of different varieties, names of the different varieties.>
- <- “Mixture of *{name of produce}*”, or equivalent denomination, in the case of sales units containing a mixture of distinctly different colours and/or commercial types of *{name of produce}*. If the produce is not visible from the outside, the colours or commercial types of the sales unit must be indicated.>

{Add name of the commercial type, depending on the nature of the produce}.

25. The delegations agreed to change in section VI.C provisions concerning origin of produce to read as follows:

<In the case of sales units containing a mixture of varieties of *{name of produce}* of different origins, the indication of each country of origin shall appear next to the name of the variety concerned.>

<In the case of sales units containing a mixture of distinctly different colours and/or commercial types of *{name of produce}* of different origins, the indication of each country of origin shall appear next to the name of the colour and/or commercial type concerned.>

26. The Working Party adopted the revised text of the Standard Layout as a new Standard Layout. The delegation of France agreed to this decision, with the following reservation: since the provisions on mixtures of varieties/commercial types had been submitted for consideration of the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables at its May session only four days prior to the meeting, there had been no time to consult with the industry and formulate the position of France on this issue.

27. The secretariat had received comments on the Standard Layout from France, the Islamic Republic of Iran and South Africa. These comments will be submitted to the Specialized Section at its May 2009 session.

B. Texts for adoption as new/revised UNECE standards

Documentation: Early and Ware Potatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/4)
Apples (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/5)
Pears (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/6)
Lettuce (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/7)
Avocados (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/8)
Tomatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/9)
Cucumbers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/10)

28. The Working Party adopted the amended texts of revised UNECE standards for early and ware potatoes, apples, pears, lettuce, avocados, tomatoes and cucumbers.

29. The document “Standard for apples - approved” on http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/wp.07/2008_wp7.htm clarifies which provisions of the Standard have been approved.

30. The delegation of France agreed to the adoption of the Standard for Pears, with the following reservation to be reflected in the text of the Standard: "The sales unit should be designed to be purchased in its entirety and its net weight should not exceed 5 kg". The delegation agreed to approve the standards for apples and avocados, on the understanding that work on the texts of these standards would continue at UNECE and the Codex Committee.

31. The delegation of the United States expressed concern about the partial and not full harmonization on sizing requirements between the UNECE and Codex Committee standards for tomatoes.

C. Texts for adoption as UNECE recommendations

Documentation: Apricots - revised (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/11)
Peaches and nectarines - revised (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/12)

32. The Working Party adopted the revised texts on apricots and peaches and nectarines as recommendations for trial use until the end of 2009.

33. The Chair encouraged the inclusion of a PowerPoint presentation of the GE.1 activities on the website on WP.7 activities.

VII. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF DRY AND DRIED PRODUCE (Agenda item 5)

Documentation: Report of the fifty-fifth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.2/2008/6)

A. Revised Standard Layout for UNECE standards on dry and dried produce

Documentation: Standard Layout (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/13)

34. The Working Party adopted the revised text of the Standard Layout as a new Standard Layout. The delegation of France indicated that they would submit a request for revision, following their consultations with the French Food Safety Agency (AFSSA).

B. Texts for adoption as new/revised UNECE standards

Documentation: Dried peaches - new (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/14)
Pistachio kernels and peeled pistachio kernels - new
(ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/15)
Inshell walnuts - revised (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/16)

35. The Working Party adopted the amended text of the UNECE Standard for Dried Peaches. The text for a new standard for pistachio kernels and peeled pistachio kernels was returned to the Specialized Section to consider the comments by France on the table of tolerances. The trial period of the recommendation was extended for one year until the end of 2009.

36. The Working Party recommended extending the trial period of the 2002 version of the Standard on Inshell Walnuts for one more year, since there was no agreement to approve it. The

Working Party encouraged the countries concerned to prepare a compromise to put to the Specialized Section at its next meeting.

C. Texts for adoption/extension as UNECE recommendations

Documentation: Blanched almond kernels - extension (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/17)
 Hazelnut kernels - extension (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/18)
 Inshell macadamia nuts - new (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/19)
 Macadamia kernels - new (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/20)

37. The Working Party adopted the revised texts of recommendations for blanched almond kernels and hazelnut kernels for trial use until the end of 2009, and the new texts on inshell macadamia nuts and macadamia kernels for trial use until the end of 2010.

VIII. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF MEAT (Agenda item 6)

Documentation: Report of the seventeenth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.11/2008/8)

A. Texts for adoption as new UNECE standards

Documentation: Edible meat co-products (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/21)
 Duck meat (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/22)

38. The Working Party approved as new UNECE standards the amended texts on edible meat co-products and duck meat – carcasses and parts.

39. The delegation of France pointed out that the development of the duck meat standard had gone too fast and that they had not had enough time to consult with the industry. France will submit proposals for amendments when the text will be up for the regular revision.

40. The delegations accepted the editorial amendments and the addition of two new products (pork cheeks and veal mask) to the Standard for Edible Meat Co-products requested by France.

IX. INTERPRETATION OF UNECE STANDARDS (Agenda item 7)

A. UNECE explanatory brochure for sweet peppers

41. Information on the outcome of the meeting of the Working Group on sweet peppers is provided in the annex to this report.

B. Colour gauge for walnut kernels

42. The delegation of the United States presented a revised colour gauge for walnut kernels. The Working Party approved the gauge and recommended it for use by the industry. The delegation of the United States was asked if the gauge could be printed on a glossier/plastified

paper. The Working Party thanked the United States and other delegations for producing the colour gauge.

X. CONCENTRATION OF AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS WORK IN UNECE (Agenda item 8)

43. The Chairperson of the UNECE task force explained that reports on the following matters would be prepared for discussion by the UNECE and OECD task forces during the week of the December 2008 session of the OECD Scheme in Paris: (a) new approaches to presenting interpretative material on standards; (b) organization of meetings of the Working Party and its specialized sections on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and on Dry and Dried Produce; (c) how to incorporate activities of the OECD into the future UNECE programme of work.

44. The participants agreed that, in view of the current workload, it would be difficult to produce more than one explanatory brochure per year.

XI. CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES (Agenda item 9)

45. The secretariat and delegations exchanged information on the capacity-building, training, promotional and other activities that had taken place since the November 2007 session of the Working Party or were planned for the near future. Information on these activities is regularly updated in the international meetings calendar table on the UNECE website (<http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm>).

XII. OTHER BUSINESS (Agenda item 10)

46. The delegations discussed the new draft cover page for UNECE standards suggested by the secretariat. To stress the global character of these standards and bearing in mind that any member of the United Nations can participate, on equal footing, in the activities of WP.7 and its specialized sections, the Working Party decided to remove “United Nations Economic Commission for Europe” from the upper part of the cover page. This does not contradict the United Nations administrative regulations for the control of documentation (document ST/AI/189/Add.6/Rev.5). The words “United Nations” and the emblem in the bottom part of the cover would reflect the global nature of the standards. The Working Party asked the secretariat to publish all new and revised standards under the revised cover page.

47. The Working Party asked the specialized sections to propose ways of applying revised standard layouts to old standards.

48. WP.6 and WP.7 held a joint session on private standards. The conclusions of that session will be summarized in a separate report.

XIII. FUTURE WORK (Agenda item 11)

49. The delegations recommended the Working Party’s draft Programme of Work, 2010 – 2011 (as presented in document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2008/INF.1) for approval by the Committee on Trade, with the following addition: The Working Party will review as necessary its terms of reference and working procedures.

50. The Working Party asked the delegation of Germany to prepare a paper on the utility of an Internet database for inspection services that could be run at UNECE or OECD. It would be appropriate to discuss this paper at the December 2008 OECD Scheme meeting and at the May 2009 session of the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.

XIV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS (Agenda item 12)

51. The Working Party re-elected Ms. Viera Baričičová (Slovakia) as Chairperson and Ms. Niina Kauhajärvi (Finland) as Vice-Chairperson.

XV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT (Agenda item 13)

52. The Working Party adopted its report.

*Annex***UNECE EXPLANATORY BROCHURE FOR SWEET PEPPERS**

Documentation: Standard for Sweet Peppers (FFV-28: Sweet peppers)
Proposals by Germany and UK (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2008/INF.7)
Draft brochure (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2008/5)

1. The Working Group considered the revisions to the Standard for Sweet Peppers, together with the explanatory text and illustrative photographs of the draft UNECE brochure. Proposals made by delegations were integrated to the draft to amend the Standard.
2. The delegations revised the text of the draft brochure, which had been first presented at the May 2008 meeting of the Specialized Section on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. The Working Group, composed of France, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, volunteered to prepare the text for consideration at the 2009 session of the Specialized Section.
3. The proposed revised texts of the Standard and draft brochure can be downloaded at http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/meetings/wp.07/2008_wp7.htm.