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COMMITTEE ON TRADE

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Sixty-fifth session
Geneva, 5 - 6 November 2009

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

Summary

The Working Party:

- adopted revised standard layouts for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables and on dry and dried produce;
- adopted revised/new standards for eggs and egg products, apples, avocados, citrus fruit, sweet peppers, apricots, chanterelles, lettuces, peaches and nectarines, tomatoes, pears, potatoes, blanched almond kernels;
- adopted the revised texts for dates, inshell macadamia nuts and macadamia kernels as recommendations for trial use until the end of 2010;
- returned to the Specialized Section the standards for pistachio kernels and peeled pistachio kernels, and for hazelnut kernels;
- authorized the Specialized Section to hold two meetings a year, if necessary, one in May and the other in November, back-to-back with the session of the Working Party;
- decided to suspend its decision to remove “United Nations Economic Commission for Europe” from the cover page of its standards and asked the secretariat to approach the United Nations Legal Office at Headquarters for advice on this issue;
- start work on revising the Geneva Protocol.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The meeting was chaired by Ms. Viera Baričičová (Slovakia).

II. ATTENDANCE

2. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Australia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and United States of America.
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 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: INC (International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation).

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Documentation: ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/1

7. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda.

IV. MATTERS OF INTEREST SINCE THE LAST SESSION

Recent developments in other organizations

8. The representatives of the OECD, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme and the European Commission reported on their activities at the meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, which preceded the session of the Working Party. Their interventions were reflected in the report of the Specialized Section. Since practically the same delegations participated in both meetings, the Working Party decided not to ask the representatives of the above organizations to report on their activities a second time (see document ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2009/9, paras 9-19).

Agenda items 3-6

9. The chairpersons of the specialized sections, and the secretariat, presented the work of the sections since the 2008 meeting of the Working Party.

V. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF MEAT

Documentation: Report of the eighteenth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.11/2009/8)

A. Texts for adoption as new UNECE standards

Documentation Eggs (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/14)
Egg products (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/15)

10. The Working Party approved the texts on eggs and egg products as new UNECE standards with a trial period of one year.

B. Extension of the UNECE Standard for Veal Meat

Documentation: List of cuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/16)

11. The Working Party took note of the list of additional cuts to be included in the Standard.

VI. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF SEED POTATOES

12. The Specialized Section held a regional workshop in March 2009 in Cairo for countries of Africa and the Middle East and could not meet for its regular session in Geneva. The work on the Standard was carried out at the meetings of the Extended Bureau held in Cairo and in Belgium/Luxembourg. The delegations developed new provisions for the Standard regarding tuber moth and other internal defects, non-compliance at destination, crop inspection practices, post-harvest evaluation. A draft questionnaire on varietal identity and purity was also prepared to carry out a survey of national practices. Reports of the Extended Bureau meetings can be found at: www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm

VII. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Documentation: Report of the fifty-fifth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2009/4)

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

Documentation: Standard Layout (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/2)

13. The Working Party adopted the revised text of the Standard Layout.

B. Texts for adoption as revised/new UNECE standards

Documentation: Avocados (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/4)
Citrus fruit (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/5)
Sweet peppers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/6)
Apricots (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/7)

Chanterelles (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/9)
Lettuces and endives (FFV-22)
Peaches and nectarines (FFV-26: Peaches and nectarines -
Recommendation)

14. The Working Party adopted the revised/new standards for apples, avocados, citrus fruit, sweet peppers, apricots, chanterelles, lettuces, and peaches and nectarines.

C. Alignment of standards with the revised Standard Layout and other non-substantive changes to standards

Documentation: Tomatoes (FFV-36: Tomatoes)
Pears (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/11)
Potatoes (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/12)

15. The Working Party approved minor changes introduced to the standards for tomatoes, pears and potatoes.

VIII. SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF DRY AND DRIED PRODUCE

Documentation: Report of the fifty-sixth session (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.2/2009/5)

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

Documentation: Standard Layout (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/17)

16. The Working Party adopted the revised text of the Standard Layout. The delegation of France indicated that they would submit a request for revision in 2010 concerning the use of the crop year.

B. Texts for adoption as new/revised UNECE standards (Agenda item 6(b))

Documentation: Pistachio kernels and peeled pistachio kernels – new
(ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/18)
Hazelnut kernels – revised (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/19)
Blanched almond kernels – new (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/20)

17. The Working Party adopted the revised text of the Standard for Blanched Almond Kernels.

18. The Working Party did not approve the revised text of the Standard for Pistachio Kernels and Peeled Pistachio Kernels because some technical aspects needed to be revisited, including differing interpretations of the term “Gülic” by countries, as well as because of the withdrawal of the provision “insufficiently developed” in section IV.A for peeled pistachio kernels. The text was returned to the Specialized Section for revision. The trial period of the Standard was extended for one further year.

19. The Working Party could not approve the revised text of the recommendation for hazelnut kernels, because the delegation of Turkey stated that additional enquiries had been received from producers regarding minimum requirements. The text was returned to the Specialized Section for revision. The trial period of the Standard was extended for one further year.

C. Texts for adoption/extension as UNECE recommendations

Documentation: Dates (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/21)
Inshell macadamia nuts (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/22)
Macadamia kernels (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/23)

20. The Working Party adopted the revised texts of recommendations for dates, inshell macadamia nuts and macadamia kernels for trial use until the end of 2010.

21. The delegation of Switzerland maintained their reservations regarding tolerances for pest damage in the recommendation for dates.

IX. INTERPRETATION OF UNECE STANDARDS

Documentation: Brochure for sweet peppers (ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/2009/13)

22. The Working Party took note of the outcome of the consideration of the brochure by the Specialized Section. The delegations of the United Kingdom (rapporteur), Germany, Netherlands, Hungary, United States and Spain, and the secretariat will proofread the brochure before it is sent to print. The brochure should be printed for the OECD Scheme meeting in December 2009.

23. The Working Party agreed to the proposal by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to start work on new brochures for pineapples and fresh chilli peppers, if the OECD Scheme work is transferred to UNECE.

24. The delegation of the United States informed the Working Party that their experts had started work on the explanatory brochure for walnut kernels.

25. The Working Party asked the secretariat to check if UNECE could print brochures in languages other than the three official ones, if a print-ready copy were to be prepared by countries.

X. CONCENTRATION OF AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS WORK IN UNECE

Documentation: Report on the transfer (INF.25, Informal document)

26. The Working Party took note of the discussion of this item at the meeting of the Specialized Section. One further delegation expressed its view on the transfer. The numbers

became: in favour - 12; neutral or decisions postponed - 11. The delegation of the European Commission supported the transfer.

XI. CAPACITY-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

27. The secretariat and delegations exchanged information on capacity-building, training, promotional and other activities that had taken place since the last session of the Working Party or were planned for the near future. Information on these activities was regularly updated in the international meetings calendar on the UNECE website: www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm.

XII. OTHER BUSINESS

28. The Working Party authorized the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables to hold, two meetings a year, if necessary, one in May and the other in November, back-to-back with the session of the Working Party. Should the back-to-back meeting take place in November, it should have the following structure: day one – working groups meetings, without interpretation; days two and three – Specialized Section meeting; days four and five (morning) – Working Party meeting.

29. The delegation of the United States asked the secretariat to try to find out the names of signatories to the Geneva Protocol.

30. The representative of the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme informed the Working Party of the request of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables to the Codex Secretariat to explore the implications of the decision of the Working Party to change the reference to "UNECE standards" into "UN standards" and to also inform the Codex Alimentarius Commission, through its Executive Committee, of this situation in order to obtain guidance on appropriate follow-up. The representative provided a brief account of the discussion that took place at the fifteenth session of the Codex Committee, including the ruling of the United Nations Legal Counsel concerning the global status of Codex standards in relation to UNECE standards (see ALINORM 10/33/35, paras 9-14, available at: <http://www.codexalimentarius.net/>). It was also pointed out that the forty-second session (June 1995) of the Executive Committee of the Codex Alimentarius Commission had acknowledged the opinion of the United Nations Under-Secretary for Legal Affairs that UNECE as a "regional commission" did not have the authority, unless explicitly authorized by the ECOSOC to establish subsidiary bodies which are anticipated to elaborate worldwide standards or which are instituted to transfer regional standards into worldwide standards.

31. The Working Party revisited the decision taken at its November 2008 session to remove "United Nations Economic Commission for Europe" from the upper part of the cover page of its standards. That decision was taken in full compliance with the United Nations administrative regulations for the control of documentation (document ST/AI/189/Add.6/Rev.5). In view of the concerns raised by some Codex member countries at the fifteenth session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in October 2009, the Working Party decided to suspend the removal of "United Nations Economic Commission for Europe" from the cover page of its standards and asked the secretariat to approach the United Nations Legal Office at Headquarters for advice on this issue.

XIII. FUTURE WORK

32. The Working Party agreed that the work on revising the Geneva Protocol should start after the decisions have been taken on the transfer of the OECD work to UNECE and on the future of the UNECE Committee on Trade. Countries were invited to draw up proposals on substantive items for discussion at the 2010 session of the Working Party.

XIV. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

33. The Working Party elected Ms. Viera Baričičová (Slovakia) as Chairperson and Mr. Ian Hewett (United Kingdom) as Vice-Chairperson.

XV. ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

34. The Working Party adopted its report.