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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE**

COMMITTEE FOR TRADE, INDUSTRY AND  
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of Perishable  
Produce and Quality Development

Meeting of Experts on Co-ordination  
of Standardization of Fresh Fruit  
and Vegetables

Forty-fourth session, 9 to 13 March 1998, Geneva  
Item 4 (e) of the provisional agenda

CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS TO REVISE STANDARDS

PEACHES AND NECTARINES

Note by the secretariat

The following document was submitted by the delegation of Italy.

EXPERIMENTS BY ITALY WITH BULK SHIPMENTS OF PEACHES AND NECTARINES

For some years fruit and vegetable traders in Italy and importers in several European countries have been pressing requests for permission to market peaches and nectarines packed in bulk in their packaging.

The reasons for such requests include economic imperatives (a wish to reduce the amount of packaging in relation to the volume of produce transported, and to diminish transport costs), practical considerations (a desire for more rapid distribution and simpler presentation) and environmental protection concerns (a wish to reduce the generation of packaging wastes which have to be disposed of).

For the 1997 season it was decided to experiment with shipments of produce packed in bulk and destined for the German, French, English and Spanish markets. The ECE Meeting of Experts had given its consent to this plan, and the monitoring departments in the importing countries cooperated in checking the conditions in which the produce arrived at its destination.

A number of bulk shipments were dispatched during the 1997 season using the means of transport used to transport produce packed in layers. The aim was to determine in practice whether the trade would accept produce packed in bulk.

Unfortunately, however, during the marketing period a very low level of readiness to set up a programme of test shipments was noted on the part of operators - whether exporters or importers.

This reluctance was due to the following factors:

1. Very unusual adverse weather patterns during the 1997 growing season (high temperatures in February, frost during the period when the trees were in flower, and hail in May and June);
2. A drop of 50-60 per cent in the country's output of peaches and nectarines compared with the normal level of 1.5 million tons;
3. A marked rise in the selling price compared with the previous year's;
4. A fall in the quality of supply stemming from growth problems caused by the poor weather, which reduced the firmness of the flesh, the sugar content and the storage life;
5. The need to add as much value as possible, in view of the limited supply, which caused sales to be directed towards elaborate packaging in layers, as demanded above all by medium-range and top-of-the-range consumers;

6. A refusal by most importers, and especially large supermarkets, to buy produce in bulk, because of the very high price prevailing during that season.

Consequently, only a very small number of shipments were made in bulk (about 15), and this number was not statistically representative enough to allow a practical assessment to be made regarding this type of packaging.

At a joint trades meeting held under the auspices of the Central European Initiative, Italian traders in this sector expressed a willingness to repeat the experiment next year, in the hope of assessing market reaction during a season in which climatic, production and trading conditions are quite normal.

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