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Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

Specialized Section on Standardization of
Fresh Fruit and Vegetables
Fiftieth session, 10-14 May 2004, Geneva

Item 7(b) of the Provisional Agenda

**DRAFT REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP
ON INTERNATIONALLY HARMONIZED PRODUCE CODING**

Note by the secretariat: In this document the secretariat presents the draft report of a meeting of the Working Group on Harmonized Produce Coding. Members of the working group might wish to make additional comments.

Draft Report of the Working Group on Harmonized Produce Coding, Brussels, EAN International headquarters, 20 January 2004

Participants: EAN International, European Community, Israel, Morocco, OECD secretariat, Slovakia, UNECE secretariat and the United Kingdom

Representatives from EAN International gave an overview over the status of produce coding from the point of view of EAN. They recalled that more than 1 million members in 140 countries are using the EAN product identification system. There are 5 billion scanning operations daily and the system is promoted and maintained through 101 EAN member organisations world wide.

The situation concerning fresh produce differs whether it is a branded or a non-branded product.

Branded products are identified like any other product and traceability is in place. Big retailers are working on further trade synchronisation in the Global Commerce Initiative (GCI).

For non branded products the situation is different – the information to be provided varies from country to country e.g. In Spain it matters from which region oranges come, which variety they are and what is their exact size – in other countries maybe the country of origin is interesting but not the region and for sizing big or small might be enough.

A unique identification system for these products is not yet in place.

A single internationally harmonized way of identifying produce it would simplify work for producers and be also necessary for / could be used in applications ensuring food safety through traceability, trade synchronisation (supply chain management tools) and electronic export certification.

EAN cooperates with different user groups that are working on produce coding at the moment with the goal to facilitate that a single internationally harmonised system.

Together with the European association of fresh produce importers, exporters, wholesalers and distributors, and retailers (FRESHFEL), Produce Marketing Association (PMA) and EUREPGAP they developed the EAN Fresh Produce Traceability Guidelines. EAN works with big retailers in GCI and has also participated in the development of the codification of the UNECE standards for meat.

Discussion and Conclusion

The group discussed if and to which extent the public sector should be involved in this industry driven process at present. The group concluded that the discussions over the last few years had been sufficient to form an opinion on the subject and thus considers its work as completed.

The group stresses that it is interested in ensuring that the future harmonized coding system will allow applications such as electronic export certification but believes that to avoid any duplication of effort it would be better to contribute to the work of the existing industry groups than to continue discussing the topic in a UNECE working group.

The group recommends to the Specialized Section to charge the secretariat with the task of monitoring the work being done in the different industry groups, give input as necessary and report back to the specialized section on a yearly basis.