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PROPOSAL RELATING TO THE TRACEABILITY OF SEED POTATOES*

Submitted by France

Note by the secretariat: This document contains a proposed scheme for the traceability of seed potatoes.

* This document was submitted after the deadline owing to a lack of secretariat resources.

Advantages of traceability

Seed potatoes are a species for which health certification is essential. Quarantine pest control is still a matter of concern, whence the need to “trace” all controls starting with the parent material that initiates the production process and ending with the certified basic category seed intended for marketing.

This implies the creation of a database that will make it possible to identify the source of the contamination.

General principle

Seed potato production is organized on the basis of a process that starts with a mother tuber.

The mother tuber belongs to a particular variety and has been tested to detect quality pests (X, Y, E, A, M and S viruses, *Edwinia* bacteria, fungus) and quarantine pests (*Clavibacter michiganensis* and *Ralstonia solanacearum*).

From the tuber it is possible to obtain parent material in vitro (B0), material produced in a glasshouse (B1) and material produced through field generation (B2), resulting in future generations of pre-basic, basic and certified category seed.

At each stage in the production process the material is identified, monitored, assessed, analysed and classified.

All data are stored electronically, thereby creating a database for each successive generation.

The material is certified at a later stage, when the lots are assessed, by issuance of an official certificate containing the following information:

- Mark of the certifying body;
- Variety;
- Lot number or grower’s number;
- Date on which the packaging was sealed;
- Declared net weight;
- Country of origin;
- Certificate number (unique to the certificate).

The colour of the certificate depends on the category of the seed: white for basic and blue for certified.

A French lot is traceable by means of the lot number indicating the plot, thus making it possible to trace the material back to the point of origin.

The database makes possible two types of traceability:

- Horizontal traceability, or the ability to determine which growers have propagated the mother seed lot during the year. It is thus possible to identify the plots where the mother seed originated;
- Vertical traceability, or the ability to determine the clonal origin of a particular lot of mother seed. The production process can thus be traced back several years.

The computerized database makes it possible to retrieve this information instantly, thus ensuring transparency.

Ensuring traceability

Ensuring traceability requires the registration and verification of data:

- Registration of crop declarations: all seed crops must be declared to the official control service so that they may be registered. This is the first step in the process;
- Verification of mother seeds: the origin, genealogy, variety and analysis of the mother seed used to produce the new generation of seed potatoes are verified;
- Assessment of growth: each seed crop is officially inspected and the observations are recorded on a score sheet for subsequent use in classifying the crop;
- Laboratory analysis: samples are taken from tubers for laboratory analysis to detect quality and quarantine pests;
- Inspection of lots: each lot is inspected prior to packaging to ensure conformity with regulations relating to surface pests and rot;
- Certification: a certificate is issued if the inspections, registration and controls meet the necessary standards.

Importance of traceability

As indicated, traceability is essential to ensure control of quarantine pests. It also offers the prospect of tracing the origin of any contamination.

Horizontal traceability makes it possible to check whether the mother seed propagated during the current year is contaminated, regardless of origin, or to trace the contamination to a particular plot.

In the former instance, the contamination will have to be verified by vertical tracing to identify the clonal origin.

For this to happen, the certificate must include the required information. However, this presupposes that the control service has carried out checks at each stage of the production process and that all data have been computerized.
