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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

COMMITTEE ON TRADE, INDUSTRY AND
ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

Working Party on Standardization of
Perishable Produce and Quality Development

Meeting of Experts on Standardization of
Potatoes (Seed)

REPORT ON ITS TWENTY-NINTH SESSION

1. The Meeting of Experts held its twenty-ninth session in Geneva from 9 to 12 February 1998. The session was attended by experts from the following countries : Canada; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Israel; Italy; the Netherlands; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Spain; Switzerland; the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America. The European Union was also represented. The experts from Belgium and Sweden expressed their continued interest in the work of the Meeting but were unable to attend.

Adoption of the Agenda (Item 1) (Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/1)

2. The Meeting adopted the provisional agenda prepared by the secretariat in consultation with the office-bearers, on the understanding that Item 5 - Consideration of a Revised Questionnaire on National Seed Potato Certification Schemes, would be dealt with only when the discussion of other possibly relevant items had been completed.

Matters of Interest Arising from the 53rd Session of the Working Party
(Item 2) (Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/2)

3. At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of the ECE Trade Division Dr. C. Cosgrove-Sacks outlined the changes in the organizational set up of the Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development (WP.7) and its meetings of experts. The ECE Committee on Agriculture had been dissolved and the Working Party now reported to the ECE Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development (CTIED). The Economic Commission for Europe and the CTIED attached considerable weight to the work on standardization of perishable produce and quality development. The Chairman of WP.7 had been elected Vice-Chairman of the CTIED in recognition of this. The secretariat was making every effort to recruit a competent and knowledgeable staff member to service the Working Party and its meetings of experts as soon as possible.

4. The Director of the Trade Division also reported on the discussions at the CTIED in December 1997 on the future status of the Working Party and its meetings of experts. As regards the proposed change of the title of standards elaborated by the Working Party, the CTIED had been unable to reach a consensus and had agreed to refer the question to UN Legal Counsel.

5. The Meeting also discussed the role of the UN/ECE in standardization of seed potatoes. It was estimated that practically the totality of seed potatoes traded between UN/ECE member countries were covered by the Standard and that UN/ECE member countries produced more than four fifths of the seed potatoes traded worldwide.

Reports of meetings of Rapporteurs on Standardization of Seed Potatoes
(Item 3) (Documentation : TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/3; TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/3/Add.1 and TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/3/Add.2)

6. The Meeting took note of the reports and agreed to revert to substantial issues under the relevant agenda items.

7. The Meeting noted that confusion still existed on the legal status of the UN/ECE Standard in the light of the developments within the WTO framework (para. 17 from TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/3). Several Experts stressed that the UN/ECE Meeting of Experts and Rapporteurs group provided the only international forum where all aspects of seed potato trade including standardization, certification and quality issues could be discussed. It was also noted that the scheme elaborated within the UN/ECE had been developed over many years and that the UN/ECE Standard was reflected in many national seed potato certification schemes and should continue to be considered in other international and regional fora.

Review of the Standard for Seed Potatoes (Item 4)

(Documentation: ECE/AGRI/129)

8. The Meeting agreed to consider the following sub-items which had been recommended by the Rapporteurs for discussion and recommendation. It also agreed to recommend to the Working Party that the definition of Basic Seed in Section II.B. Classification of the Standard be amended to read :

- (ii) Basic Seed
Potato tubers which are (a) descended directly from Pre-basic Seed or Basic Seed or are produced under special provisions of a national certification scheme.
(b) and (c) unchanged.

The representative of the European Community reserved his position on this issue.

9. It also agreed to amend the text of Section II.C. Subdivision of the categories to read: Producing countries are free to create within the categories provided for in paragraph B, classes which are subject to specific requirements.

Regulation and Certification of Pre-Basic Seed (Item 4(a))

(Documentation: TRADE/WP.7/1998/4)

10. The Meeting adopted the recommendations by the Rapporteurs concerning revisions to Annexes III, IV and V of the Standard with the following amendments and reservations :

- Annex III The Meeting agreed to delete the proposed section 2 and to renumber the following sections accordingly.
- Annex IV The Meeting took note of the reservation made by the delegation of Sweden in a written submission (TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/CRP.2) relating to the proposed tolerances for common scab (4) and Rhizoctonia (5) on pre-basic seed and agreed to amend the total tolerance for items 2 to 5 to read 6 per cent by weight.
- Annex V The Meeting took note of the reservations made by the delegations of France, Germany, Poland and Portugal as regards the proportion, in direct progeny, of plants showing symptoms of mild or severe virus diseases.

11. The Meeting also agreed to invite the Rapporteurs to look again at the tolerances for Common Scab and Rhizoctonia for basic and certified seed and to recommend tolerances for powdery scab. The Rapporteurs should also consider listing common pathogens which, in their opinion, should be dealt with in the Standard.

12. The Meeting agreed to recommend to the Working Party that the secretariat be invited to issue, as soon as possible, a revised version of the Standard, incorporating the agreed amendments and to make every effort actively to promote the revised Standard worldwide.

Discussion of a proposed sub-division of the classification of certified seed into level I and level II seed (Item 4 b)
(documentation : TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/5)

13. During the Meeting there was no consensus on this proposal, but it was agreed to refer the question of lowering the tolerances for virus diseases in basic and certified seed potatoes to the Rapporteurs.

Consideration to replace the word "viruses" by the term "harmful organisms" in Section II E of the Standard (Item 4 c)

14. After discussion, the Meeting agreed to replace the word "viruses" in the second sentence of the text of Section II E of the Standard by the term "regulated non quarantine pests", taking into account the definition of "pest" used by the FAO International Plant Protection Convention (FAO/IPPC) which should be included in the definitions. The Meeting also agreed to amend the second indent in Section E to read: "However, each producer country may be authorized by the UN/ECE Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development for the marketing of seed potatoes in the whole or any part of its territory, take more vigorous measures than those provided for in Annexes III and V against the introduction of certain regulated non quarantine pests which do not exist there or which seem particularly injurious to the crops in that country or in any part of its territory."

Consideration to include clonal selection and tissue culture production in the revised Annexes (Item 4 d)

15. The Meeting agreed with the opinion of the Rapporteurs that the issues of clonal selection and tissue culture production were sufficiently covered in Annexes I and II of the Standard for the time being and pending the outcome of discussions in the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPPO).

Consideration to include sampling plans or certification protocols in the Annexes of the Standard (Item 4 e)

(documentation : TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/3/Add.1 and 2)

16. The Meeting agreed to invite the Rapporteurs to consider how the sampling plans and table on probability data could be made relevant to the Standard and to make recommendations as to their possible inclusion in the Standard as Annexes for information purposes. The Meeting of Experts requested Rapporteurs to study routine procedures for sampling related to certification for inclusion in the Standard.

Consideration of a revised questionnaire on national seed potato certification schemes (Item 5) (Documentation TRADE/WP.7/GE.6/1998/7)

17. The Meeting expressed appreciation of the work carried out by the Rapporteur from Israel on the revision of the questionnaire and invited the Chairman, in consultation with the secretariat, to review it and to submit his proposal to the Rapporteurs.

Discussion on genetically modified varieties (Item 6)

18. The representative of the EU provided information on requirements for the handling and marketing of seed potatoes derived from transgenic plant material in the Union and announced a possible EU initiative to ask for an amendment to the Standard by including, in Annex VI thereto, the requirement that it be indicated on the label if the variety concerned was genetically modified.

Accreditation of laboratories (Item 7)

19. The Meeting agreed that developments as regards laboratory accreditation warranted further study. In particular The Meeting of Experts asked the ECE to clarify as soon as possible how the concept of official procedures should be considered in an accredited system. It took note of the information provided by the secretariat as regards the work of the International Laboratory Accreditation Conference (ILAC).

Matters of Interest related to the activities of (Item 8):

North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO)

20. The Chairman announced that the NAPPO Potato Standard, although completed and formerly adopted, was undergoing some minor technical revisions by the NAPPO Potato Panel. The intent is to meet with EPPO later this year to

discuss the possibility of building a phytosanitary standard for potatoes, that would have global application.

European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organization (EPP0)

21. An Expert from the United Kingdom reported that the EPP0 Panel on Certification of Seed Potatoes met on 5-6 June 1996 in Paris, France, on 29-30 January 1997 in Malmo, Sweden, and on 6-7 November 1997 in Paris. The object was to prepare guidelines for a seed potato certification scheme modelled on other EPP0 schemes, e.g. strawberry. The drafting of the proposals has concentrated largely on the conditions and testing appropriate for the production of Nuclear Stock, Propagation Stock I (Pre-basic TC) and Propagation Stock II (Pre-basic). Discussion on the tolerances for these stocks and the categories, basic and certified, has been very limited with a proposal being made to refer to the UN/ECE Standard as the basis for the lower categories. A final meeting of the Panel is planned for 10-11 March 1998 in Kosica, Slovakia, after which the final draft will be submitted to the Working Party for approval.

International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

22. The Chairman distributed document TRADE/WP.7/GE,6/1998/CRP.3 prepared for him by the Canadian representative to IPPC. The document provided information on the latest IPPC developments. He pointed out that the adoption of a definition for a "regulated non-quarantine pest" would be of particular interest to the ECE Standard.

23. The Meeting took note of the information concerning the activities of other relevant organizations mentioned in paragraphs 20 - 22 above and some delegations reserved their right to make comments before the next meeting of the Working Party and/or of the next Meeting of Experts.

Other business (Item 9)

a) Future Work

24. The Meeting took note with appreciation of the preliminary invitations by the delegations of Italy, Netherlands and the United States of America to hold the next Meeting of Rapporteurs in their countries in late 1998. It invited the Office-Bearers to decide on the time and place of the Meetings of Rapporteurs in consultations with the secretariat. It stressed the importance of choosing dates and venues which would ensure that as many as possible of the Rapporteurs, Office-Bearers and the ECE secretariat could attend.

25. It agreed to invite the Rapporteurs to consider :

- i) the items explicitly referred to them in paras. 11, 13, 15 and 17 of this report; and
- ii) any other business.

26. The Expert elected Mrs. T. Afonso of Portugal as a Rapporteur to replace Mr. Rasquilho, Dr. S. Carnegie of the United Kingdom to replace Mr. Dukat of the Czech Republic and Mr. R. Marenne of Belgium to replace Mr. de Smet.

b) Date and place of next Meeting

27. The thirtieth Meeting of Experts on Standardization of Potatoes (Seed) will take place at the Palais des Nations, Geneva in 1999 or early in the year 2000. The Meeting expressed the opinion that it would be desirable to meet more frequently and to move up the next meeting as much as possible.

Adoption of the Report (Item 10)

28. The Meeting adopted this report on its twenty-ninth session on 12 February 1998.