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## Regional commissions programme planners meet in Geneva

The Chiefs of Programme Planning from the five United Nations Regional Commissions met in Geneva from 26 to 28 September 2007 at their fifth annual meeting. The intention is to inform each other and exchange good practices with a view to becoming more effective and at the same time enhancing their joint regional identity within the UN system.

Information on past and current programmatic reviews was shared. Experience in preparing and defending programme budget proposals was exchanged during the meeting. The Regional Commissions also discussed how to better articulate the regional dimension – a common feature of their programme of work.

In view of a general trend to enhance transparency in the UN on the one hand, and on the other to increase efficiency, effectiveness and the “impact on the ground” of what we do, results based management including programme performance assessment and evaluation were also the focus of the meeting. The UNECE informed the other Commissions on the introduction of its new biennial performance evaluations at subprogramme level, where the Sectoral Committees are the owners of the process and the



member countries and the secretariat are its main actors. The first steps of the evaluation process are currently being enthusiastically launched.

The participants also brainstormed on the responsibilities of the Regional Commissions as facilitators of regional cooperation and coherence in view of “One UN”. As the convener of system-wide regional coordination meetings, the Regional Commissions have an important role to play to facilitate effective partnerships between UN entities with direct country level presence, such as the United Nations funds and programmes, and the so-called Non-resident agencies, in order to contribute to the concept of “delivering as one”. ❄

## UNECE standards to help Sicilian growers sell their produce internationally

Zucchini, Peperoni, Pomodoro, Pesche e nettarine. The programme of the latest UNECE Workshop reads like the menu of your favourite Italian restaurant. The three-day workshop on international commercial quality standards for agricultural produce, held in Ispica, Sicily on 24-26 September, focused on Sicily’s major export products – table grapes, peaches and nectarines, tomatoes, sweet peppers and squash (zucchini/courgettes). Organized jointly with the Sicilian Regional Ministry of Agriculture, and Trade Point Ragusa, the workshop aimed to promote UNECE and European Commission standards relating to those agricultural products that have high export potential for that region, and also to show local growers and traders how the standards are interpreted in the countries that import Sicilian produce.



Grading cherry tomatoes at the packhouse of the “Pomodoro I.G.P. di Pachino” cooperative

Experts from the largest export markets for Sicilian produce - Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom - presented the standards and led the discussion. Other more general presentations explained how the international standards are developed (UNECE), how the standards are enforced in EU countries (Italian Ministry of Agriculture), how they are used in Sweden, and how Germany’s national inspection service operates.

Locally cultivated products were used as samples to discuss the application of the standards. First, experts presented the standards and explained the main problems they have with the products imported into their countries. Then participants were invited to examine the exhibited samples, take notes and assign a quality category to each product.



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This was followed by a general discussion of the defects and a classification of the products.

Exported products are often rejected for reasons unrelated to their intrinsic quality, such as marking, sizing, careless picking and handling, minor skin defects that result in rotting during long-distance transportation. Almost no additional investment is needed for



*Growers of cherry tomatoes in a greenhouse outside Ispica*

careful picking (e.g. for cutting sweet peppers rather than pulling them off), packaging, correct marking and putting produce into cold storage right after harvesting. Just by paying more attention to these details, growers and traders could reduce their losses and increase their income.

Production of fruit and vegetables in Sicily is influenced by the preferences of local consumers, who favour big and colourful

fruit. In export markets, however, consumers may prefer smaller fruit or more even colouring. Growers and exporters should avoid sending unripe fruit, for example peaches, early in the season because that may spoil the market. Consumers who buy the product are disappointed with it and then refrain from buying it again, at least for some time.

Sicilian fruit producers who benefit from growing conditions that allow them to deliver fruit that is ripe and tasty – in addition to meeting the standard requirements of careful picking, transport, labelling and presentation – may well succeed in influencing consumers in export markets to select their produce in preference to other producers' goods and thereby increase both sales and profit.



*Discussing the commercial quality of peaches*

Leaflets that explain how the favourable growing conditions result in fruit with exceptional taste may also help in boosting sales.

Growers shared their concern about supermarkets imposing their own commercial quality requirements, usually stricter than those in the standards. Meeting these requirements, differing across supermarkets and countries, is very costly for producers.

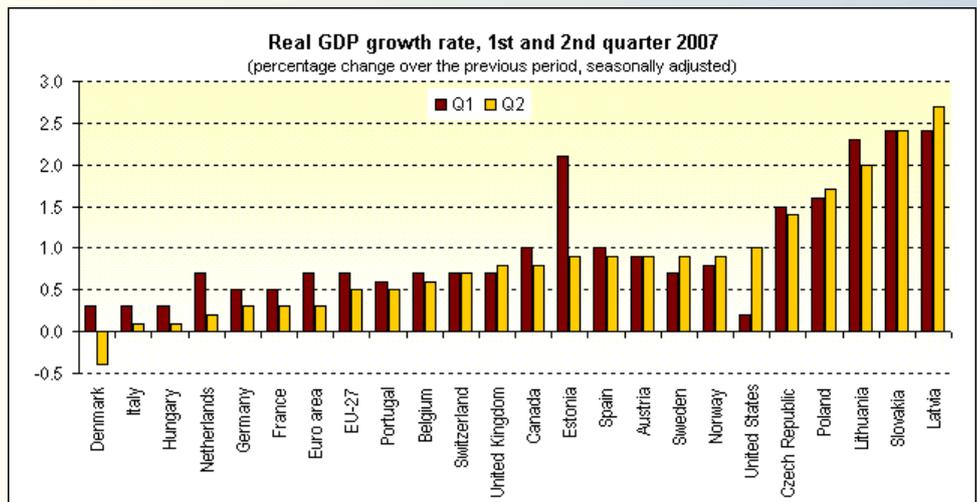
The expertise of local growers would be very welcome at meetings of the specialized sections in Geneva. Producers, packers and traders can participate in Geneva meetings as part of their official national delegation. Standards are drawn up using inputs from producers and they are meant to help growers, packers and traders to compete at the same quality levels on equal ground. \*

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## Facts and Figures

### Contrasting current economic growth dynamics in Western Europe and North America

Macroeconomic data for the second quarter of 2007 seem to help in reassuring businesses and consumers that the fundamentals remain strong in the United States and most European economies. In fact, as the chart attests, GDP growth has rebounded markedly in the second quarter in the United States, thanks to improved net exports, higher government consumption and non-residential investments. Economic growth gained momentum also in Northern Europe and many Eastern EU member countries. In contrast, Euro area GDP growth moderated to 0.3% quarter on quarter as investment declined and government consumption slowed perceptibly in several Euro area countries. The loss of momentum was apparent in the biggest economies (Germany and France), and growth dwindled to 0.1% in Italy and 0.2% in the Netherlands (due in part to a decline in gas production). Outside the Euro area, the slowdown was most acute in Denmark, where GDP fell by 0.4% in the second quarter, dragged down by investment activity.



Source: UNECE Statistical database (<http://www.unece.org/stats/data.htm>)