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Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat****Twenty-ninth session**

Geneva, 7-8 September 2021

**Report of the twenty-ninth session of the Specialized
Section on Standardization of Meat****I. Introduction**

1. Mr. Ian King (Australia), Chairman of the Specialized Section, opened the twenty-ninth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat.
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, welcomed the delegates to the first meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat convened in a hybrid format, allowing for interpretation into French and Russian languages.
3. He noted that any decisions of the Specialized Section would be approved in an intersessional approval procedure after the meeting. The report would be adopted in a written procedure.
4. He expressed his gratitude to the delegates for their work and support as well as progress made despite the COVID-19 crisis and wished the Specialized Section fruitful deliberations in the session.

II. Attendance

5. Representatives of the following United Nations Member States attended the meeting: Australia, China, France, Germany, Poland, United States.
6. Representatives from the following observer organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), associations, academia and private sector groups also attended: Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (United Kingdom), AUS-Meat Limited, Birkenwood PT (Australia), Carni Sostenibili (Italy), Meat and Livestock Australia (Australia), Polish Beef Association (Poland), Universiti Putra (Malaysia).

III. Adoption of the agenda

7. The delegates adopted the agenda.

IV. Matters arising since the last session

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies

8. The Chief of the Market Access Section informed delegations that the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards last met on 21-22 June 2021 in hybrid mode. He highlighted two studies – the Study on Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in Serbia (<https://unece.org/trade/publications/regulatory-and-procedural-barriers-trade-serbia-needs-assessment-ecetrade460>), which was approved at the recent meeting, and a similar study that was being conducted in Uzbekistan, and would be presented at the next session of the Steering Committee in June 2022.

9. He noted that the upcoming session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) would be held on 15-17 November 2021 in a hybrid format. Following the April 2021 session of the Commission which focused on the circular economy and the sustainable management of natural resources issues, a dedicated mini-conference would be held during the WP.7 annual session and all delegates were invited to participate. He provided an overview of the Commission's decisions (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/E_ECE_1500-2103148E.pdf) and the high-level statement which calls for strengthening work on the circular economy in the UNECE region and invites its subsidiary bodies to consider embedding the issue into their scope of work within their mandates (https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/E_ECE_1497-2102163E.pdf).

10. He also mentioned the ongoing preparations for the first-ever United Nations Food Systems Summit as well as UNECE's contribution to the summit, including through the Issue Based Coalition on Sustainable Food Systems. He thanked everyone who contributed to the Technical Note on Sustainable Food Systems and Methodological Brief – UN Food Systems Summit (<https://unece.org/issue-based-coalition-sustainable-food-systems>).

11. Delegates appreciated the update from the secretariat and one of the delegations expressed interest in engaging on circular economy as well as contributing to the discussion on the importance of sustainable food production and trade in any circular economy approach.

V. Eating quality

12. The Rapporteur for eating quality (Poland) provided a brief update on the work of the UNECE scientific reference group for eating quality. A delegate from Australia, also a member of the eating quality group, provided a detailed update on the significant progress made by the International Meat Research 3G Foundation (IMR3GF) despite COVID-related restrictions for accessing slaughterhouses. He reported on key activities, including the development of the DATAbank software allowing for efficient and safe data collection, management and analysis. The database consists of seven categories where countries and organizations can enter data on live animal data supplied from the farm/feedlot; slaughter floor data from abattoir files; grading data; primal cut and sample

data including all ID linkages; consumer sensory data; individual cut pH data; and specialized category. Once the system is fully operational it will have a combined database of animal and consumer sensory data collected over a 25-year period in 11 countries.

13. He further updated delegates on recent and upcoming training activities aimed at ensuring a common data-collection approach as well as updates on software design and the protocols for adding members and controlling access at multiple levels. In conclusion, he mentioned the ongoing work on data-sharing agreements and commercial grading.

14. The Chair stressed the importance of the eating quality group's work as an extension of the Specialized Section's work on the UNECE's standard for bovine meat. The Specialized Section thanked presenters for the summary of the group's activities and for making considerable progress over the years. The next update would be provided at the 2022 session.

VI. Revision of the standard for porcine meat (marbling and fat content)

15. At the 2020 session, a rapporteur's group was established (Russian Federation, Serbia, United States). There was no document received for the 2021 session and the United States representative reported about ongoing work and a forthcoming document from the group. The Chair proposed to expand the group and expressed Australia's interest to participate. The Chair also highlighted the importance of regular review and update of the standards to ensure their continued relevance from the practical, user and market perspectives.

16. The discussion was postponed to the 2022 session.

VII. International standard for animal protein derived from connective tissue

17. At the 2020 session, the Specialized Section decided to establish a rapporteur's group led by the Russian Federation and consisting of other countries that expressed interest to work on the national standard for animal proteins. As there was no document received for the 2021 session, the discussion was postponed to the 2022 session.

VIII. Development of international minimum sustainability guidelines for the meat sector

18. Following initial discussions at various symposia held by the Specialized Section, delegations continued the discussion on the possible development of a sustainability framework for the meat sector. Delegations reiterated their continued interest in that topic, highlighting it as a critical area for the meat industry and livestock production as well as outlining potential challenges. The United States delegate reported on its national supply-chain resiliency efforts and offered to contribute to advancing the issue jointly with Australia and any other interested countries. Delegations acknowledged that a number of sustainability initiatives existed globally and the Specialized Section agreed to establish a forum for sharing best practice and expertise as well as collecting contributions around the sustainability model. The Chair also called on delegations to identify standards that need to be reviewed in the coming years, reminding the group that this has to be done regularly.

19. The Specialized Section decided to advance this topic and to establish a rapporteur's group that would also serve as a "sustainability response team" moving forward. The Specialized Section also decided to organize a seminar/webinar either in conjunction with or prior to the next session. The secretariat would contact possible experts and inform delegates on meeting arrangements in due course.

IX. Alignment of the Economic Commission for Europe cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Descriptions and Coding System

20. Following discussions on a potential project scoping on Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS) code alignment with the UNECE meat cut codes at the 2020 session, the Specialized Section reviewed an update on this topic. The Specialized Section took note of a meeting with the World Customs Organization (WCO) held in July 2021 where WCO representatives indicated their interest to work together.

21. The delegate from Australia presented a paper reflecting discussions of last year and demonstrating the degree of possible alignment within existing cut codes and HS descriptions. He demonstrated how mapping the UNECE cut codes to the six-digit HS codes could be implemented in the case of Australia, emphasizing that achieving an alignment across all countries might be challenging. He noted that performing a similar data-collection exercise with countries would help to determine feasibility of the project and pave the way forward. Delegates appreciated the update and some delegates confirmed that a similar system was used in their countries (Germany, Poland).

22. After careful consideration, the Specialized Section agreed to establish a rapporteur's group (Australia, Poland, United States) and to capitalize on the opportunity of closer collaboration with the WCO on the topic. The delegation of the United States, which initially had some reservations about the value of devoting resources for alignment with HS codes, also endorsed that suggestion. The secretariat was asked to liaise with the WCO and organize a meeting with the group of rapporteurs in October 2021.

X. Discussion on the possible development of a livestock language

23. The delegation of Australia reported that the expert group developed guidelines on the livestock language containing best practice, the final draft of which is expected to be reviewed and finalized next week. He mentioned that the use of different terms in describing livestock was one of the challenges and the delegate from the United States reminded delegations of last year's discussions about harmonizing the guidelines with the use of meat terminology and livestock nomenclature of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

24. The Specialized Section appreciated the update on the livestock language guidelines and welcomed the opportunity to review the final version, once ready. It also decided to explore the ISO equivalent process and engage with any international forum to maintain the momentum.

XI. Future work

25. Further items for the 2022 agenda included:

- Revision of the Standard for Porcine meat (marbling and fat content);

- International standard for animal protein derived from connective tissue;
- An update on development of sustainability framework for the meat sector;
- An update on eating quality;
- An update on the alignment of the UNECE cut codes with the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS codes);
- An update on the development of a livestock language.

XII. Election of officers

26. The Specialized Section elected Mr. Ian King (Australia) as Chairperson and Mr. Mark Lobstein (United States) as Vice-Chairperson.

XIII. Adoption of the report

27. The Specialized Section adopted the report on its twenty-ninth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.11/2021/2). The tentative dates of the next session are 28-30 September 2022.
