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## Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

**Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**

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Item 5 of the provisional agenda

**Specialized Section on Standardization  
of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables**

### **Revised standard for onions**

**Submitted by the secretariat**

#### *Summary*

The following document is submitted to the Working Party for adoption as the revised United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) standard FFV-25 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of onions.

The document is based on the document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2019/10 adopted by the Working Party at its seventy-fifth session in 2019. It incorporates revisions agreed by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (GE.1) as contained in the document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/14. It also integrates the proposed modification to the standard layout for standards on fresh fruit and vegetables as agreed by GE.1 at its 2023 session and contained in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2023/2.



## I. Definition of produce

This standard applies to onions of varieties (cultivars) grown from *Allium cepa* L. Cepa Group to be supplied to the consumer in the natural state, green onions with full leaves, smoked onions and onions for industrial processing being excluded.

## II. Provisions concerning quality

The purpose of the standard is to define the quality requirements for onions after preparation and packaging.

However, if applied at stages following export/dispatch, products may show in relation to the requirements of the standard:

- a slight lack of freshness and turgidity
- a slight deterioration due to their development and their tendency to perish.

The holder/seller of products may not display such products or offer them for sale, or deliver or market them in any manner other than in conformity with this standard. The holder/seller shall be responsible for observing such conformity.

### A. Minimum requirements

In all classes, subject to the special provisions for each class and the tolerances allowed, the bulbs must be:

- intact
- sound; produce affected by rotting or deterioration such as to make it unfit for consumption is excluded
- clean, practically free of any visible foreign matter
- free from damage due to frost
- sufficiently dry for the intended use (in the case of onions for storing, at least the first two outer skins and the stem must be fully dried)
- without hollow or tough stems
- practically free from pests
- free from damage caused by pests affecting the flesh
- free from externally visible shoots
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of any foreign smell and/or taste.

In addition, the stems must be twisted or clean cut and must not exceed 6 cm in length (except for stringed onions).

The development and condition of the onions must be such as to enable them:

- to withstand transportation and handling
- to arrive in satisfactory condition at the place of destination.

### B. Classification

The onions are classified in two classes, as defined below:

**(i) Class I**

Onions in this class must be of good quality. They must be characteristic of the variety and/or commercial type.

The bulbs must be:

- firm and compact
- practically free of root tufts; however, for onions harvested before complete maturity, root tufts are allowed.

The following slight defects, however, may be allowed, provided these do not affect the general appearance of the produce, the quality, the keeping quality and presentation in the package:

- a slight defect in shape
- slight defects in colouring
- light staining covering not more than one fifth of the bulb's surface
- superficial cracks in and partial absence of the outer skins, provided the flesh is protected
- slight glassiness not exceeding the outer fleshy ring.

**(ii) Class II**

This class includes onions that do not qualify for inclusion in Class I but satisfy the minimum requirements specified above.

The bulbs must be reasonably firm.

The following defects may be allowed, provided the onions retain their essential characteristics as regards the quality, the keeping quality and presentation:

- defects in shape
- defects in colouring
- staining covering not more than one half of the bulb's surface
- cracks in the outer skins and partial absence of the skins on a maximum of one third of the bulb's surface, provided the flesh is not damaged
- slight marking caused by parasites or disease
- slight bruising
- root tufts
- glassiness not exceeding the two outer fleshy rings.

**III. Provisions concerning sizing**

Size is determined by the maximum diameter of the equatorial section.

The minimum diameter shall be 10 mm.

To ensure uniformity in size, the range in size between produce in the same package shall not exceed:

- 15 mm where the diameter of the smallest onion is under 40 mm
- 20 mm where the diameter of the smallest onion is 40 mm and over but under 55 mm
- 30 mm where the diameter of the smallest onion is 55 mm or over.

## **IV. Provisions concerning tolerances**

At all marketing stages, tolerances in respect of quality and size shall be allowed in each lot for produce not satisfying the requirements of the class indicated.<sup>1</sup>

### **A. Quality tolerances**

#### **(i) Class I**

A total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of onions not satisfying the requirements of the class but meeting those of Class II is allowed. Within this tolerance not more than 1 per cent in total may consist of produce satisfying neither the requirements of Class II quality nor the minimum requirements, or of produce affected by decay. Within the 1 per cent tolerance, the externally visible shoot growth may not exceed 1 cm in length.

#### **(ii) Class II**

A total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of onions satisfying neither the requirements of the class nor the minimum requirements is allowed. Within this tolerance not more than 2 per cent in total may consist of soft onions or produce affected by decay.

In addition, a tolerance of 10 per cent by number or weight of firm onions with externally visible shoot growth are allowed.

### **B. Size tolerances**

For all classes: a total tolerance of 10 per cent, by number or weight, of onions not satisfying the requirements as regards sizing is allowed.

## **V. Provisions concerning presentation**

### **A. Uniformity**

The contents of each package (or lot for produce presented in bulk in the transport vehicle) must be uniform and contain only onions of the same origin, variety or commercial type, quality and size.

However, a mixture of onions of distinctly different commercial types and/or colours may be packed together in a sales package, provided they are uniform in quality and, for each commercial type and/or colour concerned, in origin. However, in case of those mixtures uniformity in size is not required.

The visible part of the contents of the package (or lot for produce presented in bulk in the transport vehicle) must be representative of the entire contents.

### **B. Packaging**

Onions must be packed in such a way as to protect the produce properly.

The materials used inside the package must be clean and of a quality such as to avoid causing any external or internal damage to the produce. The use of materials, particularly of paper or

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<sup>1</sup> A conformity check shall be made by assessing primary or composite samples. It is based on the principle of presumption that the quality of the randomly taken samples is representative of the quality of the lot. The OECD Operating Rules for Conformity Checks are recommended for application – also by operators – at the stages of dispatch as well as in wholesale and distribution centres and storerooms of food retail. <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/fruit-vegetables/publications/oecd-fruit-and-vegetables-rules.htm>.

stamps bearing trade specifications, is allowed, provided the printing or labelling has been done with non-toxic ink or glue.

Stickers individually affixed to the produce shall be such that, when removed, they neither leave visible traces of glue nor lead to skin defects.

Packages (or lots for produce presented in bulk in the transport vehicle) must be free of all foreign matter.

## VI. Provisions concerning marking

Each package<sup>2</sup> must bear the following particulars, in letters grouped on the same side, legibly and indelibly marked, and visible from the outside.

For onions transported in bulk (direct loading into a transport vehicle) these particulars must appear on a document accompanying the goods, and attached in a visible position inside the transport vehicle.

### A. Identification

Packer and/or dispatcher/exporter:

Name and physical address (e.g. street/city/region/postal code and, if different from the country of origin, the country) or a code mark officially recognized by the national authority<sup>3</sup> if the country applying such a system is listed in the UNECE Code Mark Registry. In the case where there is no street address available, the physical address can be made up of the name of the farm or facility, the nearest village, town, region, and postal code; or GPS coordinates and a PO Box address together with nearest town, region and country shall be accepted as a physical address.<sup>4</sup>

### B. Nature of produce

- “Onions” if the contents are not visible from the outside
- “Mixture of onions”, or equivalent denomination, in the case of a mixture of distinctly different commercial types and/or colours of onions. If the produce is not visible from the outside, the commercial types and/or colours and the quantity of each in the package must be indicated.

### C. Origin of produce

- Country of origin<sup>5</sup> and, optionally, district where grown, or national, regional or local place name
- In the case of a mixture of distinctly different commercial types and/or colours of onions of different origins, the indication of each country of origin shall appear next to the name of the commercial type and/or colour concerned.

<sup>2</sup> These marking provisions do not apply to sales packages presented in packages bearing these particulars. However, they do apply to sales packages (pre-packages) presented individually.

<sup>3</sup> The national legislation of a number of countries requires the explicit declaration of the name and address. However, in the case where a code mark is used, the reference “packer and/or dispatcher (or equivalent abbreviations)” has to be indicated in close connection with the code mark, and the code mark should be preceded by the ISO 3166 (alpha-2) country/area code of the recognizing country, if not the country of origin.

<sup>4</sup> Reservation by the United States of America on the use of a PO Box address, as it may not allow facility inspections or rapid intervention in case of recalls, and is not part of its national labelling requirement related to packer and/or dispatcher/exporter.

<sup>5</sup> The full or a commonly used name should be indicated.

**D. Commercial specifications**

- Class
- Size expressed by minimum and maximum diameters.

**E. Official control mark (optional)**

Adopted 1961

Last revised 2023

Aligned with the Standard Layout 2023

The OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables has published an explanatory illustrated brochure on the application of this standard. The publication may be obtained from the OECD bookshop at: [www.oecdbookshop.org](http://www.oecdbookshop.org).

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