



# Economic and Social Council

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## Economic Commission for Europe

### Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

#### Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards

##### Seventy-seventh session

Geneva, 14–16 (a.m.) November 2022

Item 10 of the provisional agenda

**Sustainable development, food systems and resource efficiency:  
food loss and waste prevention and reduction**

## United Nations Economic Commission for Europe work on food loss and waste

**Submitted by the secretariat**

### *Summary*

Over the past few years, the Working Party has increased its focus on improving sustainable production and trade, particularly related to the prevention of food loss and waste in support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 12.3 on halving food loss by 2030. The work has included the organization of awareness-raising events and the development of studies, tools and guidance documents, as well as the adoption of Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. This note provides a short summary of the work done.

The Working Party is invited to discuss and agree on its future work on food loss and waste reduction in agricultural supply chains, including to provide guidance on the usefulness of developing explanatory brochures for other products or groups of products. It is also invited to guide on resource mobilization for this work.

This document is submitted according to ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/2 – paragraph 66, ECE/CTCS/2022/2 – Decision 2022-06, and A/76/6 Section 20.



## I. Introduction

1. Currently a third of all food produced globally is lost or wasted – around 14 per cent between harvest and retail, and another 17 per cent at household, food service and retail levels. This means that the resources used to produce it – water, land, fertilizers, energy, and labour – go wasted. As around 70 per cent of fresh water is used for agriculture, it in turn means that around 25 per cent of world's fresh water supply, 8–10 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions and large tracts of land/soil is used to grow food that ends up being discarded.
2. Food loss and food waste are two distinct but related concepts. Food loss refers to any food that is discarded, incinerated, or otherwise disposed of along the food supply chain from harvest or slaughter up to, but excluding, the retail level, and which does not re-enter in any other productive utilization, such as feed or seed. It generally occurs at the production, post-harvest, and processing stages of the food supply chain. It can be caused by infrastructure limitations, climate, and other environmental factors. Food waste, in turn, occurs at the end of the food supply chain, due to consumers or retailers discarding food.
3. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) has over the past few years explored the link between standards and food loss and waste, and how standards and trade processes could be adapted to reduce food loss and waste along agricultural supply chains.

## II. Overview of work done

4. Given their perishable nature, fresh fruit and vegetables are particularly prone to contributing to food loss or waste. Thus, as part of its work on Agricultural Quality Standards, ECE has been working to address this issue. As a result, the following tools have been developed:
  - Code of Good Practice – reducing food loss and ensuring optimum handling of fresh fruit and vegetables along the value chain (ECE/TRADE/454 and ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/Inf.1). With specific chapters for producers, traders, transporters and retailers, the Code provides practical advice for preventing food loss and waste as well as for maintaining quality along the fresh fruit and vegetables supply chain, from production to retail.
  - Simply Measuring – Quantifying Food Loss and Waste: UNECE food loss and waste measuring methodology for fresh produce supply chains (ECE/TRADE/453). The publication provides guidance for quantifying losses in fresh produce supply chains.
  - Minimum Quality Specifications (MQS) for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. The Minimum Quality Specifications for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (UNECE-MQS) developed by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables provide a simple trading language that is easy to apply. The UNECE-MQS ensure, when applied along the distribution chain, that the produce recipient will receive a product of marketable quality and suitable for human consumption. The application of the UNECE-MQS can help to prevent food loss, while providing all the necessary information about the product including country of origin.
  - FeedUp@UN, A digital solution for identifying, quantifying, and tracing food lost in supply chains.
5. Seamless and rapid trade procedures are critical to ensure agricultural products reach their destination quickly, and thus for reducing food loss and waste. In collaboration with the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), ECE has been working to facilitate the development of electronic conformity certificate management systems for products covered by marketing standards/subject to conformity certificates. A functional specification for an electronic conformity certificate management system has been developed, which describes the core processes and business requirements for the development of an electronic certificate management system in the context of marketing standards, with focus on the processes in the exporting country. The specification can be used

by member States to develop in-house systems, or a generic system could be developed through international partnerships.

### **III. Going forward**

6. During the past year, texts for explanatory brochures on the practical application of the Code of Good Practice have been developed with suggestions for how to reduce losses in harvest and post-harvest handling for four groups of fruit and vegetables (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.1/2022/3-6, covering floral vegetables, immature fruit vegetables, leafy vegetables, and root vegetables). The Working Party is invited to provide guidance on the usefulness of developing such material for other products or groups of products.

7. At its 2022 meeting, the Specialized Section on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce decided to include in its future work the development of a Code of Good Practice for dry and dried produce, in collaboration with industry and building on existing industry materials, to provide guidance on food loss and waste reduction. The Working Party will be kept informed of the progress of this work.

8. The Working Party is invited to discuss and agree on its future work on food loss and waste reduction in agricultural supply chains, including as regards developing explanatory brochures related to the Code of Good Practice for products or groups of products. It is also invited to guide on resource mobilization for this work.

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