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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 Seed Potatoes

#### Forty-ninth session

Geneva, 17-18 March 2022

## Report of the forty-ninth session of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

### I. Introduction

1. The meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes was chaired by Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland).
2. The Chief of the Market Access Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, welcomed the delegates to the forty-ninth session of the Specialized Section, held in an online hybrid format with interpretation into ECE's official languages. He expressed appreciation for delegates' continuous support to the ECE as well as for the valuable work in the past year and the materials produced by the group, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. He commended the progress made in 2021, including the finalization of the Capacity-building Guide for Implementation of a Seed Potato Certification Scheme, and the amendments to Annexes I and VII of the Standard, both adopted by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards at its seventy-sixth session in November in 2021, as well as the conclusion of the bacterial pathogens survey.
4. He highlighted the agenda items to be discussed in the next two days, including amendments to the Standard for Seed Potatoes and work on the draft guide on mini-tuber production, and informed that the report would be adopted in session, with decisions sent to the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards for adoption at its next session in November 2022.

### II. Attendance

5. Representatives of the following countries attended the meeting: Algeria, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.
6. The European Commission was also represented.
7. Representatives of Euroseeds and Europatat also participated in the session.



### **III. Adoption of the agenda**

8. The delegations adopted the provisional agenda with the following revision: discussions under items 7 and 9 of the agenda (“The potato mop top virus – sharing experiences” and “Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses”) postponed to its 2023 session.

### **IV. Matters arising since the last session**

#### **(a) United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and subsidiary bodies**

9. The Chief of the Market Access Section, Economic Cooperation and Trade Division at ECE, Mr. Mika Vepsäläinen, informed that since the last session of the Specialized Section in March 2021, the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards met in a hybrid meeting on 21-22 June 2021, followed by the seventy-sixth session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards in November 2021. The Working Party had adopted the report of the forty-eighth session of the Specialized Section, the amendments to Annex I and Annex VII of the Standard for Seed Potatoes, the revised draft guide on capacity-building, and the text of the poster on the benefits of certified seed.

10. Moreover, in September 2021, the United Nations held its first ever Food Systems Summit. In preparation for the Summit, ECE and the four other regional commissions of the United Nations had produced a joint policy brief highlighting the role of regional cooperation in food systems transformation.

11. He further informed that the upcoming meeting of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards would be held on 27-28 June 2022; and the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards on 14-16 November 2022; followed by the seventieth session of the Commission, to be held in the spring of 2023 under the theme “Digital and green transformations for sustainable development in the ECE region”. The Specialized Section was invited to consider potential contributions, action items, or draft proposals for consideration by the Commission related to the theme.

### **V. Revision of the Standard for Seed Potatoes**

12. During its 2021 session, the Specialized Section approved changes to Annex I and Annex VII to the ECE Standard S-1 concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of seed potatoes, with changes subsequently adopted by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards at its annual session in November 2021. The Specialized Section also decided that the working group that had reviewed the annexes (Australia, Finland (rapporteur), Germany, Netherlands, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States and Euroseeds) would continue its work on reviewing and revising the entire standard and its annexes and place this item on the 2022 session agenda.

13. The group had not held any meeting in 2021, but an initial proposal had been circulated within the group by the rapporteur, with comments received from the delegations of France and the Netherlands. Suggestions included: to move some more generic information that is currently part of the standard text (such as history of the standard) into a separate document, to have a more concentrated standards document; to discuss adding true potato seed (TPS) and potato plantlets; reviewing the information on varieties; discussing if sizing was needed; and considering if the information in Annex IX on sample sizes for virus testing and field inspection could be moved into a separate document.

14. The Specialized Section decided to continue the work within the working group on reviewing the entire standard and its annexes, with proposals for changes to be submitted by December 2022 for consideration at the 2023 meeting of the Specialized Section. The group would meet via videoconference in four half-day meetings, tentatively in May, June,

September, and October. The secretariat was requested to facilitate the video conferences and to conduct an online poll to identify suitable timing for the meetings.

15. The Specialized Section further decided to expand the working group with the delegations of France and Spain. The delegation of Poland and the representative of Europatat also expressed interest in joining but would confirm after the meeting.

## **VI. Survey on bacterial testing methodologies - conclusions**

16. At its 2021 session, the Specialized Section reviewed preliminary results of the bacterial testing methodologies survey which had been conducted in early 2021 and collected 51 responses from 32 countries. At its 2022 session, the full results and conclusions of the survey were presented, with discussions led by the delegate from the United States on behalf of the rapporteur's group (Finland, Israel, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States).

17. The rapporteur presented the scope, participation, methodology, and key findings of the survey, and encouraged all to visit the ECE website for the full survey results, where a report with main conclusions is available as document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2022/4 and the full survey results available in document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2022/INF.1. She thanked all the participants for participating in the survey, and the secretariat for its technical help in creating the survey and creating the visual representations.

18. The Specialized Section discussed lessons that can be drawn from the survey and potential questions that could be included in future surveys. Delegates commended the survey which had produced very interesting and practical information. It concluded that the results of the survey should be considered, as needed, when the Specialized Section undertakes revision of the Standard. Supplemental polling could also be conducted if necessary.

19. The Specialized Section thanked the delegate from United States for her excellent analysis and requested the secretariat to distribute the survey results to all survey participants.

## **VII. Draft guide on mini-tuber production**

20. At its 2021 session, the Specialized Section decided to postpone the discussion of the new draft guide on mini-tuber production. It asked the working group led by Australia (rapporteur) and including France, Germany, Netherlands, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom and Euroseeds to review and finalize the draft guide.

21. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposed draft guide on mini-tuber production (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2022/6). The delegate of Australia presented the work on behalf of the working group, informing that several of the proposals had been pending the results of the review of Annex I of the standard. He thanked South Africa and Germany for having provided comments. He proposed to continue reviewing the guide in a follow up meeting of the group and also invited comments from the meeting.

22. Several delegations thanked the rapporteur for the excellent work. Additional comments were provided in session by the delegates of Germany, France, the Russian Federation, South Africa, and Euroseeds. The rapporteur also invited countries who did not certify mini-tubers to provide comments.

23. The Specialized Section decided to place approval of the guide on the agenda for its next meeting in 2023. It requested the secretariat to organize an online meeting for the working group in May to continue the work on finalizing the draft guide. All delegations interested in contributing were invited to join the working group. Delegations were also requested to send any good pictures they have of tissue-culture laboratories, other infrastructure systems and facilities, labels, and mini-tubers, to ensure pictures representing a wide range of environments and settings.

## **VIII. Knowledge sharing, capacity-building and guides**

### **(a) Update on development of a knowledge-sharing and resource reference page on seed potato certification**

24. At the 2021 session, the delegation of Australia informed about a newly established knowledge-sharing platform for experts of the Specialized Section, allowing registered experts to upload relevant material. The platform is available through: <https://vicspa.sharepoint.com/sites/UNECESeedPotatoes>. Delegations were encouraged to upload videos, posters and photos related to the seed potato activities in their countries.

25. The Specialized Section reviewed progress and discussed possible contributions and additions to the knowledge sharing platform, including videos, documents, and other informational materials. It requested the secretariat to confirm after the meeting if it would be possible to host the material on a document sharing platform hosted by the secretariat.

### **(b) Finalization of the poster/paper on the benefits of certified seed**

26. At the 2021 session, the Specialized Section approved the textual changes and submitted the poster on the benefits of certified seed for adoption by the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards. Following the adoption of the text, the secretariat created a draft design of the poster (document ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2021/INF.1).

27. The Specialized Section reviewed the proposed design of the poster and decided on additional changes to be made, including adding a link to the Standard; adding photos of high-quality potatoes, to be chosen from submissions by the delegations to the secretariat; and left justifying the bullet points.

28. The Specialized Section asked the secretariat to circulate the revised poster to the delegates for a final round of comments and approval. Delegates were requested to send pictures of high-quality potatoes to the secretariat.

### **(c) Workshops and guides**

29. The secretariat informed that the Capacity-building Guide for Implementation of a Seed Potato Certification Scheme, adopted at the November 2021 meeting of the Working Party (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/2021/4), had now been published on the ECE website. The ECE Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service had also been published in a final layout (ECE/TRADE/434).

30. Delegates agreed to complement the Capacity-building Guide for Implementation of a Seed Potato Certification Scheme with pictures. Photos from outside of Europe would be welcome, given the subject matter of the guide.

31. The Specialized Section was informed that the lists of varieties and national certification schemes and authorities had been published on the ECE website. Delegations were invited to send any updated information on certification authorities to the secretariat. The delegate of Australia suggested hosting this information in the forthcoming Sharepoint folder, so it can be updated dynamically.

32. The secretariat provided an overview of the seed potato page of the ECE website and showed where Specialized Section documents can be found. The Specialized Section discussed recommendations for improving the useability of the website, including better labelling, updating older resources, and fixing broken links.

33. The Specialized Section took note of the World Potato Congress, postponed owing to the pandemic and now scheduled to take place 30 May-2 June 2022 in Dublin, Ireland. The delegate of Australia informed that the following World Potato Congress will be held in Adelaide, Australia in 2025. He also informed that it was being proposed to establish an international potato day, to be held on May 30 starting in 2025.

34. The Specialized Section discussed the options for new capacity building or training activities. The secretariat informed the Specialized Section that there was currently no budget for capacity building activities that would require travel. However, there are options for video trainings that are not cost-prohibitive.

35. The Specialized Section requested delegates to send photos to the secretariat that can be included in the capacity building guide. It requested the secretariat to circulate the list of certifying authorities for any updates, and delegations were invited to contact the secretariat with updates. The secretariat will update the website in consultation with the Bureau of the Specialized Section.

## **IX. The potato mop top virus – sharing experiences**

36. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2023 session.

## **X. Lot size of seed potatoes**

37. The Chair introduced the item, highlighting that for seeds e.g. for cereals and grasses, the international standards of International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provide the rules for the maximum lot sizes, but that for seed potatoes there is no requirement for maximum lot sizes.

38. The Specialized Section discussed whether there was a need to define lot sizes for seed potatoes. The delegate of Australia stated that it would be useful to know what other countries are doing in terms of maximum lot size and the number of samples taken. The delegation of Germany agreed with this point, and extended it to sample sizes, in addition to lot sizes. The French delegation agreed with the suggestion to discuss sample size, expressing concern with the sample size requirements in the Standard, and supported the idea of a small survey on this.

39. The Specialized Section concluded that further discussion on both lot size and sample size was needed. It decided to conduct a small survey on the topic of lot and sample size limits and practices as background for further discussions. The delegation of Germany will develop the survey, and the secretariat will help distribute it.

## **XI. Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses**

40. The Specialized Section decided to postpone this item to its 2023 session.

## **XII. True potato seed and potato plants in pots**

41. At its 2021 session, the Specialized Section exchanged updates on the topic of true potato seed (TPS) and potato plants in pots. The Specialized Section decided to continue discussion in a rapporteur's group (Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands (rapporteur), South Africa, United Kingdom, United States and Euroseeds) and exchange further updates at the 2022 session as well as subsequently propose possible amendments to the ECE Standard S-1.

42. The Specialized Section continued discussions and exchanged updates on the topic. The delegations of Netherlands, France, Germany and South Africa shared information on developments in their countries related to TPS and potato plants in pots, and challenges encountered.

43. The Specialized Section decided to continue the discussion on this complicated but very interesting item, aiming to identify basic rules for what are the minimum requirements for TPS, and plantlets if they are produced from a TPS or tubers. It further decided that TPS could be one of the topics in the intersessional meetings on reviewing the standard.

### **XIII. New and emerging diseases and pests – information on *Liberibacter*, and the Tomato Potato Psyllid**

44. The Specialized Section exchanged information concerning ongoing research and studies on new and emerging diseases and pests, such as *Liberibacter* and the Tomato Potato Psyllid.

45. The delegation from Australia informed that while isolated instances of psyllids have been found, the *Liberibacter* pathogen has not been detected in Australia. However, *Liberibacter* is a problem in New Zealand. The delegate from the United States reported that *Liberibacter*, while present in the United States, is not a major problem with seed growers, as it has shown to be self-eliminating in these populations. The widespread use of neonicotinoids may be responsible for controlling the prevalence of psyllids. The delegate from Australia proposed gathering information on diagnostic capabilities from countries where *Liberibacter* is a problem as a cautionary measure.

46. The Specialized Section decided to keep the item as future work and to work on gathering diagnostic information on *Liberibacter* from the New Zealand, the United States, and other countries where the pathogen has been detected.

### **XIV. Herbicide carryover and seed potatoes**

47. At its 2021 meeting, the Specialized Section decided to create a working group (Australia, France, New Zealand, South Africa, United Kingdom (rapporteur), United States) to discuss herbicide carryover and seed potatoes and to determine if this could lead to a study paper or possible amendments of the Standard.

48. The Specialized Section discussed whether the herbicide carryover item should be included in the Standard's requirements or if a position paper was needed. The Specialized Section decided to pursue a position paper.

49. Delegations discussed their respective approaches to herbicide damage in certification. The different approaches include preclusion of certification (Germany), allowing partial certification (United Kingdom, others), and case by case analysis (Montana/United States).

50. The delegation of the Netherlands noted the difficulty and expense of acting on and testing for this type of damage, suggesting that caution should be taken before adding herbicide carryover to the Standard, and that a position paper would be appropriate. The delegation of Australia emphasized the need for increased awareness of herbicide carryover, even if it is not included in the Standard. They reported that this problem is occurring more frequently with tighter crop rotation.

51. The Specialized Section decided a position paper was necessary before considering whether to include a provision on herbicide carryover in the Standard. The rapporteur's group will work on preparing this position paper.

### **XV. Future work**

52. The Specialized Section decided to include the following items on its 2023 agenda:

- Revision of the entire Standard for seed potatoes
- Draft guide on mini-tuber production
- Capacity-building (development of an online webinar series (Australia (rapporteur), Finland, Netherlands, United Kingdom, and the United States); knowledge sharing and resource reference page; poster on the benefits of certified seed; update of the ECE seed potato website)
- Lot size and sample size of seed potatoes
- Discussion on dormant tuber testing for viruses

- True Potato Seed (TPS) and potato plants in pots
- New and emerging diseases and pests - information on *Liberibacter*, and the Tomato Potato Psyllid
- The potato mop top virus - sharing experiences
- Herbicide carryover and seed potatoes - position paper
- Revision of the Specialized Section position papers (rapporteur's group with United Kingdom as rapporteur; Australia, Finland, and the United States)

## **XVI. Other business**

53. The Specialized Section took note of the dates of the 2023 meeting of the Specialized Section session (16-17 March 2023). Delegations were invited to volunteer as hosts for the next rapporteurs meeting in 2023. The secretariat was requested to issue a formal thank you to three very active delegates who had retired during the past couple of years (Anders Christensson, Sweden; Guido Mussche, Belgium; and Fernando Alonso, Spain).

## **XVII. Election of officers**

54. The Specialized Section elected Ms. Hanna Kortemaa (Finland) as its Chair and Mr. Nigel Crump (Australia) and Ms. Nina Zidack (United States) as its Vice-Chairs for a one-year period.

## **XVIII. Adoption of the report**

55. The Specialized Section adopted the report of its forty-ninth session (ECE/CTCS/WP.7/GE.6/2022/2) in session, followed by a silence procedure.

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