

# codex alimentarius commission



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

WORLD  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION



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JOINT OFFICE: Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 00100 ROME Tel: 39 06 57051 www.codexalimentarius.net Email: codex@fao.org Facsimile: 39 06 5705 4593

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Agenda Item 2(b)

CX/FFV 06/13/3  
September 2006

## JOINT FAO/WHO FOOD STANDARDS PROGRAMME

### CODEX COMMITTEE ON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

13<sup>th</sup> Session,  
Mexico City, Mexico, 25 - 29 September 2006

#### MATTERS ARISING FROM OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE STANDARDIZATION OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

This document is divided into two parts: Part I refers to the activities of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruits and Vegetables and Part II to the UN/ECE work in the field of standardization of fresh fruits and vegetables.

## ORGANIZATION FOR THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD)

(1) Main issues of interest to the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables that were discussed at the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruits and Vegetables (Paris, France, November 2005) are summarized below<sup>1</sup>.

### 63<sup>RD</sup> SESSION OF THE OECD SCHEME FOR THE APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS FOR FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

#### Publications

(2) The OECD publishes interpretative brochures of commercial quality standards for fresh fruits and vegetables which comprise an explanation of the terms contained in the Standard as well as illustrations of produce defects and the provisions ruling the produce under the different quality classes. These brochures are available worldwide through the OECD sale points as well as on the Internet at <http://www.oecd.org> either as printed copies or electronic files in pdf format. Some of the explanatory brochures are trilingual publications (English, French and Spanish).

(3) Since the last session of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (May 2005), **explanatory brochures** on the standards for strawberries, cultivated mushrooms, beans, commercial types of melons and the **Guidelines** on objective tests to determine the quality of fruits and vegetables and dry and dried produce have been published. These publications can be found on the OECD Scheme website: [www.oecd.org/agr/fv](http://www.oecd.org/agr/fv).

#### Ongoing Work

(4) Work on the explanatory brochures for the standards on citrus fruits, apples, pears, kiwifruit, peaches/nectarines, apricots, melons, pistachios, hazelnuts, prunes, cucumbers and potatoes is ongoing and is expected to be completed by mid-2007. The brochure on table grape will be published shortly.

(5) At the 63<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme it was agreed to make a proposal to the UN/ECE to officially formalize and strengthen cooperation between the OECD Scheme and the UN/ECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards by:

- (a) proposing a Memorandum of Understanding to mutually recognize the outputs of each Organization, to underline the confidence that has been built in the two Organizations, to intensify the cooperation and to better promote the work of both Organizations.
- (b) endeavouring to optimize the organization of sessions of the meetings of the UN/ECE Specialized Sections (especially the one on the standardization of fresh fruits and vegetables) and the Plenary Meeting of the OECD Scheme.

(6) The OECD continues to sponsor training courses, workshops and related activities in the area of fruits and vegetables e.g. quality assessment, inspection, etc. in cooperation with Member countries and other organizations such as UN/ECE, FAO, etc.

(7) The next session of the OECD Plenary Meeting will be held on 30 November - 1 December 2006 in Paris. At this session, the Plenary Meeting will continue to make progress on implementing the reforms of the Scheme that were adopted in 2004 and covering the period 2004 - 2008. These reforms provide for an expansion of the programme of work to include aspects related to economic analysis, in order to increase the added-value for participating countries. Additional work areas relate to support to National Inspection Services through the process of peer reviews and working guidelines, technical training programming to increase the capacity of countries participating in the Scheme, as well as overall policy recommendations.

(8) The next Heads of National Inspection Services Meeting of the Scheme will be held on 4-6 December 2006 in Agadir, Morocco.

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<sup>1</sup> AGR/CA/FVS/M(2005)1 - draft Summary Record of the 63rd Plenary Meeting of the OECD Scheme - to be adopted by the upcoming 64th Plenary Meeting of the OECD Scheme. INF.19 - Statement of the OECD Secretariat at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the UN/ECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables (Geneva, Switzerland, May 2006).

### **Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in the UN/ECE**

(9) A possible transfer of work of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruits and Vegetables to the UN/ECE had been discussed by the Plenary Meeting of the Scheme in October 2003, on the basis of the results of an independent review of the Scheme. The Plenary Meeting concluded that the Scheme mission would be best fulfilled by keeping and strengthening its activities within the OECD. Any transfer of work from the OECD to UN/ECE or another international organization would have to be agreed by consensus by all Member countries of the OECD Scheme.

### **Revision of Council Decision C(99)/FINAL**

#### **Revision of the text (except Annex II)**

(10) The Plenary Meeting agreed on a number of amendments e.g. Article I.4 was amended to include a reference to the Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme so that also the relevant standards adopted by the Codex Alimentarius Commission, once approved by the Plenary Meeting, shall be applied under the “Scheme” to the products specified in Annex I to this Decision (fresh fruits/vegetables and dry/dried produce) when these products enter into international trade between countries participating in the “Scheme”.

#### **Revision of Annex II**

(11) The Plenary Meeting agreed with the amendment to this document. Section 3 “Criteria for defining inspection priorities (risk analysis)” would be deleted and this issue would be dealt with in another document and discussed again at the next session of the Plenary Meeting.

(12) After final review by the Directorate for Legal Affairs, the text of the entire Council Decision as amended will be transmitted to the Committee for Agriculture for endorsement with a view to its subsequent submission to the Council for adoption.

## **UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE (UN/ECE)**

(1) Main issues of interest to the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables that were discussed at the 61<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN/ECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards<sup>1</sup> (Geneva, Switzerland, October 2005) and the 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of its Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables<sup>2</sup> (Geneva, Switzerland, May 2006) are summarized below<sup>3</sup>.

(2) This document should be read in conjunction with working document CX/FFV 06/13/4 containing the UN/ECE Standards and Recommendations in force relevant to the work of the Committee.

### **61<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF THE WORKING PARTY ON AGRICULTURAL QUALITY STANDARDS**

#### **UN/ECE Standard for Apples**

(3) The Working Party adopted the UN/ECE Standard for Apples as proposed by the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

(4) The Working Party adopted provisions concerning minimum sizes except for provisions on uniformity for sizing by weight which was still at the trial stage. Discussions on uniformity for sizing by weight (eventually, tolerances of sizing by weight) would be conducted at the next session of the Specialized Section in which the delegation of France would provide additional information. The delegation of the United States lodged a reservation on the text of the UN/ECE Standard for Apples "Provision concerning Sizing" - Section on Sizing by Weight - pending completion of work on uniformity by weight.

#### **UN/ECE Recommendation for Apples**

(5) The Specialized Section proposed that the Working Party adopted as a revised UN/ECE Standard the inclusion of a section on minimum quality requirements but without recommending Brix values for the moment.

(6) The Working Party adopted the text for apples regarding minimum maturity requirements as a UN/ECE Recommendation for a two-year trial period until 2007.

#### **UN/ECE Recommendation for Table Grapes**

(7) The Specialized Section proposed to the Working Party to amend the text of the UN/ECE Recommendation for Table Grapes, specifically, the sections on minimum quality and minimum maturity requirements.

(8) The Working Party adopted the text for table grapes as a UN/ECE Recommendation for a two year trial period until 2007.

#### **Alignment of the Control Certificate with the UN Layout Key**

(9) The Working Group on the Control Certificate prepared a proposal in cooperation with the United Kingdom trade facilitation organization, SITPRO. The proposal aimed at aligning the control certificate with the UN Layout Key and at defining continuation sheets to allow several lots to be treated on one certificate. The Control Certificate was not yet considered ready for adoption.

(10) Following the discussions, the delegation of the United Kingdom presented modifications as follows: "Some official control services have systems where the inspector signs and stamps the control certificate to verify that the conformity checks have been carried out under an approved quality control/assurance system. In this case additional physical sampling checks may not be made and the statement in the relevant Box was not appropriate." The Working Party asked the Specialized Sections on Standardization of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Produce to consider how to manage this situation.

(11) The delegation of the Netherlands pointed out that auto control had been a fact in trade and standard practice for a long time; the Control Certification could not be done by governmental organizations only.

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<sup>1</sup> TRADE/WP.7/2005/9.

<sup>2</sup> ECE/TRADE/C/WP.7/GE.1/2006/2.

<sup>3</sup> UN/ECE documentation is available for downloading at: <http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/welcome.htm>.

### **Independent Evaluation of the UN/ECE and cooperation with other organizations**

(12) A major independent evaluation of UN/ECE had taken place. The work on the development of agricultural quality standards had been appreciated, which meant that more resources could be allocated to this work in the future depending on the outcome of current UN/ECE reform negotiations.

(13) The Working Party had been informed of the external evaluation of the UN/ECE and welcomed the preliminary recommendations.

(14) The Working Party stated that trade in agriculture had great potential for increasing employment and export-based economic growth for lower income countries in the UN/ECE region and could result in employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and foreign direct investment. Given the importance of the sector in some UN/ECE member States where agriculture accounts for up to 40 % of GDP, it was important that that sector participated fully in international supply chains. It was also of benefit to all member States who implement the UN/ECE agricultural quality standards to see the standards implemented in as many countries as possible, both within and outside the region – as that increased market transparency for exports as well as imports.

(15) In the light of the above information, both the Working Party and the UN/ECE Secretariat had received numerous requests for capacity-building activities as well for increased promotion of the standards.

(16) The Working Party would therefore like to see:

- A significant increase in the promotion of the quality standards, in particular in countries that have not yet implemented them;
- Increased capacity-building and implementation support in less advantaged member States;
- An investigation of various options for enhanced cooperation with other international organizations, such as OECD and FAO, through activities that might include joint programmes of work, events and capacity-building programmes.

(17) Realizing that this could not be accomplished within existing resources, the Working Party, recommended to the UN/ECE Secretariat and the Economic Commission for Europe to seriously consider assigning additional resources to this work.

### **52<sup>ND</sup> SESSION OF THE UN/ECE SPECIALIZED SECTION ON STANDARDIZATION OF FRESH FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**

#### **Review of the UN/ECE Recommendations**

##### **UN/ECE Recommendation for Table Grapes**

(18) The delegations discussed changes to the Standard based on the contributions from the delegations of Germany and the United States. The United States delegation suggested simplifying the minimum maturity requirements by: (a) fixing the refractometric index at the level of 16° Brix; and (b) accepting fruit with a refractometric index lower than 16° Brix provided the sugar/acid ratio is at least 20:1. Exceptions were proposed for several grape varieties. These proposals had also been suggested to the Codex Working Group on Table Grapes as complementary to a more general proposal by the Working Group that was circulated to Codex Members and Observers for comments and consideration at the September 2006 meeting of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

(19) The German paper summarized proposals by the OECD Working Group on the explanatory brochure for table grapes. The proposals were aimed at aligning the text of the Standard with the UN/ECE Standard Layout and facilitating the application of the Standard.

(20) The delegations agreed that no special provisions for exceptions on trademarks should be made in the United Nations standard.

(21) The Specialized Section decided to introduce a minimum bunch size of 100 grams and recommended it for trial. No Annex of varieties would be needed if one minimum size were accepted.

(22) The Specialized Section asked the representative of Germany to update its document to reflect the discussions at the current session and at the September 2006 meeting of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruits and Vegetables. The paper should then be sent to the UN/ECE Secretariat for translation and submission to the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the Working Party in November 2006 for approval as a new Standard.

#### **UN/ECE Standard/Recommendation for Apples**

(23) The delegations discussed the current provisions concerning sizing and size tolerances. The industry found it difficult to apply these provisions, because, in practice, the uniform size of apples was determined by a combination of weight and diameter.

(24) As a solution, the delegation of Germany proposed leaving the sizing requirements unchanged and updating the provision on size tolerances. Another approach would be to simplify the sizing requirements, as indicated in the proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples. COPA/COGECA reported that it was preparing an option based on a fixed size chart.

(25) The Specialized Section noted the growing importance of small varieties. What parameters should be used to measure quality characteristics, such as maturity, for small varieties? Should the Brix degree be used as a maturity index for all size classes or only for apples below a certain size? The Section decided to continue discussions on the Standard at its next session. The results of the work in Codex and the fixed size chart from COPA/COGECA will be important contributions for this discussion.

(26) The delegations exchanged views on the concepts of single minimum size, uniformity and colour, indicated in the proposed draft Codex Standard for Apples. Moving to a single minimum size would be a welcome simplification, but would need to be checked with the industry. There was no clear distinction between small and large varieties.

(27) To develop a practical and easy-to-understand approach to uniformity, the Specialized Section formed a Working Group that would use inputs from COPA/COGECA (fixed size charts) and from the September 2006 meeting of the Codex Committee on Fresh Fruit and Vegetables.

(28) Colour was regarded as an important quality characteristic, widely used by traders. Varieties were also important for the decision making of consumers. Including colour characteristics on the label could be problematic as there were already too many labelling requirements.

(29) COPA/COGECA provided information on the preliminary results of the research establishing a correlation between the size and the Brix value of apples. The results indicated a correlation between the fruit size and sugar content for the sampled varieties of French and Italian apples.

(30) The Standard continues to be on trial until November 2007.

#### ***List of apple varieties***

(31) The delegations discussed whether the Annex to the Standard should be limited to the most important apple varieties, and particularly those traded internationally. Most delegations were in favour of having a shorter list of varieties in the Standard. However, reducing the list could negatively affect the work of inspectors, who rely on the quality characteristics of varieties contained in the list.

(32) A proposal was made to remove the list of varieties from the Standard and to maintain it in a separate database for reference.

(33) The Specialized Section decided to continue discussion on the list of varieties at future sessions.

### **Control Certificate**

(34) The delegations discussed changes to the control certificate on the basis of the proposals by the Working Group on the control certificate and contributions by the delegations of France and Germany. The German note reflected the changes discussed by the OECD Scheme and proposed for inclusion into the inspection guidelines. The Specialized Section agreed on a number of changes in different boxes/explanatory notes of the certificate e.g. "Certificate issued electronically" should be given as an example in the explanatory notes; "Signatory" - who the authorizing person is should be specified in the explanatory notes. The certificate should allow for private signatures even though the ultimate responsibility might be with the State authorities; the address of the inspection service should be indicated in the explanatory notes; the validity of the certificate should be indicated by the last day of validity; etc. Member States would discuss further whether or not to remove the descriptive text "This certificate is for the exclusive use of the control service". It was not decided whether the net weight only should be indicated for each lot.

(35) The Specialized Section asked the UN/ECE Secretariat to:

- Collect any further comments from the delegates.
- Align the conformity certificate with the latest recommendations for the UN Layout Key and other UN/ECE trade facilitation recommendations.
- Present the revised certificate to the November 2006 meeting of the Working Party for approval.
- Investigate procedures and techniques for electronic signature and stamping used by countries.

### **UN/ECE Standard Layout**

(36) The delegations discussed a German proposal based on the European Community regulations, for a new wording in the Standard Layout to acknowledge that UN/ECE standards can be applied at all stages of marketing and not only at the export stage. Although the Specialized Section could not reach agreement on this proposal, many countries were in favour of changing the Standard Layout in such a way that it would open the application of the standards to all stages of distribution. In doing so, it might, however, be useful to point to the export stage as the "reference" point for the application of standards.

(37) The participants also discussed whether this change should be reflected in the standards or in the Geneva Protocol. The German document should be resubmitted to the next session of the Specialized Section for revisiting the issue.

(38) The delegation of the United States presented a proposal to include a table of tolerances in UN/ECE Standards for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables. The arguments were: (a) the uniform international interpretation of normative terms such as "slight and superficial" facilitating greater use of the standards; (b) clarification of "Quality Tolerances" for Extra Class thereby facilitating greater use of this class; (c) resolving the interpretation of quality defects for Extra Class and Class I; and (d) setting fixed tolerances for individual defects for each class.

(39) The Specialized Section was of the opinion that standards should be simple and that their interpretation should be kept separately. The concerns of the United States would be discussed during the revision of the Standard Layout.

### **Concentration of agricultural quality standards work in the UN/ECE**

(40) The delegations supported the decision to strengthen the UN/ECE work in agricultural quality standards.

(41) The Specialized Section regarded the proposed transfer of activities from the OECD as an opportunity for all United Nations Member States to contribute to the development of the standards and explanatory brochures. This would give the standards higher recognition and prominence. Because many of the same experts work on the same material in both bodies, a clear possibility for synergy also exists in bringing together the activities of the two Organizations.

(42) The UN/ECE and OECD would need to carefully plan the transition period for concentrating the activities within the UN/ECE. The OECD has expertise in developing interpretative material for standards, and countries appreciate this work. The transfer of activities to the UN/ECE should not have a negative effect on the quality of output.

(43) The Specialized Section asked the UN/ECE to revise the draft transition plan taking into account the discussion at the session and recirculate it to the participants for review before submitting it to the Committee on Trade in June 2006.

(44) The delegations stressed the need for the UN/ECE and Codex Alimentarius to work more closely with each other in order to avoid duplication of activities. However, the current priority for the UN/ECE should be on effectively accommodating the OECD activities.