

REVISED WORKING PROCEDURES OF THE WORKING PARTY
ON STANDARDIZATION OF PERISHABLE PRODUCE AND QUALITY DEVELOPMENT
AND ITS SUBSIDIARY SPECIALIZED SECTIONS
(as agreed by the Working Party at its 53rd session, 12-14 November 1997)

I. Background

The UN/ECE Working Party on Standardization of Perishable Produce and Quality Development has responsibility for the elaboration of harmonized commercial quality standards for perishable produce. The purpose of this work is to facilitate international trade through the establishment and maintenance of commercial quality criteria in the form of standards which are indicative of actual commercial practice. The UN/ECE standards on perishable produce represent a harmonization of existing national commercial standards to take into account common commercial quality and trade practices. It is not the aim of the Working Party to create new principles of commercial standardization.

The standards establish the definition of the produce, levels of quality by means of minimum characteristics and quality classes, size classifications, marking, packaging and presentation requirements for the purpose of promoting orderly and efficient trade by providing a common trading language. The standards are intended for application at the point of export/dispatching control.

These activities began in 1949 and have led to the elaboration of a wide range of UN/ECE standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dry and dried fruit, seed potatoes, eggs and egg products, meat (porcine, bovine and poultry) and cut flowers. World-wide Codex standards for fruit juices and quick frozen foods have been elaborated in co-operation with the Codex Alimentarius Commission in Joint ECE/Codex Alimentarius Groups of Experts.

The framework and basis of this work is the Geneva Protocol for the Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Dry and Dried Produce. A Standard Layout has also been elaborated which serves as a format for the elements included in commercial quality standards. These documents are found in ECE/AGRI/55/Rev.2.

As the purpose of commercial standardization is trade facilitation, the work has been greatly benefitted by the active participation of a wide range of member, including the European Union (Commission) representative, and non-member countries representing producers, exporters and importers of perishable produce. It should be noted that any member country of the United Nations may participate in the standardization activities of the UN/ECE under Article II of the Commission's Terms of Reference.

Non-member governments participating under Article II may

- fully participate in all discussions without prejudice to their Article II status;
- propose amendments for the revision of existing standards, according to their needs or interests;
- propose the elaboration of commercial quality standards for items of economic importance to them or their region;
- serve as expert rapporteurs for the elaboration or revision of UN/ECE standards;
- objections to the decisions of the Working Party or in the same manner as member countries, its Specialized Sections by non-member delegations may be expressed by formal reservations, or as viewpoints noted in the reports of the Specialized Sections, the Working Party or the Committee on Agriculture.

International and regional trade organizations also actively participate, such as the Confederation of Importers and Marketing Organization in Europe of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables (CIMO).

Work on a commercial standard for a particular item is initiated by a request from an interested party such as: a country interested in production, export or import of the item; an international or intra-governmental organization; or, an international trade organization having a particular interest in the quality, marketing and standardization of the particular perishable item. A request to elaborate a standard should include information on the commercial importance of the item in import or export trade or both. The secretariat may be requested to provide further background information on this aspect of trade to assist the Working Party in reaching a decision on whether an international commercial standard would be warranted.

Specialized agencies of the UN as Food and Agriculture Organization, Joint FAO/WHO Food Standards Programme, are normally represented. (Close cooperation is maintained between the two Standards setting bodies)

Also, representatives of non-governmental organizations, such as CLAM (Comité de Liaison de l'Agrumiculture Méditerranéenne) and COLEACP (Comité de Liaison - Europe - Africa - Caraïbes - Pacifique - pour la promotion des fruits tropicaux, légumes de contre-saison, fleurs, plantes ornementales et épices), usually participate.

At the invitation of the secretariat, a representative of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables, regularly participates in the session; and others can be invited.

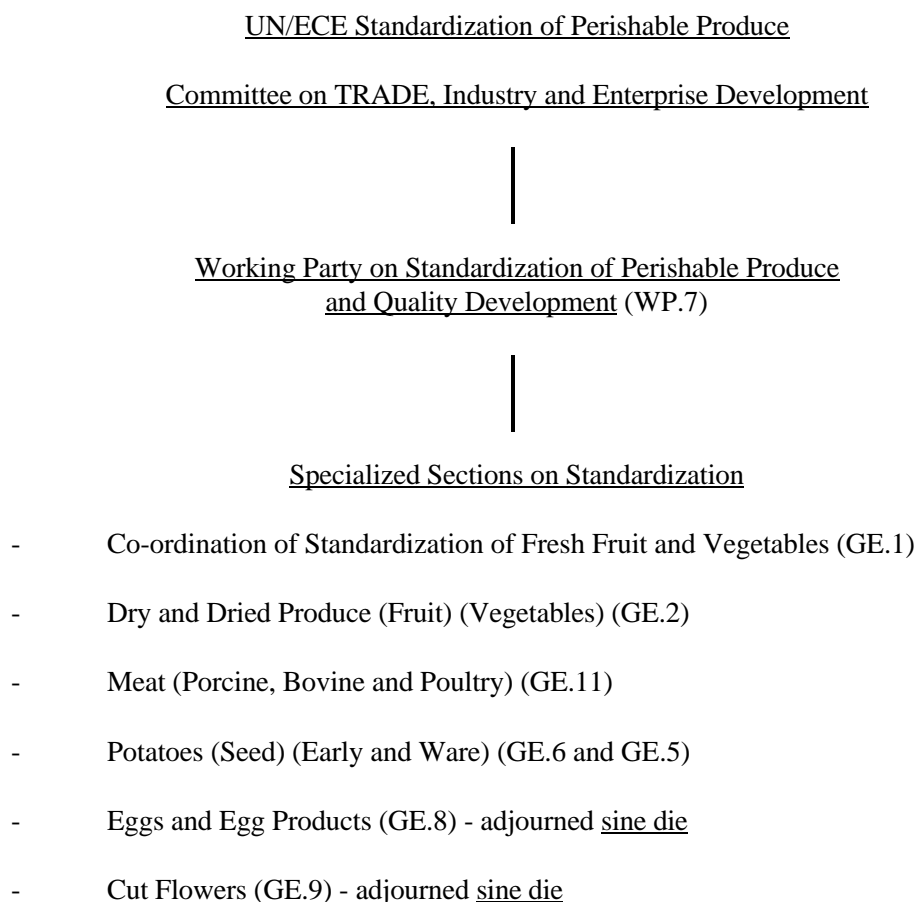
Any country participating in the work of the Working Party can propose a product for which it feels a UN/ECE Standard should be elaborated. In reaching a decision as to whether to proceed with this work, the Working Party would take into account the commercial importance of the commodity for one or several UN/ECE countries on the basis of import and export volume, or both; the importance of one or several national commercial standards among UN/ECE member countries; and, the quality characteristics of the item.

The work of the OECD Scheme for the Application of International Standards for Fruit and Vegetables on occasion leads to the need to revise or update a standard to align it more closely with current marketing practices. The OECD Scheme elaborations explanatory brochures to interpret and illustrate the standards with the aim of uniform application of the standards.

The Working Party and its subsidiary Specialized Sections also work in cooperation with the European Community (Meeting of Governmental Experts on Standardization) to maintain harmonization of UN/ECE and EC standards to promote trade facilitation. The UN/ECE standards in many instances have served as the basis of European Community standards which are mandatory at all levels of marketing from producer to the retail level. The European Community has in the past proposed revisions of UN/ECE Standards to maintain a close harmonization of commercial quality requirements within Europe.

II. Organization of the Standardization Activities

The following organigram presents the various subsidiary bodies which participate in the elaboration of UN/ECE Standards for Perishable Produce:



III. Process of Elaborating UN/ECE Standards for Perishable Produce

The following outline illustrates the steps necessary in the elaboration or revision of a standard.

1. *Process in the Specialized Sections*

- 1.1 Proposal by an interested party, or selection by the Specialized Section of a commodity of commercial importance to exporters, importers or both, as the subject of a future UN/ECE Standard or a Revised UN/ECE Standard which is approved by the Working Party to be prepared.
- 1.2 Volunteer Rapporteur (if necessary) selected by the Specialized Section or an informal Meeting of Rapporteurs is established (Seed Potatoes, Porcine Meat, Bovine Meat, Dry and Dried Fruit).
- 1.3 Draft Standard or Draft Revision presented by Rapporteur(s) or an interested party for consideration by Specialized Section. Rapporteur or interested party revises after each session to reflect discussions and to request further technical data provided by experts.

- 1.4 Countries' proposals for amendments or comments on the drafts should be sent in writing to the Secretariat 10 weeks prior to the following session or at a deadline set by the secretariat and the Chairman, in order to allow translation, preparation and circulation of the working documents for the consideration of all participants.
 - 1.5 During discussions of the Draft Standard or Draft Revision countries may enter reservations against tolerances, etc., including ad referendum to allow further consultation with their national experts.
 - 1.6 Draft Standard or Draft Revision, once accepted by Specialized Section, forwarded to the Working Party for consideration to adopt as a UN/ECE Recommendation with a trial period for testing in actual application or as a UN/ECE Standard or Revision.
2. *Working Party studies the proposal of the Specialized Section and may:*
- 2.1 Adopt the Draft Standard as a Recommendation for a trial application or as a UN/ECE Standard or Revision. Reservations may be entered against the standard or specific provisions by countries not in full agreement with the Draft Standard or Revision.
 - 2.2 Working Party may decide to return the Draft Standard or Revision to the Specialized Section for further study. Reservations may be entered by countries having specific or general reservations. Specialized Section would study the returned draft and address reservations to the extent possible. Once the Specialized Section completes its review and revision of the Draft Standard, it would re-submit it for the consideration of the Working Party for adoption as a Recommendation.
3. *Recommendation completes its trial period(s) and is considered by the Specialized Section*
- 3.1 Specialized Section agrees that the Recommendation performed successfully in its trial period and recommends adoption by the Working Party as a new Standard.
 - 3.2 minor amendments and adjustments to the standard may be necessary in light of findings without extending the trial period.
 - 3.3 delegates are requested to consider whether any remaining reservations might be lifted.
 - 3.4 Specialized Section agrees that the Recommendation needs further study. It informs the Working Party of its view that the trial period should be extended.
4. *Working Party considers the proposal of the Specialized Section. It may :*
- 4.1 accept the proposal and adopt the Recommendation as a new UN/ECE Standard (further reservations may be entered)
 - 4.2 accept the proposal of the Specialized Section to extend the trial period of the Recommendation to allow further study by experts.
 - 4.3 refuse the proposal of the Specialized Section to adopt and instead rejects the Recommendation noting the reasons for rejection. The Recommendation then returns for further consideration in the Specialized Section.

5. *Report of the Working Party is forwarded to the Committee for Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development for endorsement of its decisions and adoption of its proposed programme of work.*

IV. Methods of Work for the Working Party and its Subsidiary Specialized Sections

The Working Party agreed to the following method of work for its subsidiary Specialized Sections.

- Provisional agendas will be prepared by the Secretariat and reviewed and approved by the chairman.
- Documents for Meetings will be sent to the secretariat by electronic mail or computer diskette (Word Perfect 5.2) when possible. Coordination of the word processing programmes for documents will be agreed between the author and the secretariat.
- At the close of discussion of each agenda item the decision(s) taken by the Meeting will be identified by the Chairman or Secretariat.
- On the basis of the decisions taken by the Meeting and identified by the Chairman or the secretariat, the secretariat prepares a revised version of the working documents during the Specialized Sections, in English and if possible in French, distributed to delegations at the end of the meeting and annexed to the final report; and
- based on the Chairman's summaries of each item, the secretariat prepares a short concise summary report for formal adoption by the Specialized Section before the end of the Meeting.
- The format of reports will remain as at present; background to the topic; report of the discussion; decision taken (as adopted in the meeting and not to be changed).

V. Rules for Adoption of Agreements

The rule for adoption of agreements in the Working Party and its subsidiary Specialized Sections is the unanimous consensus. For this reason some technical discussions in the Specialized Sections are long and difficult, in order to reach compromise solutions which can be valid for all interested parties.

Unanimous consensus does not prevent the possibility of any delegations disagreeing with the group, which can be reflected in the standard by means of reservations.

Reserved positions are not compulsory for the country(ies) affected, as regards the particular requirement of the standard.

Note

The Committee on Trade, Industry and Enterprise Development and the Working Party do not discuss technical aspects of the proposed standards, revisions of standards or Recommendations. Whenever a proposal or Recommendation reaches the Working Party which requires further technical discussion, it must be referred to the appropriate Specialized Section. Minor technical points and changes may be considered and agreed to by the Working Party upon the agreement of delegations without returning the document to the Specialized Section. This approach is acceptable as a means of avoiding lengthy delays over minor technical details. The Working Party may tentatively agree to such adjustments and request, through the secretariat, that the experts concerned (delegates to the appropriate Specialized Section) confirm the decisions to accept the Recommendation or Revised Standard.