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UNECE adopts eight revised standards for fruit, vegetables and meat

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Since its establishment in 1949, UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards (WP.7) has developed over 120 commercial quality standards for fresh fruit and vegetables, dried fruit and nuts, seed potatoes, and meat. The standards provide a common trading language, enabling producers, and traders to operate confidently across borders. This week, the Working Party adopted revised standards for seed potatoes, table grapes, peas, pears, citrus fruit, inshell walnuts, prunes and ovine meat.

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A highlight of the session was the adoption of the revised UNECE Standard for Seed Potatoes (S-1).

Seed potatoes are tubers (i.e. potatoes) that are carefully selected and grown under controlled conditions to be disease-free and genetically pure. The quality of seed potatoes directly affects crop yield, health, and productivity. High-quality seed potatoes allow for increased production, contributing to food security and reduced environmental impact. In 2023, global seed potato exportsÂ reached USD 1.1 billion, totalling 1.7 million tons.

The adoption of the revised standard was the culmination of a three-year process, led by Finland and supported by experts from Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Euroseeds.

Originally adopted in 1961, the UNECE standard S-1 for seed potatoes is the only international framework covering all key aspects of seed potato certification. It sets common terminology and minimum quality requirements for varietal identity, traceability, disease control, pest prevention, and labelling.

The revised standard introduces:

- Improved certification processes for greater transparency and quality assurance.
- Stronger disease and pest control measures through updated inspection protocols.
- Enhanced traceability and labelling to support supply chain integrity.
- Alignment with global trade rules, including European and North American standards.

â??This revised standard is a crucial tool for global trade in seed potatoes. By providing clear and consistent certification rules, we are helping producers, certifying agencies and traders ensure quality seed potatoesâ? notedÂ Hanna Kortemaa,Â Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes and Director of the Plant Production Department at the Finnish Food Authority.

Responding to market evolution: updated standards for fruit and vegetables, nuts and meat

The Working Party also adopted revised UNECE standards for table grapes, peas, pears, citrus fruit, inshell walnuts, prunes and ovine meat. The revisions reflect evolving market demands and in the case of table grapes and citrus fruit also aim to reduce food loss by revising requirements for table grapes packed in sales packages, and by increasing clarity in the labelling of citrus fruit.

â??Table grapes are an important export product for South Africa. By allowing more small bunches in sales packages, the revisions to the standard will assist in reducing food loss and waste in pack-houses and increase grower sustainabilityâ? explained said Cyril Julius, Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, and Chief Operations Officer of the Perishable Products Export Control Board Â of South Africa.

In 2023, fruit and vegetables accounted forÂ 20 percent of the value of food exportsÂ globally. Europe remained a net importer of fruit and vegetables (â??USD 36.1 billion), while Africa was a net exporter, according to FAO.Â Global exports of bovine and ovine meat increased by 2 percent and 11 percent between 2022 and 2023, respectively.Â Australia was the largest exporter of ovine meat, accounting for 40 percent of global exports in 2024, at a value of 3.8 billion USD.

â??The review of the UNECE Ovine Standard has been an important opportunity to ensure our framework remains aligned with global best practice and the realities of modern trade. As one of the worldâ??s largest exporters of sheepmeat, Australia is proud to have contributed to a process that supports transparency, consistency, and confidence across international marketsâ?• said Ben Robinson, Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Meat, and General Manager â?? Meat Standards & Training Services atÂ AUS-MEAT, Australia.