

Opening statement

by

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at

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you today to the **76th Session of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards**. Our event is being held in hybrid mode, that is online and in the meeting room here at the Palais des Nations.

I am delighted to welcome delegates from across the globe as well as many new participants. Your work is central to driving a global agenda for international trade and sustainable development.

Agricultural quality standards are one of the earliest work streams established in UNECE. Today, Working Party 7 is convening for its 76th session! This demonstrates the great relevance and the continued importance of a key pillar of UNECE's trade related work.

I commend you for making significant progress in the past year, despite the many challenges brought about by the COVID-19 crisis. I understand that during the past year all meetings were successfully held, resulting in a record number of nearly 20 standards, which are presented for adoption today. This is truly impressive, and I wish to thank you for your commitment!

This year saw **two important global events on the topic of food**.

First, 2021 is the *International Year of Fruit and Vegetables*, as proclaimed by the UN General Assembly proclaimed 2021. This designation as not only emphasizes the vital role of fruit and vegetables in human nutrition, but also urges efforts to improve sustainable production and reduce waste.

In that context, let me highlight the ***Specialized Section on Standardization of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables*** and its contribution to advancing sustainable fruit and vegetable food systems, with over 60 standards developed to date. This work helps to substantially reduce loss and waste of these highly perishable products.

On a personal note, I would like to take this opportunity and thank the outgoing Chair, Ms. Ulrike Bickelmann of Germany, for her many years of service as a delegate, and her much-appreciated support to the Specialized Section and the Working Party.

Let me also commend the ***Specialized Sections on Standardization of Dry and Dried Produce, Seed Potato and Meat***. Your work directly contributes to sustainable production in different sectors, with over 100 agricultural quality standards developed and updated on a regular basis.

The second global event was the first-ever ***Food Systems Summit*** that the UN Secretary-General convened on 23 September as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The Summit called on all stakeholders to intensify efforts to make food systems more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

Member States committed to step-up their efforts towards transforming food systems, through five action tracks designed to identify solutions that can deliver wide-reaching benefits. Your work on agricultural quality standards is an integral part of making this transformation a reality. I count on your continued efforts to contribute to this process.

Let me now turn to UNECE and a key event we held this year.

As you may know, at ***this year's Commission session*** in April, member States committed to intensify efforts towards promoting circular economy and sustainable use of natural resources.

In response to this decision, UNECE together with UNEP launched a 4-year project on ***Accelerating the transition towards a Circular Economy in the UNECE region***.

It is in this context, that we are also holding a ***Roundtable on Fostering Circularity in Food Trade***, which will take place tomorrow during lunch.

Our Roundtable will explore the links between circular economy and agri-food production, trade and standards, including in relation to food loss and waste. We are committed to supporting proposed activities in enhancing a circular economy

focus, within your existing mandates and program of work, and of course subject to available resources. I look forward to hearing about the outcome of your discussions.

Together, we can further expand the impact of our standards and our work, while building resilient and sustainable food systems, as a critical contribution to advancing international trade, developing competitive markets, and delivering on the 2030 Agenda.

Thank you all once again for your active engagement. I wish you successful deliberations.