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Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Fifty-first session

Geneva, 26-28 March 2024

Item 3 of the provisional agenda

Report of the rapporteur's meeting in 2023

Summary report of the rapporteur's meeting in Brest, France, 10–12 October 2023

Submitted by the Chairperson

Summary

On 10–12 October 2023, the Specialized Section held a Rapporteur's meeting (i.e. an ad-hoc meeting of the Specialized Section) in Brest, France, hosted by the French Interprofessional Organization for Seeds and Plants (SEMAE). The meeting was held in person with online participation for the agenda item discussing proposed revisions to the Standard for Seed Potatoes. The attached report provides an informal summary of the meeting.

REPORT

UNECE Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes

Rapporteur's meeting

10-12 October 2023

Brest, France

Attendance: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Finland, France, Jordan, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Netherlands (the Kingdom of), Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Europatat

Online: Australia, Germany, Greece, India, Latvia, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, United States of America, Euroseeds, Agrico

10 October 2023

Welcome remarks

Anne-Laure Fondeur, Head, Directorate for Quality and Official Controls (SOC-France) of the French Interprofessional Organisation for Seeds and Plants (SEMAE) and Hanna Kortemaa, Chair of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes, UNECE Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards welcomed the participants.

Presentation of the seed potato certification system in France

Nicolas Ponserre, Expert, Directorate for Quality and Official Controls (SOC-France), SEMAE presented on the institutional and regulatory framework for seed potato certification in France, and on the official control procedure. He informed that SEMAE is the organization in France responsible for seed potato control and certification. The French Variety and Seed Study and Control Group (GEVES) is responsible for variety registration. The total area of seed potatoes production in France amounts to about 21,000 – 23,000 hectares/year. The majority of seed potato production is used domestically and in the EU-27. The largest export destinations in 2021-2022 were Egypt, Tunisia and Mali. In France, there are five plant breeding companies for seed potatoes, 57 seed potato producing companies and 804 seed potato farmers. Normandy and Brittany are the main seed potato production areas.

Discussion on proposed revisions to the UNECE Standard on Seed Potatoes (Teams -meeting)

The Chair provided an overview of the revisions to the Standard which had been discussed at the meetings of the working group. The chapter on field inspection was discussed based on a new text provided by Germany. The meeting also drafted a new text on testing for diseases, and a new text on re-packing and re-labelling was added based on a text provided by France. The paragraph on closing of containers was updated. The working group decided to hold its next meeting online on 13th December 2023.

Potato plantlets – roundtable discussion and sharing of experiences

The Chair introduced a document with background information on potato plantlets. After a discussion, participants agreed on the following:

- i. True Potato Seed (TPS) will not be included in the Standard in this revision, as there are still several unresolved questions concerning variety testing and variety registration.
- ii. Potato plantlets should be included in the Standard because different types of plantlets are marketed all the time.
- iii. The Standard should concentrate on potato plantlets produced using micropropagation.
- iv. The following terms should be added to the Classification part of the Standard: PBTC minitubers, microtubers, microplants and plantlets.
- v. The work continues as part of the revision of the entire UNECE Standard.

11 October 2023 – Technical visits

Presentation of the French organization for seed potato production

Jean-Yves Abgrall, Director of Bretagne Plants¹, a producer organization which brings together potato plant producers in Brittany, introduced the seed potato production, inspections and testing activities of the organization. Activities are accredited according to ISO 17020 standard. Statistics show that 68 per cent of seed potatoes produced are exported to 55 countries. Bretagne Plants is a board of 15 seed potato growers. The national organization is Fédération Nationale des Producteurs de Plants de Pomme de Terre (FN3PT). Bretagne Plants is 100 per cent funded by growers' contributions.

Visit of the seed testing laboratory at Bretagne Plants: viruses, bacteriology, nematodes

Meeting participants visited the laboratories of Bretagne Plants, and saw preparation of samples and testing of viruses, bacteria and nematodes of seed potatoes. Bretagne Plants uses the serological enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) method for virus testing, Immunofluorescence (IF)-method for testing bacteria and Schuiling-machine and microscope for testing Potato Cyst Nematodes. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) methods are also available, at the request of the client.

Visit to the *in-vitro* production laboratory

Marion Flodrops of Bretagne Plants informed about the production of micropropagative material and minitubers. Participants watched harvesting of minitubers from the greenhouse.

Visit to the GAEC Kergleuz farm, Guipavas

Dominique Morvan of the Kergleuz farm informed about the production and packaging of seed potatoes on his farm, where seed potatoes were packed for export purposes. He expressed concern about increasing problems due to climate change and less plant protection products available.

12 October 2023

Lecture by an expert: Climate change impacts on seed potato production

Frederic Levrault, Expert on Agriculture and Climate Change, the Chambers of Agriculture of France gave a presentation on "Climate change: adaptation challenges for potato production in France and Western Europe". Referencing data from NASA, he remarked that over the past 50 years the annual mean temperature in Europe has been warming at a rate of about +4 °C /century. In France, the number of hot days (> 25 °C) per year in three potato growing areas has almost doubled since 1959² and the number of heat waves have multiplied by four since 1947³. At the same time, the number of days with frost (temperature below zero degree Celsius) has almost halved in France since 1959⁴. Annual rainfall has increased in Northern Europe and decreased in Southern Europe. He noted that the prognosis is that the warming trend will continue for at least 30 years and that the number of hot days will become more frequent⁵.

As regards challenges for potato production in the future Mr. Levrault raised the following issues:

- i. With fewer cool days, cooling of potato storage could be more difficult/costly in the future.
- ii. Changing temperatures can affect dormancy (storability) of potatoes.
- iii. Increased prevalence of heavy rain may lead to soil erosion.
- iv. The need for water and irrigation will increase.
- v. Plant breeding and new potato varieties could increase adaptation to hot temperature in the future.

¹ <https://plantsdebretagne.com/>

² Source: Météo France/ Climat HD.

³Source: Météo France

⁴ Source: Météo France/ Climat HD.

⁵ Source: Météo France/ Climat HD.

Discussion on climate change impacts

A roundtable discussion and sharing of experiences of climate change resulted in a summary list of different perspectives. Participants suggested that the discussion should continue in a rapporteur's group under the Specialized Section. France, Netherlands (the Kingdom of), Finland and Europatat volunteered to be members of such a rapporteur's group, and France volunteered to chair it. The group will be formally established at the Specialized Section meeting in March 2024, and other countries will be invited to join.

Other business

The Chair informed that the Specialized Section had decided at its 50th session in March 2023 to revise the position paper on vigour of seed potatoes, but that no working group had yet been established for this purpose. France, the Netherlands (Kingdom of) and South Africa volunteered to join the work. The working group will be formally established at the Specialized Section meeting in March 2024, and other countries will be invited to join the work. Following the meeting, South Africa provided a document with input on the topic.

Any other business.

The next meeting of the Specialized Section on Standardization of Seed Potatoes will be held on 26-28 March 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland. The representative from Australia has offered to host a rapporteurs meeting in June 2024 in Australia.