



## REPORT

### on the results of the fourth regional meeting of the Central Asian Workgroup for Promotion of Quality and Commercial Standards of Agricultural Produce in Central Asia (expanded composition) (extended attendance)



September 25-26, 2019  
Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan



## I. Abbreviations

CA	Central Asia
CAWG	Central Asian Workgroup
NTG	National Technical Group
NTG RT	National Technical Group of the Republic of Tajikistan
NTG RU	National Technical Group of the Republic of Uzbekistan
NTG RK	National Technical Group of the Republic of Kazakhstan
NTG KR	National Technical Group of Kyrgyz Republic
WG	Workgroup
UNECE	The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
MAPEST	International Association of Producers and Exporters of Agricultural Produce of Tajikistan
QMC	Quality Management Center
HWI	Hilfswerk International
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit)
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
GIZ / TFCA	GIZ Regional Program "Trade Facilitation in Central Asia" (TFCA)
UNDP/AFT	UNDP Regional Project "Wider Europe: Aid for Trade in Central Asia", financed by the Government of Finland
CANDY – IV	Improved BIO Support Program – Specialized and Comprehensive Services for Export-Oriented SMEs in the Processing Sector
DDP -07	UNECE standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of PRUNES
DDP -15	UNECE standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of DRIED APRICOTS
FFV-25	UNECE standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of ONIONS
FFV-29	UNECE standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of PLUMS
FFV-63	UNECE standard concerning the marketing and commercial quality control of PERSIMMONS
UNECE	The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
GI	Geographic Indications

The Fourth Regional Meeting of the Central Asian Workgroup for Promotion of UNECE Standards Concerning the Marketing and Commercial Quality Control of Agricultural Produce in Central Asia took place on September 25-26, 2019, in Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan.

The main goal of the Meeting was to discuss the work completed over the past year and the plans for further cooperation and developing a coordinated position on the projects being implemented by the Central Asian Workgroup (CAWG).

Objectives:

- Summarize the results of the past year's work
- Develop the strategy and plans for further cooperation

The discussion was attended by the representatives of standards agencies and responsible ministries of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, business associations, Chambers of Commerce, University representatives, producers and processors from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as UNECE, UNDP and GIZ experts.

**Day One (September 25, 2019)** of the meeting was dedicated to reviewing the results of CAWG and NTG work over the past year.

CAWG Secretariat presented a brief review of the implementation of objectives set for 2018-2019, issues faced and achievements made by CAWG in the reporting period (see attached).

Next National Technical Groups (NTGs) from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and TAJIKISTAN presented their reports. The following information was presented:

- NTG Tajikistan:
  - Report on the progress of approval of the draft explanatory brochure on dried apricots, including review of the comments made by the Turkish party during the UNECE DDP meeting in Geneva;
  - MAPEST report on the results of work in the reporting period (see attached);
- NTG Uzbekistan: Report on the progress with the development of the new standard (dried melons) and conducting information meetings
- NTG Kyrgyzstan: Report on the implementation of the standards (prunes, walnut kernels, etc.) and their promotion among SMEs (SME meetings), see attached.

Each presentation was followed by discussions, in particular, comments made by the Turkish party to the draft brochure DDP-015 (dried apricots). The following decisions were made:

- NTG Tajikistan to send the full text of the Turkish party's recommendations to all CAWG members by October 5, 2019, for introduction and preparing proposals;
- NTG Uzbekistan and NTG Kyrgyzstan to review the recommendations of the Turkish party by October 20, 2019 and present their comments and recommendations to NTG Tajikistan and CAWG Secretariat;
- As suggested by Ms. Liliana Annovazzi-Jakab, Head of UNECE Agricultural Standards Unit, following the review at the regional level CAWG Secretariat will send the brochure on DDP-15 and CAWG comments to UNECE for further discussions with the delegations from other countries at the UNECE level.

Next, current projects were reviewed in detail:

- NTG Tajikistan:

- Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in fresh onions, including a review of FFV-25 standard (see attached);
- Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in fresh persimmons, including a review of FFV-63 standard (see attached);
- Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in lemons, including a review of FFV-14 standard (see attached);
- NTG Kyrgyzstan:
  - Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in prunes, including a review of DDP-07 standard (see attached);
  - Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in fresh plums, including a review of FFV-29 standard (see attached);
- Projects by NTG Uzbekistan:
  - Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in dried melons (see attached);
  - Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in fresh grapes;
  - Draft explanatory poster for quality defects in commercial varieties of fresh melons (see attached);

During the discussion, the participants, along with identification of the product specifics, also touched upon the issues related to the translation of posters into local languages, finalizing their design, printing, and conducting information meetings with industry representatives (producers and exporters of onions, persimmons, melons and plums).

Based on the review results, CAWG members made the following decisions:

Explanatory poster on onions:

- NTG RT shall send the explanatory poster to NTG KR, NTG RU, NTG RK by October 10, 2019; the latter will review the poster, prepare their recommendations and proposals and return them to NTG RT;
- NTG RT, upon receiving recommendations and proposals from other NTGs, shall amend the explanatory poster by October 20, 2019 and prepare the final design of the poster on dried onions, which shall be sent to CAWG Secretariat;
- After receiving the final version of the poster on onions, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

Explanatory poster on fresh persimmons:

- NTG RT, following the CAWG members' recommendations, shall amend the poster on fresh persimmons, including replacing the photograph "Persimmon defect – dirt" with a different version, and making amendments to "Damage and Rot" point (add "Damage by microorganisms" phrase);
- NTG RT shall complete the design of the explanatory poster by October 31, 2019 and send the explanatory poster to other countries by November 10, 2019; the latter will review the poster, prepare their recommendations and proposals and return them to NTG RT;
- NTG RT, upon receiving recommendations and proposals from other NTGs, shall amend the explanatory poster by November 20, 2019 and prepare the final design of the poster on fresh persimmons, which shall be sent to CAWG Secretariat;
- After receiving the final version of the poster on fresh persimmons, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

Explanatory poster on lemons:

- CAWG countries discussed the explanatory poster and decided to approve it subject to further amendments by NTG Tajikistan until the end of December 2019;

- NTG RT, following the CAWG members' recommendations, shall amend the poster on lemons, adding the photograph "Lemon with defect – mold" by December 15, 2019;
- NTG RT shall send the explanatory poster to all CAWG countries on December 15, 2019, for coordination with the respective government agencies and industry representatives; the latter shall return their comments to NTG RT;
- NTG RT, upon receiving recommendations and proposals from other NTGs, shall amend the explanatory poster by January 20, 2020 and prepare the final design of the poster on lemons, which shall be sent to CAWG Secretariat;
- After receiving the final version of the poster on lemons, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

*Explanatory poster on prunes:*

- The draft explanatory poster on prunes, taking into account comments and amendments, has been approved by CAWG;
- NTG KR, following the CAWG members' recommendations, shall make the following amendments to the poster on prunes: split the defects of prunes with and without stones into two separate columns, replace the photographs for defects of prunes with and without stones, by October 20, 2019;
- NTG KR shall complete the design of the explanatory poster by October 20, 2019 and send the explanatory poster to other countries; the latter shall review the poster, prepare their recommendations and proposals and return them to NTG KR by November 1, 2019;
- NTG KR, upon receiving recommendations and proposals from other NTGs, shall amend the explanatory poster by November 10, 2019 and prepare the final design of the poster, which shall be sent to CAWG Secretariat;
- After receiving the final version of the poster, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

*Explanatory poster on fresh plums:*

- NTG KR shall prepare sample defects and complete drafting the explanatory poster by November 1, 2019;
- NTGs in other countries shall review the draft poster by November 10, 2019, prepare their recommendations and suggestions and return them to NTG RK for amendment;
- The recommendations and suggestions shall include updates to defect photographs. Names of the defects and the structure of explanatory poster shall not be modified;
- NTG KR, after receiving recommendations and suggestions from other NTGs, shall within one month prepare the final version of the explanatory poster on fresh plums and send it to CAWG Secretariat for approval;

*Explanatory poster on dried melons:*

- NTG RU shall complete drafting the explanatory poster on dried melons by January 1, 2020, add photographs of defects and send to NTGs in other countries;
- NTGs in other countries shall review the draft poster by January 31, 2020, prepare their recommendations and suggestions and return them to NTG RU;
- The recommendations and suggestions shall include changes to defect photographs and increasing image resolutions. Names of the defects and the structure of explanatory poster shall not be modified;
- NTG RU, after receiving recommendations and suggestions from other NTGs, shall within one month prepare the final version of the explanatory poster on dried melons and send it to CAWG Secretariat for approval;

- After receiving the final version of the poster, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

Explanatory poster on fresh melons:

- NTG RU shall complete drafting the explanatory poster on fresh melons by 2020, add photographs of defects and send to NTGs in other countries;
- NTGs in other countries shall review the draft poster by January 31, 2020, prepare their recommendations and suggestions and return them to NTG RU;
- The recommendations and suggestions shall include changes to defect photographs and their resolutions. Names of the defects and the structure of explanatory poster shall not be modified;
- NTG RU, after receiving recommendations and suggestions from other NTGs, shall within one month prepare the final version of the explanatory poster on dried melons and send it to CAWG Secretariat for approval;
- After receiving the final version of the poster, CAWG Secretariat shall translate it into local languages of the project member states;

Explanatory poster on grapes: The discussion has been moved to later meetings, due to absence of NTG RU responsible officer at the CAWG meeting.

**Day two (September 26, 2019)** was dedicated to a discussion of the plans for CAWG and its structures, and presentations of further activities.

NTG RT representatives with support from Hilfswerk International presented a methodology for preparing and conducting information meetings with groups of producers, consolidators, harvesters and purchasers of agricultural produce for introducing defects in quality and commercial quality of the produce. It was remarked that the methodology was based on information meetings with farmers and producers of fresh and dried produce in Tajikistan.

The following decisions were made based on the presentation results:

- The proposed methodology for preparing and conducting information meetings shall be accepted;
- NTG RT shall distribute the methodology, including developed modules, flipcharts, posters and other visuals to CAWG members for use in conducting information meetings.

The next item in the agenda was a presentation of the CAWG members' reports on the study tours to Izmir and Malatya.

The study tour to Malatya was organized on July 15-21, 2019, to introduce the members of the Regional Workgroup on UNECE Standards Promotion to the Turkish experience of organizing the inspection and quality assurance services to farmers, enterprises processing dried apricots and enterprises exporting fresh produce (apricots) in Malatya (the report is attached). The speaker mentioned the following key aspects in his presentation:

- Practical implementation of agricultural policy in Turkey is a clear example of the balance between free economy and government control and comprehensive support measures, which are expressed in the following aspects:
  - Planning and coordination of all agricultural technical works at the farm (the services determine the scope, types and timing of agricultural works)
  - Providing farm development loans at discounted interest rates. Particularly, saplings are provided to farmers on two-year deferred payment terms.
- Commercial producers of dried apricots in Turkey use only three to five permitted varieties. The production process for dried apricots in Turkey is identical to that in the

Central Asian countries, with the only difference related to sulfur dioxide use – companies in Turkey do not use secondary sulfur dioxide treatment of dried apricots in the factory, as Turkish farmers originally properly identify the smoking norms following the standards.

- Dried apricots production processes used by farmers from one generation to another, have become traditional rules and do not require constant monitoring and evaluation for compliance with the approved standard requirements. To promote the standards, producers use visual aids at each workplace while sorting the produce.
- Producers do not separate implementation of quality and food safety standards – these are combined in a single process.
- Dried apricot producers have a clear vision of their role in ensuring the safety of their produce. Their success and competitiveness in the international market is perceived primarily through the prism of ensuring quality of the produce in compliance with TSE 485 standard and compliance with the importing countries' requirements. The companies are strongly export-oriented and often adjust their production processes to meet the requirements of the importing countries (different sulfur dioxide levels), which are also defined by the TSE 485 standard (for European countries and Russia – 2000 ppm, for the USA – 2500-3000 ppm). The companies have a strong political belief and understanding that if their systems are inefficient, this would affect their reputation among the importing countries. This should never happen, as it casts shadow on the entire national image of Turkey as a reliable supplier of safe food products at acceptable quality levels.
- Each company visited by the participants has set up quality assurance processes both during the production cycle and when batching the produce for shipment.
- The control is exercised by specially authorized employees, whose numbers depend on the processing volumes. For large enterprises, this may be a designated quality assurance department (of about four persons). At SMEs, the inspections are carried out by the engineer, food quality assurance specialist, supervisor and company director, who inspects the finished product as it is packaged onto the pallets.
- Turkey has a well-established training process for specialists in the field of enterprise quality assurance, who complete a Bachelor's degree and a two-year on-site training before obtaining a work license. However, a quality inspector can lose the license in case of malpractice. This system ensures quality control at all levels.
- All enterprises, regardless of their size or equipment class, have their own quality labs, featuring at least the instruments to measure the humidity and SO<sub>2</sub> levels. The labs start work at the launch of production cycle (sampling the inputs before purchasing) and before shipment (also taking samples of the final product) before the verification by respective government authorities.
- Export control process is also well-established, and it is executed by two primary authorized bodies: Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Turkey (which verifies the products for compliance with safety and plant quarantine regulations), and the Ministry of Commerce (which checks compliance with commercial quality standards). Upon completing internal inspection, the enterprises send requests for external inspection to the two agencies, using an electronic system, accompanied by customs clearance data.

The participants also discussed the involvement of academic institutions in the production processes, interaction issues, etc. Based on the discussions, it was decided as follows:

- Send a report on the results of study tour to Izmir to all CAWG members (Zarina Nigmatova) by October 10, 2019;

- Send a report on the results of study tour to Malatya to all CAWG members by October 10, 2019;
- Include the consideration of food safety issues in the CAWG procedures.

The next step was a presentation of the feasibility analysis for using geographical indications to promote agricultural produce in the Central Asian countries.

The speaker noted that the use of Designations of Origin (DO) and GI is acceptable for agricultural produce whose properties depend on their production location and specific geographical factors in that location (climate, soil features), as well as on the traditional production methods. The use of geographical indications is of benefit to the producers, as they allow the consumers to differentiate their products from those of the competition. Geographical indications as a branding element cannot be considered in isolation from food safety and quality issues.

The Central Asian region has created certain conditions to implement this tool. The Central Asian countries accept means of customization of geographical origin (DO and GI), have passed the respective laws and regulations. The Central Asia countries have joined key international norms as well. At the same time, the speaker mentioned the need to improve the legislation, with a particular focus on broadening the understanding of GI advantages among the producers, i.e. conducting information and education campaigns.

The speaker offered initiating a discussion of the opportunities for branding individual product types with identical properties and quality at the level of an individual country and region within the existing CAWG structure.

Turkish experience shows that quality assurance system for exportable agricultural produce must be integrated with quality control and food safety control measures. This is confirmed by existence of defects that cause food safety violations, which are caused not during sorting and calibration, but at earlier stages in the production process. During an earlier quality assurance training, UNECE experts also confirmed that to avoid duplication of production control functions and optimize the use of human resources, **it is recommended that quality assurance and food safety monitoring be integrated into a single system.**

Based on the presentation and analysis findings, it was decided to include the topic of geographical indications as an element in the promotion strategy for regional produce and food safety issues into CAWG activities as an integral element in quality assurance.

The participants also offered a more comprehensive approach to promoting the standards and suggested basing the development or amendment of standards on a needs assessment (availability of the production volumes, export markets, etc.). It was also suggested to engage other organizations, along with UNECE, in the promotion of the standards and development of information brochures. Further, it was suggested to focus more on the specific needs of domestic and regional trade between the countries. Internal country meetings with relevant institutions and organizations were suggested to identify the products of strategic export value, with the aim of suggesting a list of products for promotion, to be discussed at the next CAWG meeting.

NTGs in all countries are recommended to intensify their activity, primarily by completing the development of visual aids and discussing the issues of implementation and conduct of information campaigns with the related government authorities.

It was also recommended to develop an action plan indicating specific steps, dates and persons or organizations responsible.

NTG RT further raised the following issues:



- Developing a standard for dried fruit mixes, that are exported by the Central Asian countries in large volumes;
- Studying the existing requirements for mung beans and promoting the issues of quality at the production level. Tentative studies show that Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have the capacity to increase the production volumes and expand sales geography.
- Joining in the process of completing the development of a standard for peanuts. Based on the minutes of earlier meetings in Geneva, the need to develop the standard had been raised several times, and each time some countries rejected the initiative. It was decided to study the requirements to the quality of peanuts in detail.

The following decisions were made based on the discussion results:

- Coordinate with UNECE the issue of discussing the standards for dried persimmons and apricot kernels at the UNECE Workgroup platform – CAWG Secretariat
- Contact UNECE with a request to initiate the development of a standard for peanuts – NTG RT;
- Arrange a review of the existing standards on pomegranates – NTG RUZ;
- Send the draft information poster on fresh grapes to CAWG members and NTGs – NTG RUZ;
- Find and study the existing standards for spices;
- Find and study the existing standards for sesame seed – NTG RUZ;
- Find and study the existing standards for mung beans – NTG RT;
- Initiate the development of a standard for compote and nut mixtures, the party responsible for developing the first draft of the standard – MAPEST (Tajikistan);
- Prepare terms of reference (ToR) for conducting a training on quality defects in walnut kernels and send requests to donors – CAWG Secretariat, responsible parties: NTG KR and NTG RUZ;
- Prepare a brief explanatory information on the quality standards and their peculiarities for a group of producers – CAWG Secretariat;
- Expand the CAWG and NTG composition with representatives of consumer rights unions and institutions – CAWG Secretariat;
- With the aim of stimulating clustering processes, expand the CAWG and NTG composition with the representatives of science and education sectors – CAWG Secretariat;
- To improve exchange of information and coordination among CAWG members, establish a group in WhatsApp messenger for sharing the information and coordinating the work among CAWG members, called “Regional Technical Workgroup”, person responsible – M. Kobilov (+992927773876), NTG RT.