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UNECE Guide to Operating a Seed Potato Certification Service





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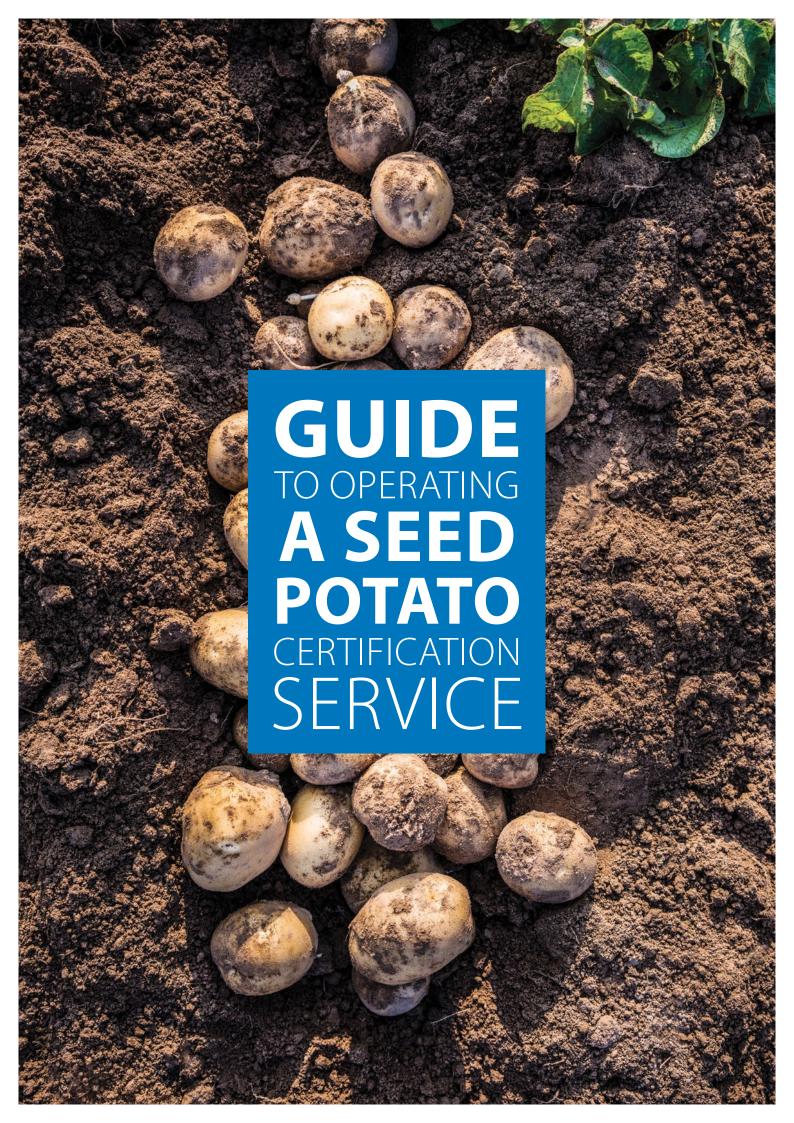
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1. Purpose of this Guide

This guide has been developed to assist Certifying Authorities (CAs) in the operation of their seed potato certification service and to encourage standardisation in the operation of seed potato certification services between CAs. The guide is also intended to assist countries that are not implementing the Standard to establish a seed potato certification system and a CA and participate in the activities of the Specialized Section.

2. Scope of the UNECE Standard S-1

The Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes operates under the authority of the Working Party on Agricultural Quality Standards of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and has approved the "UNECE Standard concerning the certification and commercial quality control of seed potatoes" (the Standard). The purpose of the Standard is to act as a world reference to facilitate fair international trade in seed potatoes by creating a harmonized quality certification system, promoting its use, and defining harmonised quality requirements for seed potatoes.

Seed potatoes are defined as tubers (including minitubers) and potato micropropagative material of cultivated tuber forming *Solanum* spp. intended for planting. The Standard describes the quality requirements, controlled by certification, for: varietal identity and purity, genealogy (i.e., line of descent from earlier generations), traceability, diseases and pests affecting commercial quality or yield, external quality and physiology, sizing, and labelling.

The Standard is implemented in an importing or exporting country by a Certifying Authority (CA). Countries applying the Standard should notify the UNECE Secretariat of their CA responsible for implementation. In relation to exports the CA certifies and labels seed potatoes for export as meeting at least the requirements of the Standard. In relation to importation the CA accepts seed potatoes certified and labelled in accordance with the Standard as meeting its national standards or technical regulations for seed potato quality.

3. Becoming a Certifying Authority

Prior to implementing the Standard, countries should notify the UNECE Secretariat of the Certifying Authority (CA) responsible for implementing the standard. The country should provide the name and contact details for the CA with whom the Secretariat can correspond.

A CA may be a government department or agency, industry organisation, or private company as long as the implementing organisation has official authorisation to be responsible for the implementation of the Standard. Depending on

the circumstances of the implementing country, the CA's official authorisation may be provided through national law or regulations or by administrative processes. A CA shall be independent, competent, impartial and free from conflict of interest.

The representatives of CAs (as well as any other United Nations member country) may participate in the meetings of the Specialized Section on Seed Potatoes. Details of the meetings can be found on the UNECE website (http://www.unece.org/trade/agr/standard/potatoes/pot_e.html). The Specialized Section reviews the Standard, considers matters of importance to seed potato quality, and engages in capacity building by running workshops and developing guides such as this. CAs wishing to participate in the activities of the Specialized Section should contact the Secretariat.

4. Establishment of a national standard at least equivalent to the UNECE Standard

Designated Authorities may choose to adopt the UNECE Standard as their national standard without including any additional requirements. Alternatively, CAs may choose to establish their own national standard that contains all of the requirements of the UNECE Standard plus additional requirements or more stringent tolerances to meet the CA's circumstances. It may be appropriate for the CA to establish a Board (or committee or other structure) to provide guidance on the implementation of the Standard.

If a CA establishes a standard that differs from the UNECE Standard, the CA's standard must be at least equivalent to the UNECE Standard. Tolerances and requirements (varietal identity and purity, genealogy, traceability, diseases and pests, external quality and physiology, sizing and labelling) should be no less stringent than those specified in the UNECE Standard.

Where, in relation to import requirements for certified seed potatoes, a CA establishes quality requirements that are more stringent than the UNECE Standard these should be technically justified and the same requirements should be applied to domestic seed potato production. It is not acceptable to apply tolerances to imported seed potatoes that are more stringent than those applied to domestically produced and certified seed potatoes. CAs are required to notify the Secretariat of each additional or more stringent requirement, and to provide the technical justification for this.

Prior to fully implementing the Standard, for example, where a national standard is in the process of being established, the UNECE standard can be used as a point of reference in developing a national standard.

5. Administration of a Seed Potato Certification Service

The Certifying Authority has responsibility for ensuring that all of the provisions of the Standard are complied with. To do this the CA needs to establish a service, with the appropriate skills and resources, which acts under its authority to provide seed potato certification. The service may be a specific unit dedicated to seed potato certification or it may involve personnel working in several agencies and organisations. For example, the systems and structures already in place to provide other forms of quality certification (such as arable seed or fruit and vegetable quality certification), or phytosanitary certification, may be able to be adapted to provide seed potato certification. There may be efficiencies in this, or it may be more desirable to establish a standalone service, depending on the circumstances of the implementing country.

The successful implementation of a seed potato certification service is dependent on the establishment of an efficient and accurate administrative system. This includes management responsibility, clear definition of responsibilities, authorisation of competent personnel and organisations to carry out certification activities, accurate registration of crops, record keeping, and financial management.

5.1 Management responsibility

The Certifying Authority should identify the person or position responsible for the operation of the service. This position should have administrative and financial authority for the management and operation of the service to ensure that all legislative and administrative requirements related to seed potato certification are satisfied.

5.2 Authorisation

The CA should establish a process for giving individuals or organisations authority to undertake activities within the certification service. These activities include acceptance of varieties for certification, acceptance of tissue culture and minitubers for certification, registration of crops for certification, field and tuber inspections, closing containers, issuance of certification labels, undertaking post-harvest evaluations, and hearing appeals. Individuals or organisations must have appropriate skills and training to undertake these activities. It may be appropriate to establish employment categories or position descriptions appropriate to these tasks. For example, the following titles and tasks could be used to provide clear direction on the scope of authorisation of each position:

 Manager – responsible for the effective operation of the certification service, with authority for financial management including fees for services (if appropriate),

- administration, staffing, approval of label design, policies, and official communication on behalf of the service.
- Inspector authorised to schedule inspections, perform field and tuber inspections, record inspection results and communicate these with growers, take samples for testing, close containers, and issue certification labels.
- Administrative assistant authorised to accept or reject applications for registration of varieties, acceptance of tissue culture and minitubers for certification, registration of crops for certification, issue invoices and administer the financial system, keep records, and generate reports.
- Data administrator undertakes data entry tasks and tracking the geneology of seed lines.

Other organisations may be involved in activities covered by the scope of the Standard. These may include diagnostic laboratories, facilities for production of tissue culture and mini tubers, and organisations growing tubers for post-harvest evaluations. All of these organisations should be authorised by the CA to undertake these activities and such authorisation should be dependent on an evaluation of the organisation's skills, competencies, independence, and compliance with requirements of the Standard.

Seed potatoes receiving certification are labelled in accordance with Annex V and section VII.A of the Standard. The CA should have a process to approve the design of the label (including appropriate organisational titles or logos) and any subsequent amendments to the label.

5.3 Roles, Responsibilities and Liability

The quality of the marketed seed lot is the applicant's responsibility. The operation of the certification scheme is the CAs responsibility. The CA may, in providing seed certification, may be at risk of legal challenge and financial liability. It may be appropriate for CAs to seek legal advice on measures to limit their liability, such as indemnity clauses in service contracts or a statement of limitation of liability.

5.4 Cost recovery

Depending on its circumstances and national policies, the CA may wish to recover the costs of operating the seed potato certification service. An equitable structure of charges will need to be developed by the CA giving consideration to any established cost recovery principles. Successful cost recovery systems are simple, easy to understand, and equitable. They are seen to be fairly applied to all parties participating in the scheme. There are several options for charging, such as these examples:

 Fee per area planted – A fixed fee is charged per hectare (or other unit of area) registered into the scheme. For example, a set fee may be charged per hectare registered. A grower may have several classifications of seed to be registered, and the same fee per hectare will be charged for all. The fee may cover time and travel for field and tuber inspections, post-harvest evaluations, administration, closing containers, and issuance of certification and labels.

- A general fee to participate in the Scheme plus specified fees for services. The general fee may cover only part of the Scheme, with additional costs recovered depending on the certification activities required such as tuber inspection or container closing.
- Fee per tonne (or other unit of mass) certified similar to the first example except that the fee is based on tonnes certified irrespective of the area registered.

Each charging option has advantages and disadvantages. The first example is simple but undercharges the true cost of field inspections for small pre-basic and basic plantings or crops that are very distant from the inspector's base. The second option may be fairer where there are a large number of small lots being exported (more time per tonne is required for small lot inspections and container closing), but is more complicated and more difficult for the grower/exporter to predict the cost of certification. The third option may be seen as more equitable for low yielding classifications or varieties, but may not recover fees from crops failing certification. Other fees may also need to be established to cover authorisation of diagnostic laboratories and tissue culture and mini-tuber production facilities, and hearing appeals.

5.5 Operating policies

The CA may also need to establish a range of policies to guide the operation of its seed potato certification service. Policies specify what an organisation does in certain circumstances. These policies help to ensure there is consistency of decision making. Policies are usually developed at a high level by a governing board, committee, or other advisory structure.

For example, a policy on confidentiality of information would make clear the circumstances under which information collected by the service would be made public. Lists of procedures and work instructions. Procedures describe the purpose of a task; identify who is responsible for doing the task, the steps to be followed when undertaking the task, and the records that should be kept.

5.7 Communication

The CA may benefit from regular communication with seed potato growers and other members of the industry to explain changes to the Standard, provide industry statistics, seasonal updates, or to explain other changes that may affect the industry. This may be done through a range of media such as newsletters, meetings, websites, or email notifications.

CAs should have in place procedures for official communication. Official communications may include notices to growers in relation to the certification status of their crops, letters of authorisation issued to diagnostic laboratories or facilities producing tissue culture and minitubers, and communications with the UNECE Secretariat and other CAs. Communication procedures can help the CA to ensure that official communications are signed off at the correct level of authority, are appropriate to the audience, and that where necessary other agencies have been consulted (for example when making official comment on UNECE documents).

5.8 Human resources

5.8.1 Staff numbers

It is important that the CA has sufficient staff to carry out inspection of crops and tubers and to complete other administrative tasks. In temperate climates the seasonal nature of the seed potato season condenses the field inspection work into a relatively short season. In other regions the seed potato season may extend across a longer season. The seasonal nature of this work can make it difficult to manage staff numbers as some times of the year are very busy and at other times there is little or no work to be done. It is useful for the CA to estimate the number of inspectors needed to inspect all of the crops (at least twice per crop) during the growing season. Time required for inspections

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