



ESA SPO INFORMATION NOTE

Towards a Uniform EU Classification Scheme for Seed Potatoes

Introduction

In the frame work of the Better Regulation Initiative the European Commission is in the process of revising the EU Seed Marketing Directives (SMD). It is likely that the current 12 SMD's will be integrated into a single Regulation. The reason for the Commission to aim for a Regulation is to improve harmonization. Where Directives need to be interpreted on national level, a Regulation in general leaves no room for national interpretation.

In the current situation a wide range of standards and classifications exist between the EU seed producing countries. A uniform EU classification scheme would lead to more transparency in the market.

The ESA Potato Section (ESA SPO) has agreed on a proposal for a uniform classification scheme in seed potatoes. The proposed scheme is a harmonized model in terms of number of generations and the denomination of the generations. The proposed standards on disease tolerances are an improvement of the present minimum EU quality requirements. However, where the differences in quality requirements between the countries are rather big, the level of the proposed standard is not high enough for certain individual producing countries. Therefore ESA strongly pleads for the possibility that each EU Member State can set more stringent quality requirements on national level, in addition to the proposed EU quality requirements.

Current situation

Quality requirements for seed potatoes are defined on international level in the UN-ECE standards and on EU-level in the Seed Marketing Directive for Seed Potatoes (Annexes of Directive 2002/56).

Both the UN-ECE standard and the minimum EU-standard are not used in the market, as the quality thresholds are too low. Each seed producing country has its own national standard, which makes comparison complicated.

The differences in classification schemes between the EU seed producing countries are a result of differences in the climatical circumstances in these countries. In general, countries with lower disease pressure or better production conditions will have more strict standards, which can lead to a competitive advantage in the international market.

In addition to minimum EU-standards ESA pleads for having more stringent quality requirements on national level in order to limit the disease pressure in high grade seed area's. This will result in less input of chemicals in the following crops where these seed lots are used.

Comparison of the existing national standards in the EU leads to the conclusion that the classification schemes differ on three levels:

1. Number of generations in each class
2. Denomination of the classes
3. Disease tolerances per class

ESA Proposal for a uniform classification scheme

ESA proposes the following standardization:

1. Standardization of the number of generations in each class

The numbers in the table below are the present theoretical number of generations per country. In practice, in most cases, the number of generations is less than the theoretical number. ESA proposes a maximum number of generations of 4 for Pre Basic Seed, 3 for Basic Seed and 2 for Certified Seed.

	Pre-basic seed	Basic seed	Certified seed
Belgium	7	4	2
Denmark	5	3	1
France	3	5	2
Germany	3	3	2
GB	4	3	3
Netherlands	5	3	2
Proposal			
	4	3	2

Every following year of growing will result in a next generation, with a maximum of 9 generations.

The second generation of certified seed can only originate from the same farm where the first generation of certified seed has grown. The certified seed can only be used for the production of ware potatoes.

2. Standardization of denomination of the classes

A new uniform denomination of the classes is based on the following premises:

- ✿ The successive generations of basic seed must be recognizable (by a number);
- ✿ The name of the classes for export must retain class E and class A, like in the current situation in most exporting countries.

Category	Generations	Name
Pre-basic	Mini Tuber	PB 0
Pre-basic	4	PB 1 - PB 4
Basic	3	S, SE, E
Certified	2	A 1 - A2
Total	9	

Pre Basic Seed will be named PB 1, PB 2, PB 3 and PB 4. PB 1 will be the first generation in the field.

3. Standardization of disease tolerances per class



Considering the big differences on the existing tolerances between countries, it is proposed to set a new standard that is acceptable for all EU-countries. In addition the Member States must have the opportunity to set more stringent tolerances on national level.

	Pre Basic	Pre Basic	Basic			Certified
	PB 0	PB 1- 4	S	SE	E	A1 - A2
Field inspection						

- Black leg	0	0	0.1	0.25	0.5	1
- Virus	0	0.1	0.5	0.5	0.5	2
- Other varieties and off-types	0	0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
Lot inspection						
- Common scab (1/3 covered)	0	5	5	5	5	5
- Powdery scab (>10% covered)	0	2	2	2	2	2
- Dry and wet rot (total)	0	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
- External blemishes / misshapen / damaged tubers			3	3	3	3
- Presence of earth and extraneous matter			2	2	2	2

4. Additional proposals

In addition to the above standardization, ESA proposes to change the current Article 10 of Directive 2002_56 as follows:

-  There should be no minimum size for minitubers;
-  The minimum size for seed potatoes should remain to be 25x25 mm but the limitation on the maximum difference in dimension of 25 mm should be deleted.