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OECD Seed Schemes

ACTIVITY REPORT OF THE AD HOC WORKING GROUP ON ELECTRONIC CERTIFICATION:
JANUARY 2014 UPDATE

This document, prepared by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Electronic Certification is circulated to Delegations, National Designated Authorities and Observers for information and discussion at the 14th Technical Working Group Meeting of the OECD Seed Schemes [under item 5 of the draft agenda TAD/CA/S/A(2014)1] to be held in Edinburgh, UK, on 30-31 January 2014.

This revised version contains an update on the activities of the group since the 2013 Annual Meeting.

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Background

1.   The Ad Hoc Working Group on Electronic Certification was established to evaluate the concept and possibilities of exchanging electronic certification data directly from Competent Authority to Competent Authority within the OECD Seed Schemes [see reference document TAD/CA/S/WD(2012)7 – "Electronic Certification (eSEED)"].

2.   Current members of the Ad Hoc Working Group are: Chile, Czech Republic, France, New Zealand, Sweden, International Seed Federation and Austria.

3.   One of the first activities of the group was to explore the purpose of seed variety certificates and the reasons for their use. A survey of National Designated Authorities (NDAs) and seed companies on use patterns with current varietal certificates was conducted at the end of 2012 to answer two main questions: (i) Where and why is an OECD varietal certificate used? (ii) How are the certificates used by companies in the different OECD Seed Schemes member countries?

4.   The survey results revealed the following: In general there is broad support for the electronic data exchange concept by NDAs and the seed industry. The current mandatory content of the OECD varietal certificate is considered as adequate. Seed certificates are generally requested by a trading partner, customs and / or an NDA. Legal (national) requirements raise some concerns and require further investigation. The number of certificates issued per country and year might not justify major investments in IT programming. For this reason, the data exchange between NDAs during multiplication abroad processes needs to be considered in the evaluation process. Costs and equipment / software requirements also have to be determined.

Latest activities

Report of last Working Group meeting:

5.   During the 2013 Annual Meeting in France the Ad Hoc Working Group discussed the advantages of other international electronic certification (eCert) developments and the requirements for the exchange of multiplication abroad data:

   a)   Acceptance of **XML (Extensible Markup Language)** as the preferred language for communication

        XML is a standardized language that defines rules for encoding documents in a format that can be read by different computer systems. It is defined in the XML 1.0 Specification produced by the World Wide Web Consortium, which is the main international standards organization for the World Wide Web. XML is internationally recognized and currently "best practice" for an electronic message format.

   b)   Utilising the **UN-CEFACT SPS Certificated XML data standard** for harmonising the structure of official seed varietal eCert data.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) serves as the focal point for trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards, covering commercial and government business processes. In this context, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN / CEFACT) was established, as a subsidiary, intergovernmental body of the UNECE Committee on Trade.

In the course of the UN / CEFACT project "eCert - XML for Sanitary & Phytosanitary Certificates" (http://www.unece.org) business requirement specifications were defined. "eCert" provides a library of data that may be exchanged between government regulators for export and import of food and agricultural products. The message exchanged must be agreed on the basis of bilateral arrangements in conformance with the eCert Data Standard and Message Structure, which has been recognised by UN / CEFACT as a standard for the exchange of export certificates for food and agricultural products. This standard adopts an XML based solution and uses published UN / CEFACT core components where possible.

c) The **UN-CEFACT SPS XML Schema** serves to standardize the XML message and describes the electronic processing of data and how elements of a phytosanitary certificate should be coded.

One of the challenges within electronic exchange of OECD Seed Varietal Certificate information involves the potential use of the data elements already defined in the UN / CEFACT SPS XML Schema. This Schema would require the OECD certificate to contain some additional data elements that are currently not part of the certificate. For example, missing data elements that would need to be adopted for a true electronic transfer of certificate information to operate under the UN/CEFACT SPS XML Schema are: Importing Country, Exporter, Importer, and Examination Event / Inspection Location.

In some countries OECD Varietal Certificates are issued for seed lots at a stage where the final importer is not known. In such cases, a change in the current process would be required.

d) During the Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting, **data exchanges** in **multiplication abroad** processes were discussed. At present communication by e-mail is the method of choice. However, especially for confidential data related to variety information, security issues are not resolved. The seed industry needs to be involved in future developments.

Visit to the Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority in the Netherlands

6.   After the 2013 Annual Meeting the Ad Hoc Working Group members visited the Food & Consumer Product Safety Authority in Utrecht, The Netherlands, to learn more about the Dutch CLIENT Programme and progresses in the global harmonisation of Electronic Phytosanitary Certification (ePhyto).

7.   The Dutch CLIENT Programme is an electronic support system for import and export certification with the main objective to improve border inspections. A new set of procedures and systems for border controls on imports and exports of agricultural goods has been developed; a system in which business and government agencies work closely together using jointly developed technology. E-certification has been established on a bilateral basis with countries like China, Kenya, South Korea, and Chile; and a number of pilot projects are ongoing.

8.   Mr. Nico Horn, member of the Electronic Certification Steering Committee of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), gave an overview about recent developments and achievements on harmonisation within IPPC (ePhyto):

a) Within the ePhyto system, the transferred message is the electronic phytosanitary certificate data or the electronic phytosanitary certificate. In the harmonization process a global consensus needs to be reached on:

– *Formats of the message*: XML language. UN/CEFACT SPS schema. Mapping for all elements of the phytosanitary certificate (ISPM 12) is available and describes how and where the information is defined in the UN/CEFACT schema.

– *Contents of the message*: Harmonized terms and codes are established (covering scientific names of plants and pests; ISO country codes; description of product, e.g. seeds for sowing, treatment type, kg, date etc.)

– *Exchange of message*: At least https security will be required. Additional encryption could be optional (countries are encouraged to use the encryption system as recommended by UN/CEFACT). A harmonized communication on message exchange is proposed, e.g. acknowledgement of the receipt of electronic certificate data.

More detailed information is available on http://ephyto.ippc.int/

Next steps for the Ad hoc Working Group

9.   More research is needed:

- The costs and equipment requirements need to be determined. The access to relevant information will be the major challenge.

- More information on customs requirements needs to be collected (interviews?).

- A connection with the Ad Hoc Working Group on Multiplication Abroad is to be established for further evaluation of multiplication data exchange.

References:

http://www.w3.org/XML/
http://ephyto.ippc.int
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/XML
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