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INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NEW VARIETIES OF PLANTS

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TECHNICAL WORKING PARTY ON AUTOMATION AND COMPUTER PROGRAMS**Thirty-Second Session****Helsinki, Finland, from June 2 to 6, 2014**REVISION OF DOCUMENT TGP/8: PART II: SELECTED TECHNIQUES USED IN DUS EXAMINATION,
NEW SECTION12: EXAMINING CHARACTERISTICS USING IMAGE ANALYSIS*Document prepared by the Office of the Union**Disclaimer: this document does not represent UPOV policies or guidance*

1. The purpose of this document is to report on the development of document TGP/8: Part II: Techniques Used in DUS Examination, New Section: "Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis".
2. The following abbreviations are used in this document:

TC: Technical Committee
TC-EDC: Enlarged Editorial Committee
TWC: Technical Working Party on Automation and Computer Programs
TWPs: Technical Working Parties
3. The TWC, at its thirtieth session, held in Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, from June 26 to June 29, 2012, agreed that a draft for New Section - Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis for document TGP/8 "Trial Design and Techniques Used in the Examination of Distinctness, Uniformity and Stability" should be prepared, by an expert from the Netherlands in collaboration with an expert from the European Union, for the TWP sessions in 2013 (see document TWC/30/41 "Report", paragraph 80).
4. The TC, at its forty-ninth session, held in Geneva, from March 18 to 20, 2013, noted the plans for the development of a New Section: "Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis" for inclusion in document TGP/8, Part II: Techniques Used in DUS Examination, as set out in paragraphs 8 and 9 of document TC/49/33 "Revision of document TGP/8: Part II: Techniques Used in DUS Examination, New Section: Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis".
5. The experts from the Netherlands and the European Union responsible for drafting the new section proposed that the first draft be presented only to the TWC in 2013.
6. The TWC, at its thirty-first session, held in Seoul, from June 4 to 7, 2013, considered the draft of the new section "Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis" for inclusion in document TGP/8, as contained in the Annex to document TWC/31/20 Add., as presented by an expert from the European Union by electronic means. The TWC agreed that the expert from the European Union should revise the text to provide guidance on the use of the method with suitable language for inclusion in document TGP/8, to be presented to the TWPs at their sessions in 2014 (see document TWC/31/32 "Report", paragraph 81).
7. The TC, at its fiftieth session, held in Geneva, from April 7 to 9, 2014, considered document TC/50/27.

8. The TC agreed to the redrafting of the proposed text, reproduced as Annex to this document, by an expert from the European Union, into a standard TGP style of impersonal speech and to add the following introduction to the proposed text, as set out in document TC/50/27, paragraph 9:

“1. Introduction

“Characteristics which may be examined by image analysis should also be able to be examined by visual observation and/or manual measurement, as appropriate. Explanations for observing such characteristics, including where appropriate explanations in Test Guidelines, should ensure that the characteristic is explained in terms which would enable the characteristic to be understood and examined by all DUS experts.”

“2. Combined characteristics

“2.1 The General Introduction (document TG/1/3, Chapter 4, Section 4) states that:

‘4.6.3 Combined Characteristics

‘4.6.3.1 A combined characteristic is a simple combination of a small number of characteristics. Provided the combination is biologically meaningful, characteristics that are assessed separately may subsequently be combined, for example the ratio of length to width, to produce such a combined characteristic. Combined characteristics must be examined for distinctness, uniformity and stability to the same extent as other characteristics. In some cases, these combined characteristics are examined by means of techniques, such as Image Analysis. In these cases, the methods for appropriate examination of DUS are specified in document TGP/12, ‘Special Characteristics’.’

“2.2 Thus, the General Introduction clarifies that the use of image analysis is one possible method for examining characteristics which fulfill the basic requirements for use in DUS testing (see document TG/1/3, Chapter 4.2), which includes the need for the uniformity and stability of such characteristics to be examined. With regard to combined characteristics, the General Introduction also explains that such characteristics should be biologically meaningful.”

9. The expert from the European Union has informed the Office of the Union that, given the need for extensive redrafting of the text, it will not be possible to produce a text for consideration by the TWPs in 2014. It is proposed that a new draft be prepared for consideration by the TC and TWPs in 2015. In order to facilitate the consideration by the TC, at its fifty-first session, it is further proposed that an initial draft be prepared for consideration by the TC-EDC at its meeting in January 7 and 8, 2015

10. The TWC is invited to note the proposal from the expert from the European Union to prepare a new draft for consideration by the TC and the TWPs at their sessions in 2015.

[Annex follows]

EXAMINING CHARACTERISTICS USING IMAGE ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

1. Image analysis is the extraction of information (e.g. plant measurements) from (digital) images by means of a computer. Image analysis is used in plant variety testing to help in the assessment of plant characteristics. It can be regarded as an intelligent measurement device (advanced ruler). This document aims to give guidance when using image analysis in plant variety testing.

2. Image analysis can be used in a fully automated or semi-automated way. When fully automated, the expert just records images of plant parts with a camera or scanner and the computer automatically calculates relevant characteristics without human interference. In a semi-automated way, the computer shows the images on a screen and a user can interact with the software to measure specific plant parts, e.g. by clicking with a mouse.

~~3. UPOV sent an image analysis questionnaire to all member states in 2012 on the use of image analysis. The results of this questionnaire are reproduced in document TWC/31/20 (see document TWC/31/20 "Revision of document TGP/8: Part II: Techniques used in DUS Examination, New Section: Examining Characteristics Using Image Analysis", paragraphs 3 and 4). Image analysis is used in more than 10 member states on a routine basis to measure a range of characteristics regarding size, shape, color and patterns of plant parts. The most often used characteristics are the size and shape of seeds.~~

IMAGE RECORDING: CALIBRATION AND STANDARDIZATION

~~3. 4.~~ An important aspect to consider when recording and analyzing digital images is standardization and calibration. Standardization is done by using as much as possible the same setup (illumination, camera, camera-settings, lens, perspective, and object-camera distance) for every recording. It is important to check that the recordings are done according to a prescribed protocol, as the software may depend on it. For example, pods may have to be orientated horizontally in the images, with the beaks pointing to the left. Calibration of the system is needed to make the recording as much as possible independent of any varying conditions by correcting for the variations, e.g. in size or color.

~~4. 5.~~ Size calibration: if we want to assess the length of e.g. a seed, we need to know the size of a pixel (picture element in a digital image) in the real world (e.g. mm/pixel), as the computer measures every object in an image in pixels. A standard way to perform this calibration is to include a ruler in every recorded image, at the same distance from the camera as the plant part being recorded. In that case the user can relate the size of the ruler to the number of pixels, and make the calibration manually. A preferred way is to use an object of standard dimensions, e.g. a coin, which can automatically be analyzed with the software and then used for an implicit size calibration. A coin also allows checking if pixels are square (i.e. if the aspect ratio of every pixel is 1:1). In all cases, the object should be sufficiently close to the calibration object and sufficiently far from the camera, to minimize the effect of varying magnification with distance. Alternatively a telecentric lens could be used to minimize this effect.

~~5. 6.~~ Illumination calibration: an object has to be segmented from the background in the image. An often used and very simple way to do this, is to use thresholding: a pixel with a (grey) value above a certain threshold is considered an object pixel and below the threshold a background pixel (or vice versa). If the illumination is not constant, it may occur that the segmentation is not optimal for every image and that part of the pixels are assigned to the wrong class (object/background), even if the threshold value is determined automatic. This may result in erroneous measurements. It is therefore advisable to check the segmentation results by having a quick look at the segmented binary images.

~~6. 7.~~ In many situations only a silhouette/contour of the plant material is necessary, e.g. for size and shape. In these cases it is often advisable to use a background illumination, e.g. a light box. This will increase the contrast between the background and the object, and make the segmentation result much less dependent on the threshold value.

~~7. 8.~~ Check that the lighting is homogeneously distributed over the image. Darker parts in the image may result in a wrong segmentation and hence lead to incorrect and incomparable measures, especially when multiple objects are recorded in the same image.

8. 9. For colors and (variegation or blush) patterns on the plant part, it is essential that the illumination is done correctly and checked regularly, preferably for every image. In that case illumination calibration can be done by recording (part of) a standard color chart in the image. Special algorithms are available to correct for color changes due to differing illumination conditions, but in many situations this correction causes some loss of precision.



9. 10. The light source is of large influence on the observed color in the image. Especially for color, the type of light source is important. In many cases, lamp color and intensity change during warming up of the lamps, so let them burn about 15 minutes before starting the recordings. If fluorescent tubes are used, check regularly if they still have more or less the same intensity/color, as they may change rather rapidly with age. You can use the calibration chart for notification.

10. 11. Especially when recording shiny objects like apples or certain flowers, you need to be aware of specular reflection. Objects with specular spots cannot be measured reliably. In such cases, attention should be paid to uniform and indirect illumination, using special light tents as shown below.



11. 12. Both (color) cameras and scanners can be used for image recording. The choice is dependent on the application and the preference of the user. Other more advanced systems, such as 3D cameras or hyperspectral cameras are not yet used in standard plant variety testing.

ANALYSIS OF STANDARD UPOV CHARACTERISTICS

12. 13. In general image analysis is used to automate the measurement of characteristics described in the guidelines of UPOV. In that case the aim is to replace a hand measurement by a computer measurement. This requires an additional calibration in addition to the image recording calibration. The measurements can then be checked with manual measurements for consistency, e.g. by a scatterplot of hand versus computer measurement with a regression line and the line $y=x$.

13. 14. In some cases, image analysis requires a more precise and mathematical definition of the characteristic than is required for human experts. E.g. the length of the pod can be redefined as the length of the medial axis of the pod, excluding the stem. In such cases, there is a special need to check for differences

in behavior for different genotypes (bias). The measurement for some genotypes may be exactly the same, whereas for others a systematic difference may be present. A nice example is for determining the bulb height in onions (van der Heijden, Vossepoel and Polder, 1996), where the top of the bulb was defined as the bending point of the shoulder. As long as such a change or refinement of the definition of a characteristic is known and accounted for, this is not a problem. In general, it is advisable to consult the crop experts for redefining a characteristic and check with UPOV if a minor modification of the guideline might be necessary.

14. 15. In some cases the object consists of different parts which have to be measured separately, e.g. the pod, beak and stem of a pod of French bean. This requires a special algorithm to separate the different parts (distinguish stem and beak from the pod) and this has to be tested extensively on a large number of genotypes in the reference collection, to be sure that the implementation is robust over the entire range of expressions.

15. 16. Shape characteristics can also be measured with image analysis, but in general it will be restricted to characteristics already in the guideline, e.g. by defining the shape as the ~~ratio~~ ratio between length and width.

16. 17. Although color is a standard UPOV characteristic, and could be measured by image analysis, it is not used often. ~~Color measurements by image analysis are described in document TWC/24/15 "Image Analysis of Ornamentals, with Emphasis to Rose and Alstroemeria".~~ In most cases, crop experts still rely on visual observation with RHS color charts.

ANALYSIS OF NON STANDARD CHARACTERISTICS

17. 18. In addition to standard characteristics, image analysis offers the possibility to assess more complex characteristics which could be more difficult to observe visually or to measure.. E.g. the total shape distribution of an onion can be described by storing the onion width along the different positions of the length axis, the ground coverage of foliage could be observed more precisely than with a visual observation, disease resistance could be assessed in measuring the area of infection on a leaf or the curvature of the perimeter of leaves could help assessing the fineness of foliage.

CONCLUSIONS

18. 19. Image analysis is used for measurements and to automate, at least partially, the assessment of characteristics. It requires a good and precise definition of the characteristic, computerization using existing or home-made software, a good preparation of samples, checking with existing procedures, careful calibration and standardization. It often necessitates therefore an investment which can only be profitable versus hand assessment of characteristics if it concerns a significant number of measurements or measurements which are difficult and time consuming to assess by the examiner. In case of organs of a small size, seed size for example, image analysis will be more precise and more reliable.

19. 20. Image analysis offers the possibility to store information: images can be recorded and analyzed at a later stage in order to avoid peaks of work and they can be retrieved at a later stage to compare varieties for example in case of doubt.

20. 21. Today it is mainly used for size and shape features but with the development of techniques, it will be possible to use it for a wider range of characteristics in future.

REFERENCES

van der Heijden, G., A. M. Vossepoel & G. Polder (1996) Measuring onion cultivars with image analysis using inflection points. *Euphytica*, 87, 19-31.

[End of Annex and of document]