

# Geneva Watch

*An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture*

## Cairns Group Ministers Brainstorm Doha's Future

In an attempt to boost the moribund Doha Round, Ministers of the Cairns Group<sup>1</sup> coalition met on September 7–9 in Saskatoon (Canada), to discuss how to bring the trade negotiations back to life again.

The group aimed to develop possible recommendations regarding the Doha work programme for 2012, and beyond, and hopes to present the results at the December 15–17 Eighth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC8).

“Cairns Group ministers will be considering possible pathways to move the dead-locked negotiations forward,” Australia’s Trade Minister, Craig Emerson – who co-chaired the meeting with Canadian Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz – said.

Additional invitees from the EU, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Morocco, the Russian Federation and Vietnam, joined Deputy U.S. Trade Representative and U.S. Ambassador to the WTO, Michael Punke. Punke also spoke on behalf of USTR, Ron Kirk, and he warned the group against sugar-coating the Round’s current problems.

The need for brainstorming, he said, “is particularly critical right now, as we face a highly uncertain, but undoubtedly difficult, road ahead on the Doha Development Agenda.”

For the U.S., Punke said, the time has come for “both an honest assessment of where we stand, and realistic guidance about where we go.”

In order to do that, Members must respond to three questions:

1. Whether the current DDA process can lead to a successful outcome?

For the U.S. the answer is “no” as the world has profoundly changed since the round was launched ten years ago. For Punke, emerging economies (such as China, Brazil and India) must assume their responsibilities within the global trading system. “Unless that realignment results in new market liberalization, we are going to remain stuck,” he said. Devising a credible path forward, he added will be the first test Members will face at MC8.

2. Can the Round be fixed in the short term?

Here again the deputy USTR was sceptical. “Even if there was broad consensus for fundamental reengineering of the Round’s architecture – and almost certainly there is not” he said, “the limited time between now and MC8 would not allow for that to be accomplished.”

3. What does this imply for the upcoming Ministerial Conference?

“Our view is that the most workable, most realistic, and least damaging path would be to acknowledge in a direct and honest manner that the Round is not working, and then agree that we will initiate a collective effort of active,

<sup>1</sup> Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Columbia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Uruguay.

structured consideration of next steps,” Punke said, admitting that the divergence of views on this fundamental question, ultimately, is at the heart of why Doha is proving such a struggle.

Cairns Group Members, for their part, decided to adopt a more optimistic stance, stressing that one of the recommendations at the upcoming MC8 would be to “simplify” the process – maybe in response to complaints that the current one is not working.

Emerson explained the interlinkages that exist between different subjects under negotiation which make the talks even more complex. “The sense is that we don't need to make it more complex,” the Australian Minister said. To Punke’s suggestion that Members acknowledge in a direct and honest manner that a successful DDA will not be achievable, the Australian minister pointed out that none of the previous rounds has failed. “[W]e see it as a big responsibility of the Cairns Group to ensure that the Doha Round does not fail,” Emerson stressed.

The group, though, refrained from providing specific recommendations for the way forward at this point, claiming that these will be developed throughout informal gatherings leading to MC8.

“We instruct our officials to work on concrete ideas leading up to the Ministerial Conference to secure a way ahead for the Doha Round negotiations on agriculture which will deliver genuine reforms, in accordance with the Doha Development mandate,” the group’s statement said.

Informal brainstorming sessions are likely to take place on the sidelines of upcoming G-20 summit on November 3-4<sup>th</sup> or the APEC ministerial meeting on November 11, 2011.

## Upcoming Events

- WTO Public Forum, September 19–21, 2011
- Regular Agriculture Committee, September 29 and November 2011
- WTO General Council, October 12-13, December 1-2, 2011
- G-20 Summit, November 3-4, 2011, Cannes (France)
- APEC Ministerial Meeting, November 11, 2011
- WTO Ministerial Conference (MC8), December 15–17, 2011

Geneva Watch is published by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Egg Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada and Canadian Hatching Egg Producers to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, particularly on the WTO negotiations on agriculture.

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