

## **Agriculture Special Session**

No detailed work plan has been unveiled at the March 22<sup>nd</sup> gathering of the agriculture negotiating group, the first since the 8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC8) held last December. Ambassador Adank, who called an informal meeting of the full membership to report on the consultations he has held since the beginning of the year and to hear from delegations on the way forward, stressed that Members needed more time to reflect on how they would move ahead with the agriculture talks.

“My sense is that overall we are still at the stage of clarifying where things are – with the consultations to date and today's discussions being an important contribution to that – before we determine where that takes us,” the chair said. “We need to listen carefully to each other.”

At the meeting, Adank said he had heard from Members that the search for a new approach – as directed by trade ministers last December – would have to observe some conditions. At his confessionals, some delegations focused their attention on their respective concerns while others warned against backward steps from what has already been achieved in the talks, the chair said.

There were differences of opinion regarding which subjects would be ripe for an early harvest and whether any political decisions can be taken in the present climate.

Comments made from the floor essentially confirmed the chair's assessment. Brazil, speaking on behalf of the G-20, said its group will continue to test ideas and present the results at the next meeting. Australia, for its part suggested export competition – including export subsidies and the parallel issues of disciplines on export credit, food aid and state trading enterprise – was ready for an early agreement. Members agreed to eliminate export subsidies by 2013 at the 2005 Hong Kong Ministerial Conference.

In a non-paper tabled by Australia last week, the country asked that the secretariat produce a report on Members' commitments and trends for export subsidies over the period 1995-2010 – i.e.: “what particular categories of export subsidies are being utilized,” – by June in order to help move forward on this issue. Australia presented the non-paper informally the afternoon of the 19<sup>th</sup>. Sources said most countries that attended the gathering, including Brazil, supported the initiative. The only objection came from the EU who reminded Members that the export competition commitment has always been tied to agreement in all areas in agriculture as well as on geographical indications in intellectual property.

India, on behalf of the G-33, along with other developing countries, insisted that whatever is agreed has to strike a balance between the talks' three pillars (market access, domestic support and export competition).

Generally speaking, Members remained committed to working with each other and with the Chair to find a way forward by exploring new approaches that might help advance the agriculture talks.

Ambassador Adank urged Members to continue consulting among themselves so that they can understand each other's positions.

“I will continue to consult with members, and to report on further developments,” he concluded. “I will not at this stage suggest timing for a further open-ended informal [meeting], but will consult in due course on when this might be useful to schedule.”

## Upcoming Events

- Regular Agriculture Committee, September 20-21, November 14-15, 2012
- G-20 Trade Ministers, April 2012, Mexico
- Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group, April 16–18 and July 9–12, 2012
- WTO General Council, May 1-2, July 25-26, October 3-4, December 19-20, 2012
- OECD Forum, May 22-24, 2012, Paris (France)
- APEC Ministers Responsible for Trade, June 4-5, 2012, Kazan, (Russia)
- G-20 Summit, June 18-19, 2012, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur (México)
- APEC Leaders Summit, September 2-9, 2012, Vladivostok, (Russia)
- WTO Public Forum, September 24–26, 2012

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