

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

Trade Ministers Reiterate DDA Support; Will Push for Agreement on Trade Facilitation

Trade ministers from the G-20 (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union) reiterated their support for multilateral trade liberalization from their first meeting in Puerto Vallarta (Mexico). Their report will be made to leaders at the June 18-19, G-20 Summit in Los Cabos (Mexico).

At the meeting, hosted by the Mexican Minister of Economy, Bruno Ferrari, trade ministers acknowledged the role of the multilateral trading system in guaranteeing both “consistency and predictability”; essential barriers against protectionism. As such, business leaders involved in the B-20 Trade and Investment Task Force – who held a meeting along with Trade Ministers and both WTO Director General Pascal Lamy and OECD Secretary General, Jose Angel Gurría – urged leaders “to reiterate their commitment and dedication to a multilateral agenda that can match circumstances for all, pursuant to the rules and norms of the WTO.”

In the meantime, in a document outlining six recommendations for G-20 Trade Ministers, the B-20 Task Force urged ministers “to execute concrete actions that may generate a stable and proper environment for investment, in addition to trade.”

Among those actions, they asked the G-20 to lead by example “by endorsing measures that promote trade and investment instead of choosing those that reject them”, “they must foster progress and the liberalization of multilateral trade,” and “support the advancement of specific issues on the WTO agenda by order of priority.”

As for the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), Mr Ferrari said trade ministers have agreed to provide “fresh impetus to the DDA negotiations” as they are looking “to try to solve the most fundamental and critical areas where stalemates existed” hence, the agreement to continue working toward advancing the issue of trade facilitation (TF).

This area of the talks has been identified as one of the areas where progress could be achieved this year as the issue is said to be beneficial for both developed and developing countries alike. Since the beginning of this year, Members have tackled the TF draft consolidated text which still has around 800 brackets and have agreed on a specific schedule of negotiations designed to help move forward on the issue. However, despite the initial engagement, Members have not yet been able to advance significantly on the issue, sources have said. Nevertheless, in Puerto Vallarta, both developed and developing countries reiterated their willingness to see this file pushed forward with the hope of some progress by the time of the G-20 Summit.

Deputy United States Trade Representative and Ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Michael Punke, who replaced USTR Ron Kirk at the meeting, stressed that his country welcomed the support for the multilateral trading system.

“Trade liberalization is an essential element of any economic growth strategy. Ambitious market opening – in manufacturing, agriculture, and services – is a critical piece of the challenge facing the global economy,” Punke said, adding that “the United States welcomes the opportunity to explore new pathways toward opening markets, such as services liberalization on a plurilateral basis.”

“In the same way, we are excited by the enthusiasm and creativity shown in Members’ continuing work on trade and development, trade facilitation, the expansion of the Information Technology Agreement, and completion of the revised Government Procurement Agreement and negotiations to broaden its membership. We hope that all WTO Members share this eagerness to see the agenda advance and are ready to act upon it, including by putting new ideas on the table as to how to move forward.

Upcoming Events

- UNCTAD XIII, April 21–26, 2012, Doha (Qatar)
- WTO General Council, May 1-2, July 25-26, October 3-4, December 19-20, 2012
- TPP Negotiations, May 8–18, 2012, Dallas (U.S.)
- 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 (Mexico)
- Trade Facilitation Negotiating Group, July 9–12, 2012
- APEC Leaders Summit, September 2–9, 2012, Vladivostok (Russia)
- Regular Agriculture Committee, September 20-21, November 14-15, 2012
- WTO Public Forum, September 24–26, 2012

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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