

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

Fight over UNCTAD's Mandate

Key WTO Members took their disagreement to Doha (Qatar) where they attended the April 21–26 UNCTAD XIII conference. The meeting set the stage for another confrontation between developing countries (especially emerging ones) and a group of developed countries (including the U.S., Australia, Canada, and Japan) moderated by Swiss ambassador to the WTO (and chair of the NAMA negotiations) Luzius Wasescha.

This time the debate took place over the organization's future work program. The debate started after the alliance of developed countries requested that UNCTAD re-focus its activities solely on its original mandate and avoid taking part in the financial reform discussion currently taking place at the G-20 level.

Developing countries, for their part, argued that the agency has been pivotal in preventing economic and financial crises (such as Mexico in 1995, and Asian in 1997).

Observers claimed that UNCTAD XIII was also an opportunity for BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) to address their dissatisfaction regarding the selection of Dr. Jim Yong Kim – the U.S. President's nominee to lead the World Bank – when the developing world thought they had better candidates in Nigeria's finance minister, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, or Colombian finance minister, Jose Antonio Ocampo.

The BRICS countries are looking to better coordinate their efforts to bring a developing country leader to lead the next vacant international organization, some source said, and this may well start with the WTO, whose current Director General, Pascal Lamy, is set to leave in September 2013.

Meanwhile, in Doha, an agreement finally emerged on UNCTAD's future work program which will continue to focus its research on trade and development "in light of the global economic and financial crisis."

Comprehensive Economic & Trade Agreement

There is a general recognition that the bilateral talks between the EU and Canada will not conclude in June as previously advertised by both parties earlier this year. The parties held another round of negotiations the week of April 16, but sources say they have not yet addressed the sensitive issues related to the agriculture market access file.

The topic is said to be left for the very last minute and both parties are currently focusing on issues such as rules of origin and geographical indications, one source said. Nevertheless, there is a belief that an agreement can be reached by the end of this year.

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)

Countries involved in the TPP negotiations (Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam, and the U.S.) will hold their 12th Round of negotiations in Dallas on May 8th.

Negotiating groups will begin meeting on May 8th, however, chief negotiators will begin meeting later in the week and are expected to continue into the following week, through to May 16th. The group expects progress in their talks before the second half of the year, at which point the U.S. presidential race is expected to take center stage.

Mexico, Japan and Canada have expressed interest in joining the talks, but so far, none of them has been accepted.

Upcoming Events

- 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 (México)
- 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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Legal Deposit: National Library of Canada, ISSN 1496-9254