

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

Agriculture Talks Resume

The agriculture negotiations group met on January 18th to kick-start its work for the New Year. The group's Chair, Ambassador John Adank, convened an open-ended meeting to discuss proposals tabled by Members since last September.

Among those proposals were the G-20¹ proposal on export competition and TRQ administration – which was discussed earlier this year and includes a paper circulated by the WTO secretariat on TRQ fill rates (see *Geneva Watch* 11/01/13). Another was the G-33² proposal on public stockholding for food security purposes seeking to adopt a number of provisions concerning food security which would allow government stockholding and purchases from poor farmers at supported prices to be considered green box subsidies as they would not distort trade.

The G-33 described this proposal as one of the “stable” provisions of the draft 2008 modalities which could be included among the topics to be finalized at the WTO 9th Ministerial Conference (MC9) in Bali in December. However, at the open-ended meeting some countries remained doubtful that a program that involves price support could be considered “Green”.

On the subject of export competition (export credits, export guarantees and insurance programs), the WTO secretariat has not been able to compile the information requested by the G-20 as the questionnaires it had sent out to Members seeking missing information from their respective notifications have not been returned. Officials said the sensitive nature of the issue have prevented some delegates from being able to provide the requested information. However, at the January 18th meeting, delegates reiterated their willingness to discuss the proposals seriously.

The Members' biggest concern was mainly related to striking a “balance” among topics; i.e. whether isolating the above listed issues would upset the balance of the 2008 draft modalities text.

More Focused Talks in Mid-February

Ambassador Adank said he wanted to start looking at the above issues starting mid-February, after the traditional WTO mini-ministerial meeting that is held on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum annual gathering in Davos, Switzerland.

“I would suggest that starting in mid-February, we need more focused discussions on where we are on the relevant issues and what the outlook is for advancing particular issues,” Adank told the full membership on January 18th, hoping that the proposals currently under consideration would be a “catalyst” for the agriculture negotiations this year.

The Chair encouraged Members who are considering tabling proposals to test them with other delegates prior to their submission, so the authors can collect “a reasonable amount of support” with the view to secure an accord within the timeframe they have available before the MC9.

Members to Start Services Plurilateral Negotiations

Countries from the so-called “Really Good Friends of Services” group – Australia, Canada, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Colombia, Costa Rica, the EU, Hong Kong China, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Switzerland, Turkey and the U.S. – will meet the week of January 28th to start negotiations for a new trade agreement on international trade in services.

The group's discussion will first focus on technicalities and its 2013 calendar of meetings, sources say, as several members of the coalition are seeking a mandate from their respective government to officially enter into negotiations. This is the case of the U.S., where Trade Representative, Ron Kirk, sent a letter to the U.S. Congress on January 15th, informing U.S. lawmakers of the USTR's intent to enter into negotiations with 20 other WTO Members (counting the EU as one).

"The negotiations will begin with a group of 20 trading partners, who represent nearly two-thirds of global trade in services," Ambassador Kirk wrote, adding that the group anticipates increasing its number of participating countries by including additional WTO Members as negotiations progress.

¹ G-20 – A developing nations group formed in 2003 which calls for the reversal of protectionist policies and trade-distorting practices by the major developed nations. Members of the developing G-20 include Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, Thailand, Uruguay, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

² G-33 – The G-33 is a group of 46 countries characterized by large agrarian populations and food security concerns that take a defensive position in the WTO's agriculture negotiations. The Group consists of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Botswana, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Laos, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Upcoming Events

- CETA, weeks of January 14 and 21, 2013
- World Economic Forum, January 23–27, 2013, Davos-Klosters (Switzerland)
- WTO General Council, January 29, 2013
- TPP Round XVI, March 3–14, 2013 (Singapore)
- Regular Agriculture Committee, March 26, September 4, November 12, 2013
- WTO 9th Ministerial Conference (MC9), December 3–6, 2013, Bali (Indonesia)

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.

For more information or comments, please visit:

www.dairyfarmers.ca, www.chicken.ca, www.eggs.ca, www.turkeyfarmersofcanada.ca, www.cbhema.com.

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