

Geneva Watch

An overview of the WTO negotiations on agriculture

Editorial: See You in September!

WTO Members wrapped up the first half of 2009 without being able to progress on any of the issues that caused the collapse of the July 2008 ministerial meeting. Members nevertheless promised to intensify discussions after the summer break in order to bridge differences on the remaining outstanding issues. They look for high level gatherings in September – i.e. the Delhi mini-ministerial meeting and the G-20 Summit in Pittsburgh – to provide the necessary impetus to conclude the talks in 2010. However, prudent trade observers will side with the Indian Commerce Minister who warned that “a quick closure” was unlikely, given the large number of unresolved issues remaining. “A lot of momentum has been generated to re-start the Doha discussion but the road ahead is filled with challenges,” Sharma said. Indeed, given the fragile state of the global economy and its dawdling resurgence, it wouldn’t be surprising to see Members waiting until the first half of 2010 to try another shot at modalities.

General Council

At their last General Council meeting before the summer break, Members recognized the importance of stepping up their efforts to narrow the remaining gaps in the fall. Because of a confined schedule, i.e. leaders’ pledges to conclude the round by 2010, it was decided to show flexibility, and get by on the 2005 Hong Kong Declaration which stipulates that the request-offer in Services will have to be agreed upon three months after an agreement on modalities.

Members raised the same concerns expressed at the July 24 Trade Negotiations Committee, especially with regard to the sequencing of discussions. They recognized the need for some bilateral talks to take place among key countries - albeit with maximum transparency - but insisted that the multilateral arena remains the unique stage for decision-making. Sceptics said it will be hard to sustain intensive negotiations for 8-10 successive months especially when one of the major players – the U.S. – had yet to seriously engage in the negotiations.

Indian Ambassador Ujal Singh Bathia decried Members’ lack of what he called “real engagement” to lead the Doha Round to a conclusion in 2010. Much like former agriculture negotiation chairman Crawford Falconer, Bathia underlined the importance of a solid road map for future discussion. “We have noted that the agriculture and NAMA chairs have presented a fairly low key program of engagement in September,” he said.

India will have the opportunity to clarify the way forward with respect to the negotiations when it will host the G-20+ trade ministers meeting in early September. The three day summit is expected to bring together about 35 WTO countries. However, the once described critical meeting for the future of the talks is now slowly being recalibrated as a gathering that will shun away from contentious matters susceptible to alter its success.

The Delhi mini-ministerial agenda is expected to be discussed toward the end of August in a Green Room with DG Pascal Lamy, one WTO official said.

Note to Readers

Geneva Watch will cease for the remainder of the summer and recommence on Friday, September 4th.

Upcoming Events

- Agriculture Consultations, week of September 7, 2009
- Technical workshop schedules, week of September 21, 2009
- General Council, Oct. 13-14, Dec. 17-18, 2009
- G-20+ Trade Ministers Meeting, September 3-4, 2009 (Delhi)
- G-20 Summit, September 24-25 (Pittsburgh, USA)
- WTO Public Forum, Sept 28–30, 2009
- WTO Ministerial Conference, November 30 – December 2, 2009

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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