



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

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Chair Tables Summary Document to Jump-Start Agriculture Talks

With the objective of jump-starting the negotiation on agriculture in the lead up to the Eleventh Session of the Ministerial Conference (MC11), the chair, Kenyan ambassador to the WTO, Stephen Karau, released a document depicting the state of play in the agriculture negotiations. The document, he stressed is “intended to assist Members” in preparation of future discussions leading up to the MC11.

“It was conceived as a supporting tool to help Members assess in a structured way what may realistically be expected as possible outcomes at MC11 and what remains to be done to incrementally develop options likely to attract consensus among the Membership,” Karau wrote in his update.

This snapshot of the current state of play is expected to evolve in the weeks to come as Members appear to agree that some issues in fact need more time and won’t be completed enough to be part of the MC11 outcomes.

The 11-page long document outlines the divergences in point of views Members have on issues such as public stockholding for food security purposes (PSH), domestic support, market access, the special safeguard mechanism (SSM), cotton, export prohibitions or restrictions, export competition, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS).

The two proposals tabled on PSH thus far suggest exempting the support provided under PSH programmes from the Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) calculation; however the attached conditions differ significantly, the chair stressed. Although Members seem to converge on some key elements, such as the needs for safeguards and transparency, countries nonetheless disagree on the scope and content of these two elements. In addition, delegates have opposing views as to whether an unlimited exemption from the AMS should be established.

There are also differences on the country coverage of the PSH (which countries will be concerned by the provision), but also on programme coverage (whether solution should be applied to existing programmes only or to existing and new programmes), and product coverage (whether the PSH should concern staple foods only or a wider range of products).

The chair also outlined the key divide on domestic support i.e. whether the new limit should be fixed or floating. Here as well Members disagree on the coverage i.e. whether this should concern only AMS, AMS and *de minimis*¹, or an overall trade-distorting support that also includes the blue box and article 6.2 of the Agreement on Agriculture (development box). Some countries even suggested tighter disciplines on Green Box support programmes.

Members expecting limited outcome on domestic support in Buenos Aires, Argentina, the hosts of MC11 suggested that discussion on this issue be pursued after the MC11. Others, meanwhile, proposed that a roadmap be established “as a fall-back alternative, should there not be any outcome at the MC11.”

On market access, several Members called for the inclusion of issues such as the special safeguard (SSG), tariff simplification, tariff peaks, and tariff escalation, and cuts in the in-quota tariffs among the outcomes of the MC11. Others meanwhile have expressed doubt over the feasibility of this, citing the limited time available to Members to tackle these issues.

In addition, some delegations simply “do not believe that there is scope for achieving agriculture market access outcomes at MC11 in the absence of parallel progress in non-agriculture market access and services market access negotiations,” the chair states. This has led some Members to support the idea of a post-MC11 work programme on market access.

¹ *De minimis*: Minimal amounts of domestic support that are allowed even though they distort trade — up to 5% of the value of production for developed countries, 10% for developing.

The agriculture negotiating group will meet in an informal gathering open to all Members on September 13th.

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

