



Geneva WATCH

An overview of the bilateral, plurilateral and multilateral trade negotiations

Charles Akande, Editor

Back to Work!

With the agreement achieved last week on trade facilitation and public stockholding for food security purposes, the “gang” of the Agriculture Special Session – as the Canadian agriculture official put it – is back in business. Indeed, Agriculture Negotiations Chair, New Zealand’s Ambassador to the WTO, John Adank, convened a meeting of his negotiating group on December 4th to review the General Council’s decisions and brainstorm on the work remaining to tackle the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) next year.

Among the most important issues on his agenda are first and foremost the implementation of all Bali Ministerial Decisions pertaining to agriculture, including issues where legally-binding outcomes could not be achieved, and the permanent solution to the food security element which is set to be adopted by December 31, 2015. In addition, the group will have to outline a clearly-defined work programme on the remaining DDA issues, including the tricky topic of cotton, by July 2015.

“So, we have our hands full,” Ambassador Adank said. “It’s clear from this background that here in the Special Session we have substantial work to progress in 2015 in the period ahead, with deadlines indicated for this work.” he stressed.

Members, for their part, seized the opportunity to reiterate their positions. Among their concerns were calls by the Cairns Group for an ambitious outcome particularly when it comes to domestic support and market access which will allow increased South-South trade. As was the case after Bali, some called for the need to confront the difficult issues contained in the draft 2008 modalities text that continue to be sticking points.

Chief among those difficult topics is the formula for cutting agriculture tariffs. The text suggests two types of cuts, one general and one for sensitive products which will lead to a TRQ increase for some countries. However, because of the complexity this has generated, some countries – including the EU – have advocated for a more simplified approach to help unlock the gridlock. Members of the G-33, meanwhile,

reiterated their plea for special treatment when it comes to special products’ tariff lines and special safeguard mechanism (SSM).

It is well known that when it comes to agriculture, the elements contained in the three pillars (export competition, domestic support and market access) are all interlinked and need to be dealt with as an overall package, Ambassador Adank reminded delegates.

The Chair does not expect to start the “intense work” before January 2015 as Members usually resume their work after the traditional mini-ministerial gathering on the side-lines of the Davos World Economic Forum, which is scheduled to take place from January 21–24, 2015 in Switzerland.

Nonetheless, countries have advocated for technical meetings of various configurations, including some involving ambassadors and senior officials from capitals with the aim of enabling a rapid consensus on the work programme. They are looking to capitalize on the existing political will and the lustre of the recent agreement on the TFA and food security in order to motivate Members into continuing with the progress on the post-Bali programme.

“[Y]ou should engage your capitals immediately on what we have to do here in Geneva in the next six months,” Ambassador Adank retorted.

While acknowledging that capitals are not going to immediately send additional observers and decision-makers to Geneva, Ambassador Adank indicated that the pace of negotiations shows that Members should seek additional direction and harness the political will more urgently in order to keep the talks advancing.

“My hope would be that in the period ahead Members will indeed be able to focus in a very practical way on the challenges ahead, recognise the need to get to substance quickly, since only in this way will 2015 be able to deliver in line with the expectations we have set for ourselves,” the Chair concluded.

KEY UPCOMING EVENTS

- [TPP Chief Negotiators Meeting](#), December 7–12, Washington D.C. (U.S.)
- [WTO General Council](#), December 10-11

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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