



AN OVERVIEW OF THE WTO NEGOTIATIONS ON AGRICULTURE

2025 Trade Outlook: Turbulence Ahead

“America’s Golden Age” began on January 20, 2025, with a series of executive orders, including a document titled *America First Trade Policy* outlining the US President’s actions on trade. President Trump emphasized that his administration would pursue trade and economic policies aimed at eliminating “destructive trade deficits.”

Trade would therefore be considered “a critical component to national security,” and as such, the US Secretary of Commerce, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the US Trade Representative (USTR) would work together to investigate the causes of the US’s large and persistent annual trade deficits in goods and recommend appropriate measures, including additional global tariffs or other policies to address those deficits.

One tool the new administration plans to use to reduce the U.S. trade deficit is the “Reciprocal Trade Act,” which would give the US the power to impose reciprocal tariffs if a country imposes higher tariffs on similar US products.

The Trump administration also plans to reevaluate the WTO’s *Government Procurement Agreement* (GPA) to ensure it is implemented in a way that favours American workers and manufacturers, as well as negotiate new trade deals, either bilaterally or with a group of like-minded countries. Jamieson Greer, Trump’s pick for USTR, has said he supports sectoral initiatives at the WTO.

WTO Mini-Ministerial

The WTO’s informal mini-ministerial meeting held on January 24, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, brought together 23 trade ministers to discuss current challenges and the organization’s priorities for 2025 and beyond.

Ministers declared their determination to preserve the multilateral trading system (MTS), but stressed the need to adapt WTO instruments and rules to current challenges in global trade. This means that while multilateral outcomes remain the preferred option, for many ministers, plurilateral initiatives, such as the Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs) on e-commerce and investment facilitation for development, are an important tool for the WTO to address today’s pressing challenges. For these ministers, plurilateral initiatives must be integrated into the WTO framework.

Other priorities include the need to launch substantive negotiations on agricultural trade with a view to achieving outcomes at the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) to be held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from March 26 to 29, 2026. Ministers also seek to re-establish a fully functioning dispute settlement system and advance work on trade and environmental sustainability initiatives.

COASS

The Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (COASS or the Negotiating Group on Agriculture) held an informal meeting on February 6, which was the last meeting of the current chair, Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy of Turkey. The WTO General Council (GC) will work actively to find a successor as soon as possible to ensure a smooth transition. In his speech, Ambassador Acarsoy took the opportunity to urge Members to push for results on agriculture at MC14.

Agriculture will be a key focus given its crucial role in Cameroon’s economy. Regular technical discussions between the African Group and the Cairns Group have been taking place since last fall and are expected to continue in 2025 to refine a set of modalities that could serve as a basis for negotiations. The Cairns and African Groups reiterated their intention to submit a modalities package for Members’ consideration before MC14.

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Given the critical importance of agriculture, Brazil called for “all hands on deck” to prepare for MC14, urging Members to negotiate with more creativity, boldness and flexibility, going beyond rigid red lines and fixed positions. The EU and several Cairns Group members also called for abandoning the “sequence” mentality, which prioritizes some issues over others. The EU suggested using the revised negotiating text submitted to the GC by Brazil in July 2024 as a starting point.

The US, for its part, has not outlined a clear path forward, other than expressing deep appreciation for Ambassador Acarsoy’s “tremendous dedication and hard work.” That said, on the same day, Jamieson Greer stressed during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Finance Committee that the US must “go and seek market access where things have been closed until now.”

“For many decades, we have had a trading system in which the United States continually opens its market, while others do not,” he said, citing India as an example. President Trump is expected to announce details of the “Reciprocal Tariff Act” by mid-February.

Geneva Watch is published monthly by Dairy Farmers of Canada, Chicken Farmers of Canada, Turkey Farmers of Canada, Canadian Hatching Egg Producers, and Egg Farmers of Canada to report on the various events occurring in Geneva, especially on agriculture.

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