

GENEVA Watch

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WTO NEGOTIATIONS ON AGRICULTURE



Refining the MC14 Agriculture Package

Following the January 30 meeting of the Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (CoASS), Members appear more optimistic – though still cautious – that a substantive outcome could be presented at the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, compared to expectations last year.

WTO officials report that discussions are proceeding in a pragmatic spirit, with Members seeking compromise solutions that move the negotiations forward. Food security has emerged as a central focus, with the objective of delivering tangible progress and a coherent package for Ministers' consideration in Yaoundé in March.

During the meeting, two new submissions were introduced by Indonesia and the African Group.

Roadmap on Food Security

Indonesia circulated a draft Ministerial Decision aimed at promoting food security and resilience within the multilateral trading system, including a proposed roadmap for post-MC14 work on food security and domestic support.

The roadmap outlines a structured and clearly sequenced approach to advancing agriculture negotiations after MC14, with the goal of achieving concrete deliverables by MC15. It envisages more intensive and focused engagement, organized around priority areas such as food security instruments, the development dimension of domestic support (including cotton), the trade-distorting effects of agricultural policies, and transparency and monitoring in global agricultural markets.

Under this framework, the CoASS would lead open and Member-driven consultations, building on proposals already submitted. Initial stages would concentrate on mapping positions, identifying areas of convergence, and consolidating texts, followed by a dedicated negotiation phase aimed at narrowing gaps and clarifying trade-offs.

The roadmap places strong emphasis on regular monitoring and review, with periodic progress reports to maintain transparency and momentum. It establishes a clear timeline, under which technical and negotiating work would be completed within six months following MC14, allowing adequate time for text finalization and enabling Ministers to consider and adopt outcomes at MC15.

Overall, the roadmap seeks to promote predictability, inclusiveness, and accountability, while supporting balanced progress across all pillars of the agriculture negotiations in pursuit of strengthened global food security.

The African Group Proposal

The African Group's communication is intended to contribute constructively to the agriculture negotiations and to facilitate meaningful progress beyond MC14. It brings together elements that could

form the basis of a potential compromise text, drawing on ideas and proposals previously submitted by other Members and groups.

The submission also provides more concrete direction on several outstanding issues in the negotiations including domestic support and market access.

Domestic Support

On domestic support, the proposal calls for intensified negotiations aimed at achieving substantial and progressive reductions in trade-distorting support. It highlights the need for fairness and equity by prioritizing the most distortive forms of support, while maintaining special and differential treatment for developing countries.

The proposal also suggests interim and exceptional flexibilities for developing Members experiencing severe food crises, including temporary scope to exceed existing product-specific de minimis limits. This work is intended to feed into possible modalities and tangible outcomes for consideration at MC15 and beyond.

Market Access

Regarding market access, the submission emphasizes the importance of focused technical work to address long-standing structural distortions in agricultural trade. This includes simplifying tariffs through the conversion of non-ad valorem duties, addressing tariff escalation, and introducing disciplines on very high tariffs and tariff peaks.

The aim is to enhance predictability and reduce distortions in agricultural markets, while fully reflecting development needs and special and differential treatment for developing countries. The results of this work would inform future negotiating modalities.

Negotiating Process and Roadmap

On process, the document underscores the need to reinvigorate the agriculture negotiations through an inclusive, transparent, and Member-driven approach. Negotiations should be organized around the established pillars and build on existing submissions to strengthen food security and development outcomes.

The proposed roadmap foresees regular reviews of progress by Senior Officials, including an assessment one year after MC14 and a further review six months ahead of MC15, with a view to enabling Ministers to take informed and substantive decisions.

Reactions

Many Members stressed the importance of ensuring that the time allocated to agriculture at MC14 is productive and focused on concrete outcomes. Some cautioned against asking Ministers to endorse overly detailed commitments in the absence of clear convergence among Geneva-based negotiators.

Others expressed openness to a Ministerial declaration articulating core principles related to trade, agriculture, and food security, while suggesting that the text could also incorporate process-oriented elements outlining the post-MC14 work programme and providing substantive guidance on key issues.

It was also noted that a high-level ministerial discussion aimed at identifying the underlying causes of the current impasse and exploring pathways to overcome it would, in itself, represent a meaningful step forward.

As the CoASS Chair, Ambassador Ali Sarfraz Hussain of Pakistan, emphasized: “I cannot overemphasize the urgency of making rapid progress if we are to finalize a workable draft text on

agriculture for ministerial consideration at MC14.”

The next CoASS meeting is provisionally scheduled for the end of the month, February 27.

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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