

GENEVA Watch

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WTO NEGOTIATIONS ON AGRICULTURE



MC14 Ends Without Breakthrough on Core Issues

The WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) concluded in the early hours of March 30, after Ministers extended negotiations by several hours in a final effort to bridge remaining differences on key matters. Despite the extra time, Members were ultimately unable to reach consensus on the major outstanding issues, leaving all politically sensitive topics unresolved.

Rather than delivering final outcomes in Yaoundé, Ministers agreed to continue the negotiations in Geneva, with the aim of securing progress by the next General Council meeting, expected around mid-May 2026.

Among the files requiring additional work are the draft Yaoundé Ministerial Declaration on WTO Reform and the accompanying post-MC14 work plan. According to trade sources, the US pushed for a more proposal-driven process that would allow Members to table concrete submissions and clarify possible pathways forward.

In his closing remarks, the MC14 Chair outlined a series of indicative milestones, noting that progress reports will be submitted to the General Council in July 2026 and December 2026, July 2027 and December 2027, with senior officials joining the process as needed. The roadmap also foresees at least one mid-term review ahead of the 15 Ministerial Conference (MC15), scheduled to take place in Saudi Arabia in 2028.

Agriculture: Ministers Fall Short of a Decision

Ministers were also unable to agree on the draft agriculture decision circulated on March 16, 2026, despite sustained efforts to narrow gaps in the final hours.

In an attempt to unlock the negotiations, the US tabled a late compromise proposal reaffirming the central role that the Agreement on Agriculture has played since 1995 in supporting agricultural trade and global food security.

Acknowledging the limited progress achieved across several negotiating pillars and the persistent divergences over negotiating approaches, Washington proposed that Members commit to “revitalizing the agriculture negotiations on the basis of Members' contributions, including proposals on possible new approaches.”

India subsequently circulated its own text, emphasizing that any future approach must remain firmly anchored in existing mandates. Its proposal calls for continued work towards a permanent solution on public stockholding (PSH), a special safeguard mechanism (SSM), and cotton, with the objective of securing balanced, development-oriented outcomes by MC15.

India also stressed the need to tackle structural inequities in domestic support, including through the elimination of Final Bound Total AMS (FBTAMS) entitlements, which it argues distort the level playing field in global agriculture.

Emerging Agricultural Trade Issues: Dialogue to Continue

Separately, the co-sponsors of the Dialogue on Emerging Agricultural Trade (EAT) Issues agreed to continue open-ended, evidence-based discussions aimed at fostering a shared understanding of emerging trends affecting agricultural markets.

The dialogue is intended to remain neutral and fact-based, while taking into account sustainable development objectives, the diversity of agricultural systems, and the varying production realities and development needs across the membership.

Participating Members plan to convene a mid-term retreat in March/April 2027, followed by a final retreat ahead of MC15, in order to assess progress, consolidate lessons learned, and prepare a report for Ministers at MC15 in consultation with WTO Members as appropriate.

Investment Facilitation Gains Momentum Despite One Holdout

One of the more notable developments at MC14 came on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD). During the dedicated ministerial session on March 28, 165 out of 166 WTO Members supported the proposed ministerial decision to integrate the Agreement into the WTO legal architecture as an Annex 4 plurilateral agreement. India remained the sole Member opposing the move.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh's accession brought the total number of participants in the Agreement to 129 Members, further reinforcing momentum behind the initiative. Participating Members also reaffirmed their intention to continue exploring practical pathways for effective implementation.

As WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala noted, the objective is to build “a more agile WTO that can seize opportunities and move nimbly to deliver benefits for people and businesses around the world,” describing the IFD Agreement as an important step in that direction.

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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Legal Deposit: National Library of Canada, ISSN 1496-9254

