

GENEVA Watch

AN OVERVIEW OF THE WTO NEGOTIATIONS ON AGRICULTURE



Towards an Agricultural Package at MC14?

The Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (CoASS) held on November 21 offered the Chair of the agriculture negotiations, Ambassador Ali Sarfraz Hussain (Pakistan), an opportunity to voice cautious optimism regarding the potential for shaping an agricultural package for the upcoming 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

While no consensus has yet emerged on the precise contents of this package, the meeting produced several proposals broadly welcomed by Members, laying the groundwork for future negotiations. Ambassador Hussain is expected to convene another CoASS session on December 8, ahead of the December 16-17 General Council where topics to be brought to Ministers will be finalized. Members were urged to quickly formalize their proposals to enable structured progress.

Among the key suggestions:

- Domestic support reform: The Cairns Group and African Group reaffirmed their alliance through a joint proposal aimed at limiting trade-distorting domestic subsidies – a first step toward broader agriculture reform.
- Public Stockholding (PSH) and Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM): G-33 Members renewed calls for text-based negotiations towards a permanent solution on PSH. Several developing countries underscored its urgency for food security.
- Market access: Agricultural exporters, including Mercosur countries (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), acknowledged productive consultations and are refining their proposal to improve market access, pushing for a realistic step forward on this topic at MC14.
- Export restrictions and transparency: Food-importing countries advocated stronger WTO rules on export restrictions to improve transparency and predictability in food markets. A paper on this issue is also expected soon.
- Food security deliverables: Some Members suggested MC14 could include targeted outcomes to support vulnerable economies, especially least-developed countries (LDCs), in addressing food security and livelihood challenges.

Although Members are converging on some technical aspects, underlying divisions remain significant. Calls for reform are more urgent than ever – fueled in part by the disruptive impact of the Trump administration's tariff-centered trade strategy, which weakened trust in the multilateral system.

The current momentum reflects a shift in mindset: there is widespread recognition that MC14 must not be a symbolic event but a launching point for meaningful WTO reform, which according to some should also include a work programme in agriculture. However, the variety of interests – ranging from subsidy reform to market access to food security – could lead to a diluted outcome unless the political will materialize. The challenge for MC14 will be to reconcile ambition and feasibility by first crafting a WTO reform program that is balanced and politically feasible.

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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