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**Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Agriculture**

**REPORT ON IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE**

(APPROVED¹ ON 1 NOVEMBER 2023)

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report has been prepared at the request² of the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG). On 30 June 2023, the CTG Chair held a meeting with the Chairs of subsidiary bodies, at which they were requested to submit reports to the CTG no later than in the first week of November 2023 reflecting improvements made in the functioning of their respective bodies since the conclusion of MC12.

1.2. Current discussions on the issues relating to the functioning of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) commenced in October 2022 with the request from the CTG Chair to Chairs of CTG subsidiary bodies to submit reports on the functioning of respect bodies. The CoA Chairperson's report on the functioning of the CoA is contained in [G/AG/W/229-G/L/1470](#) dated 9 December 2022. Based on the reports submitted by the CTG subsidiary bodies, including the CoA, the Secretariat circulated a matrix³ containing an overview of comparable and quantifiable elements across the various reports. The CoA has since taken up this matter regularly at its informal and formal meetings.

1.3. Several Members acknowledged that the CoA was a highly efficient body and credited the Secretariat for supporting its work. In this regard, Members recalled the several improvements, including the launch of the [Agriculture Information Management System \(AG-IMS\)](#)⁴, which had been introduced over the years in the work and mechanics of the Committee pursuant to the 2009-2011 work programme⁵ to improve transparency and timeliness and completeness of notifications launched pursuant to a communication to this effect from the then Chairperson of the General Council to the Chairs of all WTO Councils and Committees. The Secretariat note [G/AG/GEN/206](#) dated 21 September 2022 describes the improvements introduced over the recent period towards the efficient organization of the CoA's work and its digital tools and documentation practices.

2 PROCESS AND PROPOSALS

2.1. The Committee undertook discussions on its functioning regularly at its informal and formal meetings in 2023:

- a. Members had an initial exchange of views on this topic at the informal CoA meeting on 13 March⁶ based on a joint submission [JOB/AG/238/Rev.1 and other symbols](#)⁷;
- b. At the informal CoA meeting on 27 March⁸ and the formal CoA meeting on 27-28 March⁹, Members identified three specific elements dealing with i) training and assistance to

¹ Through a written procedure ([RD/AG/121](#) refers).

² See documents [JOB/CTG/29](#), [JOB/CTG/33](#) and [JOB/GC/345/Add.1](#).

³ [G/C/W/824/Rev.1](#).

⁴ <https://agims.wto.org/>.

⁵ Annex 6 of [G/AG/R/55](#) refers.

⁶ Annex 4 of [G/AG/R/105](#).

⁷ The latest revision of this document is contained in [JOB/AG/238/Rev.3 and other symbols](#).

⁸ Annex 3 of [G/AG/R/105](#).

⁹ Section 3.3 of [G/AG/R/105](#).

agriculture delegates on the work of the CoA; ii) role of existing digital tools ([Agriculture Information Management System \(AG-IMS\)](#)) and iii) scheduling of meetings;

- c. At the informal CoA meetings on 6 June¹⁰ and 27 June¹¹, Members specifically considered matters related, *inter alia*, to i) a 'style manual' containing an explanation of the different types of the CoA document symbols; ii) linkage between the Q&A AG-IMS database of the CoA and a house-wide STC database; and iii) deadlines for the submission of questions and closure of CoA agenda. Some cross-cutting suggestions such as the use of interactive meetings calendars and annotated agenda also came up in the discussions;
- d. In light of the discussions on this matter in the Committee, including based on written submissions¹², the Secretariat, in consultation with the CoA Chairperson, prepared a tabular summary of various suggestions and proposal along with some practical suggestions on the matters raised for Members' consideration (initially in Annex 1 to [ICN/AG/2](#), later revised in [RD/AG/111](#) dated 16 June 2023)¹³;
- e. At the formal meeting of the CoA on 27-28 June, the Committee approved the use of an annotated agenda for its meetings along the draft circulated by the Secretariat in [RD/AG/112](#)¹⁴;
- f. The issue of existing deadlines for raising and responding to questions again came up in the discussions at the informal CoA meeting on 27 September.¹⁵

2.2. In the context of ongoing discussions among Members on the existing deadlines for raising and responding to questions under the Committee's working procedures, the Secretariat circulated the "reminder airgram"¹⁶ for the November 2023 Committee meeting one week earlier than the usual circulation timeline of 4-weeks prior to Committee meetings.

2.3. Improving transparency and efficiency of the Committee's work is an ongoing task. Discussions on the transparency and efficiency of the Committee have taken place routinely in its informal meetings for some years. Members intend to continue their deliberations on these matters in the Committee.

3 IMPROVEMENTS ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRILCUTRE

3.1. As a result of the discussions described in Section 2 of this report, the following 9 improvements¹⁷ have been agreed to be implemented to enhance the functioning of the Committee.

¹⁰ [ICN/AG/2](#) and [ICN/AG/2/Corr.1](#) and Annex 4 of [G/AG/R/106](#).

¹¹ [ICN/AG/5](#) and Annex 5 of [G/AG/R/106](#).

¹² [JOB/AG/238/Rev.1](#) and [JOB/CTG/26/Rev.1](#).

¹³ Please refer to [G/AG/R/105](#) (paragraphs 3.59-3.60 and Annexes 3 and 4) and [G/AG/R/106](#) (paragraphs 4.37-4.38 and Annex 5) and G/AG/R/107 (to be issued).

¹⁴ Paragraph 4.38 of [G/AG/R/106](#).

¹⁵ [ICN/AG/8](#) and G/AG/R/107 (to be issued).

¹⁶ The CoA "reminder airgram" contains, among other things, the date(s) of the upcoming Committee meeting, a list of notifications issued since the previous Committee meeting, and the deadline for the submission of questions or other items on the agenda of the meeting.

¹⁷ The list doesn't include some improvements being introduced as a Secretariat-wide exercise. The CoA and CoA SS Secretariat have, for example, commenced efforts to gradually shift to the E-registration system to eventually substitute their current delegate mailing lists. The current mailing list of Ag-Attachés will be maintained during the transition period.

General area	Improvements in the functioning of the Committee on Agriculture
A. Assistance to delegates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular introductory sessions on the functioning of the CoA: starting November 2023, the Secretariat will organize an annual introductory session on the functioning of the Committee for the new Geneva- and capital-based agriculture delegates in a hybrid setting. • Development of a delegate manual on how to prepare and follow CoA meetings: the Secretariat has updated the Committee webpage to provide at one place all necessary information and explanation as well as links to CoA documents to facilitate delegates' participation in CoA meetings. The Secretariat, in collaboration with the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA), is developing a delegate manual on CoA participation. • Updated guidance to support the effective use of the AG-IMS system: some user manuals have been made available under the "Help" tab of the AG-IMS. The Secretariat is working to develop additional training materials on AG-IMS.
B. Conduct of formal meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of an annotated agenda: at the formal meeting of the CoA on 27-28 June 2023, the Committee approved the use of an annotated agenda for its meetings along the draft circulated by the Secretariat in RD/AG/112. • Inclusion of hyperlinks to download referenced documents in documentation: this practice has been implemented in all CoA documents to the extent possible.
C. Conduct of informal meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of ICN document symbols to convene informal meetings: the Secretariat has commenced using the ICN/AG/ series for releasing the convening notices of informal meetings. • Circulation of Chair's reports on informal CoA meetings in advance of the formal meeting: Chair reports on Informal CoA meetings have started to be shared with Members in advance. When Informal CoA meetings were held almost in continuum with a formal meeting, an attempt is been made, as practicable, to ensure that Members receive a copy of Chair's report on the Informal at the moment it is presented at the formal meeting.
D. Digital tools used by the Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG-IMS enhancements: the Secretariat introduced two enhancements to the AG-IMS in 2023, namely, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Export Competition Questionnaire (ECQ) on-line tool enabling online submission of Members' responses to the ECQ and online data extraction and reporting functions; and ii) first tranche of the Domestic support database allowing extraction of reports on the three 'exempt' domestic support categories, namely the Green Box, Article 6.2 development programmes, and the Blue Box, both in the notified currency and in USD.