

**Council for Trade in Goods  
Committee on Agriculture****REPORT ON THE CURRENT FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE****REPORT TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS  
BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE**

The following report has been prepared under the responsibility of the Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture, Mr Marcel Vernooij of the Netherlands, at the request of the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods<sup>1</sup>. Improving transparency and efficiency of the work of the Committee is an ongoing task. Members intend to continue their deliberations on these matters in the Committee next year.

**1 PAST EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**

1.1. The Committee on Agriculture (CoA) launched a work programme in 2009 in response to a communication<sup>2</sup> by the Chairman of the General Council to the Chairs of all WTO Councils and Committees to examine ways to improve transparency and notification compliance in their respective bodies. While the main thrust of the Committee's work programme<sup>3</sup> remained on improving the timeliness and completeness of agriculture notifications, important changes were also introduced for the preparation and dissemination of Committee documents. The work programme conducted during 2009-2011 also included elements on the development of digital tools and data systems to improve Members' accessibility to Committee's information, including the questions and answers (Q&As) considered in the review process. Pursuant to the discussions under the work programme, the Secretariat commenced the project for the development of an Agriculture Information Management System (AG-IMS)<sup>4</sup> starting with the development of a module on the CoA review process (Q&A). Later on, an additional feature was added to the AG-IMS allowing Members to submit agricultural notifications electronically. A recent note by the Secretariat in document G/AG/GEN/206 dated 21 September 2022 describes the improvements introduced over the recent period towards the efficient organization of the Committee's work and its documentation practices.

**2 CURRENT STATUS OF COMMITTEE PRACTICES****2.1 Assistance to delegates**

2.1. The Secretariat regularly organizes presentations and information sessions in the margins of CoA meetings, including during informal meetings of the Committee. These presentations and information sessions routinely explain the main functions (as well as the recent enhancements) of the Agriculture Information Management System (AG-IMS) covering both the Q&A function and the online submission of agricultural notifications. Also as a result of the 2009-2011 work programme discussions, the Secretariat, since 2009, has regularly delivered Geneva-based advanced agriculture notification workshops to provide training to government officials on the preparation and analysis of agriculture notifications. Recent editions of the notification workshop have also focused on the work of the Committee, especially the review process, in response to call by Members for a more diversified participation of Members, especially of developing country Members, in the work of this Committee.

<sup>1</sup> See document JOB/CTG/18.

<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 72 of G/AG/R/54 refers.

<sup>3</sup> Annex 6 of G/AG/R/55 refers.

<sup>4</sup> <https://agims.wto.org/>.

## 2.2 Organization of Committee work

### 2.2.1 Digital tools used for Committee work

2.2. The idea to develop a data-system overseeing the Committee's review process as well as the online submission of agriculture notifications had been actively explored during the 2009-2011 work programme of the Committee. In the very early stage of discussions on the work programme, the then Chairperson, based on his consultations, had noted that *"Members continued to accord the highest priority to the development of a database on specific implementation-related concerns raised since 1995 during the Review Process"* and had encouraged Members with experience in building such databases to contact the Secretariat for an initial exchange of ideas.<sup>5</sup> Starting from that early conversation to the finalization of the AG-IMS and its routine enhancements, the Secretariat has regularly consulted the Membership, including via the regular CoA briefings, in the design, development and regular enhancements of the AG-IMS.<sup>6</sup> The AG-IMS has remained a dynamic tool which could adjust and improve based on evolving needs.<sup>7</sup> Most of the enhancements introduced to the AG-IMS seek to implement the suggestions made by Members in the CoA formal and informal discussions.

2.3. Section 4.3 of the CTG Chair's report in JOB/CTG/16 refers to three specific examples of 'digital tools', namely the e-agenda, trade concerns database and notifications portal, as being already used by some Committees. The AG-IMS with its Q&A and on-line notification facilities integrates in it all these three specific elements. The AG-IMS Q&A facility hosts all written questions raised prior to a Committee meeting under the review process, which are then discussed at the corresponding Committee meeting. All responses and Members' follow-up comments are also subsequently hosted on the AG-IMS.<sup>8</sup> The AG-IMS automatically notifies via a standardized e-mail message the questioning and answering Members whenever a question or answer has been submitted through the AG-IMS. All historical record of the Committee's review process since 1995 conducted prior to the launch of the AG-IMS has also been populated on the AG-IMS Q&A facility which could be searched, *inter alia*, by meeting number, questioning or responding Members and numerous thematic possibilities and key words organized by notification types and agricultural pillars or areas (e.g. market access, domestic support, export competition, export restrictions) as well as topics and agricultural products concerned. The on-line agriculture notification system was later integrated into the AG-IMS in end-2019 since when Members could submit their agriculture notifications through the AG-IMS portal.<sup>9</sup>

2.4. Some important contributions of the AG-IMS for an efficient conduct of the Committee's work and review process, including the recent enhancements<sup>10</sup> it has incorporated, can be found in section 3 of G/AG/GEN/206.

### 2.2.2 Planning and organization of meetings

2.5. At the last yearly meeting of the Committee (usually in November), the Secretariat informs Members about the scheduled dates of formal Committee meetings for the upcoming year. The dates announced during the meeting are then also included in an official document circulated in the G/AG/GEN<sup>11</sup> series. In light of recent consultations by the Chairperson of the CTG on the scheduling of the meetings of the CTG subsidiary bodies, and to avoid a potential overlap with a meeting of another CTG subsidiary body, the dates of the CoA meetings are accordingly determined in consultation with the CTG Secretariat. Informal CoA meetings may be convened by the Chair to address some specific matters on the Committee's agenda.

<sup>5</sup> Paragraph 41 of G/AG/R/57 refers.

<sup>6</sup> Refer for example to Paragraphs 24 a) of G/AG/R/67/Rev.1, 11 of G/AG/R/68, and 2.22 of G/AG/R/69.

<sup>7</sup> There is, for example, an ongoing AG-IMS extension project on Export Competition Questionnaire (ECQ) which would enable online replies to the ECQ and online data extraction and reporting.

<sup>8</sup> Submission on questions and answers to the AG-IMS is done via the password-protected AG-IMS interface. Questions and answers, once submitted, become accessible to all Members and the public.

<sup>9</sup> Section 2.8.1 of G/AG/R/93 refers.

<sup>10</sup> As a part of recent enhancements, the system now allows a Member to join or co-sponsor a question already raised by another Member. This feature has the potential to improve and widen the participation of Members, especially developing country Members, in the Committee's Review Process. An increasing trend in the number of jointly-raised or cosponsored questions has already been evident over recent Committee meetings

<sup>11</sup> The meetings for 2023 are contained under G/AG/GEN/212.

### 2.2.3 Formal meetings

2.6. Pursuant to its working procedures<sup>12</sup>, the Committee meets three to four times a year, usually in the months of March, June, September, and November. The working procedures also allow for special meetings to be convened.<sup>13</sup>

2.7. A typical cycle of a Committee meeting entails five stages: Reminder airgram, Advance questions, Convening airgram, Committee meeting, Summary report. These stages are described below. Section 2 of G/AG/GEN/206 provides additional information on the Committee's latest documentation practices and other organizational and procedural improvements organized around each of these five stages.

#### 2.2.3.1 Communication before meetings

2.8. While the Committee's working procedures do not specifically provide for it, about four weeks prior to each Committee meeting, the Secretariat issues a "reminder airgram" which 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.

#### 2.2.3.2 Number of meetings

2.9. A total of 14 formal meetings took place from 2019 to 2022. Most formal meetings were preceded by half-day informal CoA meetings to prepare the formal meetings. A number of information sessions, workshops and symposiums were organized in the margins of the Committee meetings as indicated in the table below.

**Table 1: Number of formal and informal meetings**

Year	Meeting Number	From	To	Duration Formal	Duration Informal	Other (workshops, symposia, etc.)
2019	90	26/02/2019	27/02/2019	2	0.5	26 February <a href="#">U.S. 2018 Farm Bill overview — Country policy presentation by the United States/</a> <a href="#">The future of CAP and the shift towards performance — Country policy presentation by the European Union</a>
2019	91	25/06/2019	26/06/2019	2	0.5	26 June <a href="#">Information session on international food aid</a> 27-28 June <a href="#">Symposium on the role of trade in the global agri-food system</a>
2019	92	30/10/2019	31/10/2019	2	0.5	2 December <a href="#">CoA transparency information Session</a>
2020	93*	28/07/2020	28/07/2020	1	0	28 July <a href="#">Information Session on Covid-19 and Agriculture</a>
2020	94 <sup>14</sup>	18/06/2020	18/06/2020	1	0	
2020	95	22/09/2020	23/09/2020	2	0.5	

<sup>12</sup> G/AG/1.

<sup>13</sup> This was, for example, the case when a special meeting of the Committee was convened in June 2020 in response to requests from Members to deliberate on the situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the state of international agriculture and food trade (G/AG/R/94 refers). This was the third such special meeting of the Committee since 1995.

<sup>14</sup> Special meeting of the Committee on COVID-19 and Agriculture.

Year	Meeting Number	From	To	Duration Formal	Duration Informal	Other (workshops, symposia, etc.)
2020	96	30/11/2020	01/12/2020	2	0.5	30 November CoA Transparency Information Session <a href="#">AG-IMS: Q&amp;A function</a> <a href="#">The value of the Committee on Agriculture: Mapping Q&amp;As to trade flows</a>
2021	97	29/03/2021	30/03/2021	2	0.5	29 March CoA Information Session "How to reply to the annual Export Competition questionnaire" <a href="#">Presentation by the WTO Secretariat</a> <a href="#">Annual examination process of the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition: Brazil's experience in brief</a>
2021	98	17/06/2021	18/06/2021	2	0.5	
2021	99	23/09/2021	24/09/2021	2	0.5	
2022	100	15/03/2022	16/03/2022	2	0.5	17 March <a href="#">CoA@100</a>
2022	101	27/06/2022	28/06/2022	2	0.5	
2022	102	14/09/2022	15/09/2022	2	0.5	14 September <a href="#">Agricultural policy monitoring and evaluation, 2022</a> <a href="#">OECD-FAO Agricultural outlook 2022-2031</a>
2022	103	21/11/2022	22/11/2022	2	0.5	22 November IMF presentation on the Food Shock Window under the Fund's Emergency Financing Instruments <a href="#">G/AG/GEN/211</a>

\* This meeting, originally scheduled for 24-25 March 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 2.2.3.3 Preparation of Airgrams and Agenda

2.10. The biggest share of substantive agenda of a CoA meeting is conducted based on a question-and-answer (Q&A) process. Members pose advance questions on specific notifications, matters relevant to the implementation of commitments under Article. 18.6 of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), and the follow-up to ministerial decisions agreed under the negotiations. The working procedures require Members to submit advance written questions under the review process prior to the release of the draft agenda (or the convening airgram) which is circulated 10-days prior to the date of the meeting. As indicated above, the Secretariat informs Members about the deadline for posing questions prior to each Committee meeting by way of a reminder airgram.<sup>15</sup>

2.11. All questions received by the deadline for a Committee meeting are compiled by the Secretariat in a single document<sup>16</sup> to facilitate the conduct of the review process. The document also contains hyperlinks using the question AGIMS-IDs identifiers allowing access to available up-to date responses to the questions raised through the AG-IMS. In order to facilitate an efficient conduct of discussions on issues raised, the document organizes these questions by thematic areas and also includes annotations and key-words to those questions based on their content.

<sup>15</sup> The deadline for submitting questions is also published on the AG-IMS ([agims.wto.org](http://agims.wto.org)).

<sup>16</sup> Issued in the G/AG/W/ series.

2.12. The convening airgram of a Committee meeting is issued usually 10 days prior to the date of the meeting. The main items of the Convening airgrams are standardized (e.g. matter relevant to the implementation of commitments under Article 18.6 of the AoA, notification subject to advance questions, overdue notifications, etc), the specific issues raised under each of those standardized agenda items for a meeting are itemized in a detailed attachment to that meeting's convening airgram. Table 2 below indicates the timelines of circulation of reminder and convening airgrams in respect of the CoA meetings held in 2019-2022.

**Table 2: Preparation of Airgrams and Agendas**

Year	Meeting No.	Date of CoA meeting	Reminder Airgram Date	No. of days before meeting	Convening Airgram Date	No. of days before meeting
2019	90	26/02/2019	25/01/2019	32	15/02/2019	11
2019	91	25/06/2019	28/05/2019	28	14/06/2019	11
2019	92	30/10/2019	27/09/2019	33	18/10/2019	12
2020	93	28/07/2020	25/02/2020	154*	15/07/2020	13
2020	94	18/06/2020	19/05/2020	30	08/06/2020	10
2020	95	22/09/2020	21/08/2020	32	09/09/2020	13
2020	96	30/11/2020	30/10/2020	31	20/11/2020	10
2021	97	29/03/2021	26/02/2021	31	18/03/2021	11
2021	98	17/06/2021	17/05/2021	31	04/06/2021	13
2021	99	23/09/2021	23/08/2021	31	08/09/2021	15
2022	100	15/03/2022	15/02/2022	28	04/03/2022	11
2022	101	27/06/2022	25/05/2022	33	17/06/2022	10
2022	102	14/09/2022	15/08/2022	30	05/09/2022	9
2022	103	21/11/2022	26/10/2022	26	11/11/2022	10

\* This meeting, originally scheduled for 24-26 March 2020, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### 2.2.3.4 Distribution of documents prior to meetings

2.13. Along with the Convening airgram, the following documents are released: i) compilation of questions with suitable annotations as indicated above; ii) record of Members' compliance with notification obligations<sup>17</sup>; iii) compilation of outstanding responses to questions raised under the review process<sup>18</sup>. In addition to being accessible on Docs-on-line, the Secretariat shares these agenda documents with agriculture delegates and observer organizations by e-mail. A growing practice has been observed whereby Members submit responses to questions prior to the concerned meeting allowing for in-depth exchanges during the Review Process at the meeting. The information on Members' responses submitted in advance of the meeting as well as any additional submission by Members or observer international organizations are also released before the meeting. Section 2 of G/AG/GEN/206 contains additional details on Committee's organization of work and documentation practices.

#### 2.2.3.5 Communication after meetings

2.14. The day after the closure of the Committee meeting, the Secretariat distributes to Members a message containing information concerning the next meeting of the Committee, including circulation dates for the reminder and convening airgrams, and the deadline for submission of questions. At the same time, the AG-IMS is set up to receive questions for the next meeting of the Committee allowing a much longer advance notice for responding Members.

#### 2.2.3.6 Summary report of Meetings

2.15. The Secretariat prepares a summary report of each Committee meeting which is issued in the G/AG/R/ series. Based on the discussions among Members during the 2009-2011, the record of the Committee's discussions based on Q&A is no longer summarized in the Secretariat's summary reports. As of the March 2010 meeting, the Secretariat has circulated the compilation of responses

<sup>17</sup> In the G/AG/GEN/86 series.

<sup>18</sup> In the G/AG/W/204/ series.

separately as a formal document in the G/AG/W/ series. This Q&A-based discussion along with any follow-up exchanges is also hosted on the [AG-IMS](#), which Members may access directly in the System by inputting the ID number of the concerned question. The Secretariat's Summary Reports include this record by reference; it includes a tabular list of all questions raised during a meeting under various agenda items along with the relevant question ID numbers and the corresponding hyperlinks to access questions, responses and any follow-up exchanges.

2.16. As a part of the ongoing enhancement of the Q&A function of the AG-IMS, Members could download an up-to-date compilation of responses for a particular Committee meeting (in a formatted Word document) at any time directly through the password protected site of the AG-IMS ([Q&A function](#)). In light of this enhancement, and with a view to streamlining the Committee's documentation, the Secretariat, starting from the Committee meetings in 2019, issues a single 'annual' compilation of Q&A for all Committee meetings in a particular year in a G/AG/W/ series document.<sup>19</sup>

2.17. The table below shows the release date of summary reports of CoA meetings for the period 2019-2022.

**Table 3: Preparation of Summary Reports**

Year	Meeting Number	Last date of the formal meeting	Date of summary report	No. of days
2019	90	27/02/2019	12/04/2019	44
2019	91	26/06/2019	30/07/2019	34
2019	92	31/10/2019	29/11/2019	29
2020	93	28/07/2020	19/10/2020	83
2020	94	18/06/2020	17/08/2020	60
2020	95	23/09/2020	22/12/2020	90
2020	96	01/12/2020	04/02/2021	65
2021	97	30/03/2021	12/05/2021	43
2021	98	18/06/2021	13/07/2021	25
2021	99	24/09/2021	25/11/2021	62
2022	100	16/03/2022	12/04/2022	27
2022	101	28/06/2022	08/08/2022	41
2022	102	15/09/2022	31/10/2022	46
2022	103	22/11/2022	N/A*	N/A*

\* The 103<sup>rd</sup> CoA meeting concluded on 22 November 2022. The report of this meeting is under preparation.

## 2.2.4 Informal meetings

2.18. Informal meetings typically take place back-to-back with the formal meetings of the Committee. The date of the informal meeting is communicated as part of convening airmail. To deal with some matters, for example those subject to specific timelines, informal meetings are sometimes organized by the Chair in between Committee meetings. In all cases, a separate convening notice for the informal meeting is sent separately to Members with background information and proposed agenda to be discussed. The Chair provides a summary of discussions in informal meetings without attribution during the formal Committee meetings under the relevant agenda items. This summary is later annexed to the summary report of the relevant CoA meeting. The table below contains information on the scheduling of informal CoA meetings during 2019-2022.

**Table 4: Convening of informal meetings**

Year	Meeting No.	Date informal meeting	Date of communication email	No. of days before meeting
2019	90	25/02/2019	19/02/2019	6
2019	*	29/05/2019	24/05/2019	5
2019	91	24/06/2019	17/06/2019	7

<sup>19</sup> The annual compilation of responses to meetings in 2019, 2020 and 2021 are contained in G/AG/W/215, G/AG/W/216 and G/AG/W/218, respectively.

Year	Meeting No.	Date informal meeting	Date of communication email	No. of days before meeting
2019	92	29/10/2019	18/10/2019	11
2020	95	21/09/2020	15/09/2020	6
2020	96	30/11/2020	23/11/2020	7
2021	97	29/03/2021	22/03/2021	7
2021	98	17/06/2021	10/06/2021	7
2021	99	23/09/2021	16/09/2021	7
2022	*	02/02/2022	26/01/2022	7
2022	100	15/03/2022	09/03/2022	6
2022	101	27/06/2022	21/06/2022	6
2022	102	14/09/2022	06/09/2022	8
2022	*	11/10/2022	20/09/2022	21
2022	*	27/10/2022	14/10/2022	13
2022	103	21/11/2022	16/11/2022	5

\* These informal meetings were convened in between the regular committee meetings to discuss some specific timebound issues.

## 2.3 Substantive work

### 2.3.1 Thematic sessions

2.19. Thematic discussions are frequently held in informal CoA meetings based on suggestions and submissions by Members. Thematic discussions are also held, both in formal and informal settings, in response to tasks assigned to the Committee by higher bodies. The latter includes, for example, matters related to the follow-up to the Nairobi Decision on export competition or the Bali Decision on tariff rate quota (TRQ) administration. The Committee's working procedures also require it to undertake discussions on some specific matters. At its November meetings, the Committee undertakes annual monitoring exercise on the follow up to the Marrakesh NFIDC Decision and annual consultations under Article 18.5 of the AoA to review the normal growth of world agricultural trade in the context of export subsidy commitments.

### 2.3.2 Notifications

2.20. There is a total of 12 distinct notification requirements applicable in the domain of agriculture covering the following five areas: (i) Market access (Tables MA:1 to MA:5), (ii) Domestic support (Tables DS:1 to DS:2), (iii) Export subsidies (Tables ES:1 to ES:3), (iv) Export prohibitions or restrictions (Table ER:1), and (v) Follow-up to the Marrakesh NFIDC Decision (Table NF:1). The applicability of a notification requirement to a Member is largely dependent on the specific commitments it has assumed under the AoA. In many cases, a limited number of notification requirements will apply for a particular Member. Simultaneously, there are a few notification requirements especially in the area of agricultural subsidization (i.e. Tables DS:1 and ES:1) that apply to all WTO Members. Additionally, the Ministerial Decision on Export Competition<sup>20</sup> requires Members to provide information on export subsidies, export credit, export credit guarantees or insurance programs, international food aid and agricultural exporting state trading enterprises by replying to an export competition questionnaire (ECQ) contained in Annex to the Nairobi Decision. Since 2021, all Members have been required to reply to the ECQ following the expiry of the grace period pursuant to footnote 17 of the Decision.<sup>21</sup>

2.21. For several years the Committee has engaged in discussions on how to improve timeliness and completeness of notifications. In addition to organizing dedicated training events on notifications, the Secretariat has created numerous tools and training manuals to assist Members fulfil their agriculture notification obligation, including by hosting a dedicated transparency toolkit on the WTO website.<sup>22</sup>

### 2.3.3 Reports by the Secretariat

2.22. The Secretariat routinely prepares background documents for the Committee to support discussions under specific themes based on Members' request. Some of these documents include

<sup>20</sup> WT/MIN(15)/45 - WT/L/980.

<sup>21</sup> Section 4 of G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.47 refers.

<sup>22</sup> [WTO | Agriculture — members' transparency toolkit](https://agims.wto.org/) or user guides on <https://agims.wto.org/>.



background notes in the G/AG/W/32/ series to support annual consultations under Article 18.5 of the AoA, annual notes in the G/AG/W/42/ series to facilitate discussions on the follow up to the Marrakesh NFIDC Decision pursuant to Article 16.2 of the AoA, notes on TRQ administration and fill rates in the G/AG/W/183/ series and background notes in the G/AG/W/125/ series to support dedicated discussions on export competition.

#### **2.3.4 Participation by external stakeholders**

2.23. The following international intergovernmental organizations have regular observer status in the Committee: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Grains Council (IGC), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank. The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is also invited to CoA meetings on an *ad hoc* basis.

2.24. The Committee actively engages with other organizations, as necessary and appropriate, and has received numerous detailed submissions<sup>23</sup> from these organizations on specific issues, including on the COVID-19 pandemic and the recently launched deliberations on food insecurity.

#### **2.3.5 Work with other Committees or WTO bodies**

2.25. The Committee liaises with other relevant bodies on matters of common interest commonly through the Secretariat staff servicing those bodies.

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<sup>23</sup> Accessible in the G/AG/GEN/series.