

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

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REPORT (2011) ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE (REGULAR SESSION)

Report by the Chairperson

The present report on the regular meetings of the Committee on Agriculture held in 2011 is submitted on the responsibility of the Chairperson, Mr. Jonas Skei of Norway, as agreed by the Committee at its sixty-third session.

1. The Committee on Agriculture held three regular meetings on 31 March, 23 June and 29-30 September.¹ A further regular meeting is scheduled for 17 November 2011.

Review Process

2. In accordance with Article 18.1 of the Agreement on Agriculture ("the Agreement"), at each of its meetings, the Committee reviewed progress in the implementation of Members' commitments. This Review Process was undertaken on the basis of notifications submitted by Members in the areas of market access, domestic support, export competition, export prohibitions and restrictions as well as under the follow-up to the Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on NFIDCs. In total, 156 notifications were subject to review in 2011.

3. At each of its meetings, the Committee reviewed the overall position with respect to Members' compliance with their notification obligations under Article 18.2 and other relevant provisions of the Agreement. Specific concerns were raised regarding the outstanding notifications that a number of Members have yet to submit to the Committee. Documents showing the current status of compliance with notification requirements were circulated in the G/AG/GEN/86 series.²

4. Under the Review Process, the Committee also addressed a wide range of general and specific matters relevant to the implementation of commitments that were raised independently of notifications under the provisions of Article 18.6 of the Agreement.

5. In 2011, the Committee has been working intensely towards an agreement on an updated List of Significant Exporters for the purposes of the Table ES:2 requirement. Building on discussions held since 2010, the Chairperson circulated a draft revised list³ on 17 June 2011. In view of pending concerns, formal and informal discussions are on-going on procedural, technical and implementation

¹ The summary reports of these meetings are contained in documents G/AG/R/61, 62 and 63 (to be issued).

² See latest version in G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.7, dated 29 September 2011.

³ G/AG/W/82/Rev.1 refers.

aspects. In this context, a written request⁴ for exemption from notification obligations under the Table ES:2 format was submitted for the Committee's consideration.

6. Pursuant to Article 18.5 of the Agreement, the Committee will hold its annual consultation on Members' participation in the normal growth of world trade in agricultural products within the framework of the export subsidy disciplines during the forthcoming November 2011 meeting. A background note will be issued by the Secretariat to facilitate the discussions.⁵

Monitoring the Follow-up to the Ministerial Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs)

7. In accordance with the Committee's Decision⁶, Grenada, Maldives and Swaziland were included in the WTO list of NFIDCs at the March 2011 meeting of the Committee.⁷ The follow-up to the Ministerial Decision on NFIDCs will be monitored by the Committee at its November meeting. As is customary, that monitoring exercise will be undertaken on the basis of, *inter alia*, Table NF:1 notifications by donor Members, contributions by Members and observer organizations, as well as a background note to be prepared by the Secretariat.⁸

Implementation-related issues and concerns

8. The Committee maintained a standing item on its agenda relating to implementation issues, both in the framework of its follow-up to the Decision by the Doha Ministerial Conference on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns⁹, as well as in the framework of issues and proposals referred to it by the General Council. The *Compendium of Documents on Implementation-Related Issues*, consolidating information with respect to the work in the following areas of implementation, was updated¹⁰:

- (a) Article 10.2 of the Agreement on Agriculture: the development of internationally agreed disciplines to govern the provision of export credits, export credit guarantees or insurance programmes, taking into account the provisions of paragraph 4 of the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries;
- (b) Examination of Possible Means of Improving the Effectiveness the NFIDC Decision: food aid, technical and financial assistance in the context of aid programmes to improve agricultural productivity and infrastructure, and financing of normal levels of commercial imports of basic foodstuffs; and
- (c) Members' Addenda to their Table MA:1 notifications in accordance with paragraph 1.1 of the Decision of the General Council in WT/L/384 regarding the administration of tariff rate quota regimes in a transparent, equitable and non-discriminatory manner.

⁴ G/AG/W/85 refers.

⁵ G/AG/W/32/Rev.12, to be issued shortly.

⁶ G/AG/3 refers.

⁷ G/AG/5/Rev.9 refers.

⁸ G/AG/W/42/Rev.14, to be issued shortly.

⁹ Paragraph 2 of WT/MIN(01)/17 refers.

¹⁰ G/AG/W/70 series refer.

Best practices

9. As part of its work on "Best practices" for preparing and reviewing notifications under existing requirements and formats, the Committee on Agriculture continued focussing on the compilation of suggestions by Members contained in document G/AG/W/73/Rev.2. The Secretariat contributed to the discussion on technical aspects (referencing processes, whether within and across the three pillars) in order to explore ways in which some of the information needs could be partly addressed, hence facilitating the preparation and review of agriculture notifications.¹¹

China Transitional Review

10. At its sixty-third session, the Committee held its final Transitional Review under paragraph 18 of the Protocol on the Accession of the People's Republic of China.¹²

Technical assistance

11. As part of capacity building initiatives, a series of Workshops on Agriculture Notifications were held in 2011, targeting government officials having direct responsibility in the preparation of agriculture notifications. A joint IICA-WTO regional event took place in Costa Rica in April 2011 for 28 Spanish-speaking government officials. As provided for in the WTO's *Biennial Technical Assistance and Training Plan 2010-2011*, a second event was organized in Geneva on the side-lines of the 63rd regular session of the Committee, offering specialized training to 20 capital-based French-speaking government officials, nine of whom represented least-developed country Members. A third event will be held on the margins of the 64th regular session in November 2011 for English-speaking government officials.

Information systems on agriculture notifications

12. In response to Members' requests for improved access to notification-related information, the Secretariat launched the development of a comprehensive tool, the Agriculture Information Management System (Ag-IMS). The system will allow users to search and analyse (i) notifications submitted by Members in line with Committee procedures and formats; (ii) agriculture-related notified information; and (iii) questions raised and responses provided in the context of the Review Process carried out by the Committee on Agriculture. Furthermore, the system will enable the on-line submission of notifications as well as the on-line submission of questions and responses for the Review Process. Meanwhile, the datasets on information notified by way of Table MA:2, MA:5, DS:1 and ES:1 formats were regularly updated and made publicly available on the WTO website. In this context, a more comprehensive compilation of ad hoc recourse to volume- and price-based safeguards notified since 1995 was prepared to reflect additional details on trigger volumes, trigger prices, as well as cross-references to individual notifications. Copies were made available to delegations for verification purposes.

Observer status

13. The following international intergovernmental organizations have regular observer status in the Committee: the FAO, the IMF, the International Grains Council, the OECD, UNCTAD, the World Food Programme and the World Bank. The Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA) continues to benefit from *ad hoc* observer status on the basis of meeting-by-meeting invitations.

¹¹ G/AG/W/70/Rev.2/Add.1 refers.

¹² G/AG/27 refers.

14. At present, no consensus has been reached as regards requests for observer status by eleven other international intergovernmental organizations.¹³

Schedule of regular meetings in 2012

15. The Committee adopted the following schedule for its regular meetings in 2012: 21-22 March, 20-21 June, 26-27 September and 14-15 November.

¹³ G/AG/W/29/Rev.7 refers.