



**Work on international agricultural trade carried out by  
the international agencies during the period 2012-2017:  
The cases of the WTO and the ITC**

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## **1. Introduction**

IICA enjoys observer status with the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and hosts a WTO Reference Centre; hence, the partnership between the two entities (both of which focus on agricultural trade policy issues). IICA is also developing close ties with the International Trade Centre (ITC), as both institutions work with the business sector comprised of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) engaged in agriculture.

In view of the above, the main purpose of this document is to study the work on international agricultural trade of two agencies specializing in that thematic area with which IICA has strategic links: the WTO and the ITC.

It is important for members of the academic and business sectors, as well as officials involved in the areas of agricultural policy and the institutional framework for agriculture, to improve their knowledge of the international system with a view to influencing the handling of regional and national issues—e.g., through the construction of trade strategies and policies. To that end, this document provides an overview of recent trends in the work of international organizations in relation to two key issues on the global agenda: trade and agriculture.

The document begins by describing the nature and main characteristics of the two agencies, as well as the international agricultural trade topics that fall within their remits; it then goes on to highlight some of the most important actions undertaken for the government and business sectors of the international community and certain specific countries.

This document is intended to provide input for further academic research on the subject, and guide decision-making at the business and government levels with regard to technical cooperation for agricultural trade.

## **2. The work of the international organizations on the topic of agricultural trade**

A number of international organizations are currently involved in work on international agricultural trade. They include global agencies such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the WTO and the ITC. Working at the inter-American and regional levels are organizations such as IICA, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). This document focuses on the work of the WTO and the ITC in this field.

### **2.1. The WTO and agricultural trade**

#### **2.1.1. General considerations**

The WTO came into being in 1995 as the international organization responsible for the rules governing the exchange of goods and services between countries. Its work is carried out under a series of legal instruments, such as the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and the Agreement on Agriculture, among others. Its remit includes a wide range of topics related to its different agreements and rules on trade in services and goods. They include: negotiations; agriculture; trade facilitation; sanitary and phytosanitary measures; tariffs; subsidies; dispute settlement; intellectual property; development; technical assistance and training; trade agreements;

environment and climate change; e-commerce; gender (women and trade); and many others (WTO 2018a).

### **2.1.2. The WTO's work on agricultural topics**

Since the WTO was created in 1995, a raft of rules, standards and other provisions relating to a wide variety of agriculture-related issues have been introduced. The main body of provisions on agricultural trade is to be found in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), which governs trade in the goods included in chapters 1 to 24 of the Harmonized System, except for chapter 3 (fisheries). The agreement's provisions deal with three major types of measures applied to agribusiness trade: market access, domestic support and export subsidies.

In times past, public access to information and data on all topics dealt with by the WTO was restricted, especially with regard to meeting minutes and official documents. Today, however, it is possible to access not only official documentation but also studies, articles, publications, statistics and videos on the aforementioned topics via the website (<https://www.wto.org/index.htm>).

#### ***The WTO Committee on Agriculture: a forum for negotiation and monitoring***

The WTO's committees, which are responsible for monitoring compliance with the agreements and the negotiations, include the Committee on Agriculture (CoA)—on which this note focuses—and the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, in whose work IICA participates as an observer. It should be noted that special meetings of the member countries are held under the aegis of the CoA to negotiate matters stemming from the reform of agricultural trade that began with the Doha Round in 2001. At the 2013 Ministerial Conference in Bali, ministers took important decisions regarding agriculture; then, at the 2015 Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, they adopted the most important overhaul of international agricultural trade rules since the WTO was established, agreeing to eliminate export subsidies for agricultural products (WTO 2018b).

During special sessions of the CoA, the delegations representing the governments of the countries (ministries of economic affairs, trade or foreign affairs) engage with their counterparts to form alliances or negotiating groups such as the Cairns Group or G-33. The work of each country's delegation to the WTO's bodies and in the negotiating groups is constant; but the ministers who take part in the ministerial conferences are the ones who make statements or sign decisions and agreements on behalf of their country every two years, as they did in the aforementioned conferences in Buenos Aires, Bali and Nairobi.

Furthermore, the correct application of the AoA is monitored at each regular session of the Committee on Agriculture. The delegations from WTO member countries notify their counterparts of **measures for trade in agricultural goods** and discuss what they need to know about them. Notifications refer to three kinds of measures, known as "*the three pillars*", established in the AoA: **a) market access; b) safeguards; and c) domestic support**. This committee holds formal sessions three or four times a year. The WTO Committee on Agriculture thus has two main functions: the negotiating of rules for agriculture and the monitoring of the application of the Agreement on Agriculture.

### **2.1.3. WTO technical cooperation and information tools for the agricultural trade**

Since the adoption of the Doha development mandate in 2001, the WTO has undertaken trade-related technical assistance (TRTA) and training actions, key elements for development, as a

means to enhance the human and institutional capabilities of the beneficiaries, thereby enabling them to take full advantage of the multilateral, rules-based trading system.

The WTO’s Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) coordinates these actions. Part of the WTO Secretariat, its efforts are based on technical assistance and training plans (Technical Assistance Plans). The Committee on Trade and Development is the regular body tasked with supervising all the technical assistance activities carried out to meet specific regional needs—e.g., capacity creation or building for officials or academics with regard to agricultural trade agreements (WTO 2018c). Some examples of the technical assistance activities carried out are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Some WTO agriculture-related technical assistance activities for developing countries.**

| Period                | Region/countries                                                                                                         | TRTA programmed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2012-2013 (WTO 2018d) | Latin America and the Caribbean.                                                                                         | 7 workshops on the Agreement on Agriculture and the agricultural negotiations.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 2015-2016 (WTO 2018e) | Africa, Arab and Middle East countries, Asia and the Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Caucasus. | 20 activities on agriculture-related topics and agricultural notifications.<br>Joint TRTA with IICA: “ <i>IICA regional workshop on the Agreement on Agriculture and negotiations; and a national workshop on specific pertinent issues related to the facilitation of agricultural trade for El Salvador’s private sector.</i> ” |
| 2016-2017 (WTO 2018f) |                                                                                                                          | 20 in-person and online activities—focused on the application of agriculture agreements and SPS.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

Source: prepared by the authors with data from the WTO and IICA, 2018.

**Databases and information tools** are also part of the technical assistance for development that the WTO offers its Member Countries to meet various objectives, such as the notification and review of trade measures in agriculture, or to enable them to learn about the trade policy measures of other WTO members.

As shown in **Table 2**, the most important tools support the issuing and review of notifications on line, while others provide data on tariffs, non-tariff measures, agricultural subsidies, etc.



**Table 2. Databases and information tools related to agricultural trade**

| Platform / Countries covered                                                                                                                | Products covered                                                                                                                           | Function                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><u>Tariff Analysis Online</u></b> (TAO).<br>Covers: All WTO members.                                                                     | All.<br>HS Chapters 01-99                                                                                                                  | Users can consult and download data on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● tariffs applied at the tariff line level.</li> <li>● import statistics by country of origin.</li> <li>● specific agricultural commitments, such as export subsidies<sup>3</sup> and aggregate measurement of support (AMS).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b><u>I-TIP Portal</u></b><br>Covers: All WTO members.                                                                                      | All<br>HS Chapters 01-99<br><br>Services                                                                                                   | Access to databases on goods and services: trade monitoring; TAO; I-TIP Goods (non-tariff measures), air services, etc.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b><u>I-TIP Goods</u></b><br>Covers: All WTO members.                                                                                       | All.<br>HS Chapters 01-99                                                                                                                  | Users can consult and download tables of measures applied: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Sanitary and phytosanitary.</li> <li>● Antidumping; compensatory; and safeguards.</li> <li>● Agricultural: special safeguard; tariff-quota; and export subsidies.</li> <li>● Quantitative restrictions; state trading enterprises.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                        |
| <b><u>Regional Agreements</u></b> <sup>4</sup><br>Covers: All WTO members and some non-member countries with which they have trading links. | Goods and services                                                                                                                         | Trade agreements reported by WTO members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● RTA<sup>5</sup> database (regional trade agreements)</li> <li>● PRTA<sup>6</sup> database (preferential trade agreements)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b><u>Agriculture Information Management System (Ag-IMS)</u></b><br>Covers: All WTO members.                                                | Agriculture.<br>HS Chapters 01-24                                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information related to the Agreement on Agriculture.</li> <li>● Searches for and analyzes information notified by members related to agriculture, as well as the questions and answers under the review process of the Committee on Agriculture.</li> </ul> <p>For delegations of WTO Member Countries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Issuing of notifications</li> <li>● Questions and answers on line. (WTO 2018g).</li> </ul> |
| <b><u>Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS)</u></b><br>Covers: only the G-20 countries.                                             | Agriculture.<br>Wheat, maize, rice and soybeans, biofuels.                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● News about markets.</li> <li>● Statistics and indicators and monitoring of policies on certain products or trade measures such as biofuel tariffs and export subsidies.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b><u>Cotton Portal</u></b>                                                                                                                 | Cotton products.<br>Market intelligence for governments and enterprises of least developed countries that participate in the cotton chain. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Access to the notifications relating to these products.</li> <li>● News.</li> <li>● Trade statistics.</li> <li>● Non-tariff measures, market regulations, etc.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

Source: prepared by the authors using WTO data, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> The members eliminated export subsidies at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference. For more information, see the document *Tenth Ministerial Conference of the WTO: main agricultural outcomes and possible implications for the Americas*. Available for download at: <http://repositorio.iica.int/bitstream/11324/6024/2/BVE17099237i.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> **Regional agreements:** these are bilateral free trade agreements between individual countries or blocs of countries (geographical, political or economic groups).

<sup>5</sup> **RTA:** a set of rules used to regulate trade between countries or blocs of countries where the preferences are reciprocal— e.g., a free trade agreement or a customs union.

<sup>6</sup> **PRTA:** Based on differential, more favorable treatment for developing countries. They are agreements between a developed and a developing country or between developing countries, and the preference is unilateral; Canada's **General System of Preferences (GSP)** is a case in point.

## **2.2. The ITC and agricultural trade**

### **2.2.1. General considerations**

The ITC is a joint cooperation agency of the WTO and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), created in 1964 under the GATT. Its goal is to make businesses more competitive, speed up economic development and help developing economies and economies in transition to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by means of trade and the promotion of international business.

To achieve its objectives, the ITC focuses its efforts on priority geographical regions, including Latin America and the Caribbean, least developed countries (LDCs) and landlocked developing countries and small island developing states. It also prioritizes the following six areas of work:

- Providing trade and market intelligence to improve the competitiveness of SMEs.
- Supporting regional economic integration and South-South links.
- Connecting to value chains: competitiveness, diversification and integration of SMEs into export markets.
- Strengthening trade and investment support institutions.
- Promoting and mainstreaming inclusive and green trade.
- Building a conducive business environment (ITC, n/d a).

The ITC works mainly with four productive sectors, namely: manufactured goods (leather, textiles, clothing, creative industry, pharmaceutical materials); export services (tourism); environmental exports (organic products, biodiversity, climate change, green technologies) and food and agribusiness.

### **2.2.2. The ITC's work on agricultural topics**

The ITC's work related to agriculture mainly focuses on two subsectors: environmental exports and agribusiness trade. In the first case, it provides information about trade in organic products through publications, technical documents, articles and presentations. In the second, the ITC's actions focus on specific products such as fruits and vegetables, coffee, cocoa, cotton, fibers, spices, medicinal plants, floriculture and essential oils.

The work of supporting agriculture is concentrated geographically in the regions of Africa, the Caribbean and, to a lesser degree, Latin America and Asia. Table 3 shows the actions that the ITC carries out for each product of interest:

**Table 3. ITC actions related to agricultural products.**

| Products              | Main regions of work            | Actions carried out                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fruits and vegetables | Africa, the Caribbean           | - Development of strategic export plans.                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Coffee                | Africa, Latin America           | - Design of national export strategies.<br>- Programs for women's groups.<br>- Quality improvement projects.<br>- Institutional strengthening initiatives and market development and sustainability plans.<br>- Coffee exporter's guide and other documents. |
| Cocoa                 | Africa, the Caribbean           | - Cocoa: a guide to trade practices (2001).<br>- Research on the role of women in the cocoa sector.                                                                                                                                                          |
| Cotton                | Africa and Asia                 | - South-South cooperation across the cotton and clothing value chain.<br>- Promotion of African cotton in emerging countries in Asia.<br>- The Cotton Exporter's Guide provides a comprehensive view of all the aspects of the cotton value chain.           |
| Fibers                | Africa                          | - Document entitled "A Road Map for Jute," which establishes the challenges and opportunities for this industry.                                                                                                                                             |
| Spices                | Africa, the Caribbean           | - Strategic development plans, dealing with aspects across the chain, from production through to exporting.                                                                                                                                                  |
| Medicinal plants      | Africa, Asia, and Latin America | - Quarterly report devoted to medicinal plants and extracts, which focuses on supply and demand trends and indicative prices, among other information.                                                                                                       |
| Floriculture          | Africa, Latin America           | - Quarterly market report that includes prices, demand and supply trends, etc.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Oils                  | Africa                          | - Quarterly report on essential oils and oleoresins with key market information.<br>-                                                                                                                                                                        |

Source: prepared by the authors using information available on the ITC website, 2018.

The ITC's activities in the area of agricultural trade may involve working with farmers, exporters, importers, trade support institutions and policymakers, and providing them with training and advice.

### 2.2.3. ITC technical cooperation and information tools related to agricultural trade

In the area of technical cooperation, the ITC's work takes various forms, including projects, training, technical assistance, and networks of experts.

For some sectors of interest, national, regional and global projects are implemented with a variety of objectives. The sectors supported by means of projects include fruits and vegetables, coffee, cotton, spices and floriculture. The Centre also provides training and technical assistance to particular sectors by means of one-time activities, such as training programs for farmers, buyers, and government officials. At present, the ITC does not offer these services to all sectors. **Table 4** shows the sectors to which training and technical assistance can be provided.

**Table 4. ITC training and technical assistance actions for specific chains**

| Products              | Training and technical assistance                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fruits and vegetables | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Detailed strategic plans in which interested parties are given advice about the most suitable way to develop and improve the sector.</li> <li>- Training programs for farmers, buyers and public officials.</li> </ul>            |
| Coffee                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advisory services.</li> <li>- Training courses on the design of national export strategies, women's groups, quality improvement, institutional strengthening initiatives, market development and sustainability plans.</li> </ul> |
| Cotton                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Design of strategies for the sector.</li> <li>- Training programs.</li> <li>- Technology transfer, good agricultural practices and the development of high-yielding and resistant cottonseed varieties.</li> </ul>                |
| Fibers                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advisory services for producers and processing companies.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Spices                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training programs for farmers, buyers and government officials.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                        |
| Floriculture          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Formalized standard advisory services on cut flowers and ornamental plants.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                            |

Source: prepared by the authors using information available on the ITC website, 2018.

The ITC maintains contacts with international experts specializing in each product who can lend their services if required.

Furthermore, the ITC has made a series of market analysis tools available that provide statistical data on the exports and imports of more than 220 countries and territories. This makes it possible for users to gain a better grasp of the supply and demand trends for some 5300 products bought and sold on the international market (ITC, n/d. b).

Table 5 lists the five online market analysis tools developed by the ITC, which could be of use to agricultural enterprises in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**Table 5. Market analysis tools**

| Tool                      | Description                                                                                                                                                                                         | Access                                                                                         |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Trade Map                 | Facilitates indicators on export performance, international demand, alternative markets and competitive markets, as well as a directory of importing and exporting companies.                       | <a href="http://www.trademap.org">www.trademap.org</a>                                         |
| Market Access Map         | Provides information about customs tariffs, tariff preferences, tariff quotas, bound tariffs of WTO members, trade remedies, rules and certificates of origin, non-tariff measures and trade flows. | <a href="http://www.macmap.org">www.macmap.org</a>                                             |
| Investment Map            | Provides yearly data on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and a breakdown of data by sector and country. It helps companies identify countries in which to invest.                                    | <a href="http://www.investmentmap.org">www.investmentmap.org</a>                               |
| Trade Competitiveness Map | Includes a trade performance index, a national export performance index and national import profile, and a section on the consistency of trade statistics and technical notes on trade data.        | <a href="http://tradecompetitivenessmap.intracen.org">tradecompetitivenessmap.intracen.org</a> |
| Standards Map             | Provides information about the sustainability standards demanded by international buyers.                                                                                                           | <a href="http://sustainabilitymap.org">sustainabilitymap.org</a>                               |

Source: prepared by the authors using information available on the ITC website, 2018.

In addition, the ITC offers market information tools, such as the Market Insider, which provides information about essential oils and oleoresins, floriculture, fruit juices, spices, tropical fruits and vegetables, edible nuts and medicinal plants (<http://www.intracen.org/itc/market-insider/>); the program on non-tariff measures (NTMs), which identifies NTMs, collects information on official regulations related to the export and import of goods and conducts business surveys on NTMs; the Guide to Geographical Indicators, which provides hands-on advice to agri-business producers who are considering registering a geographical indication (GI); and a map of trade treaties, which registers multilateral trade treaties and instruments ([www.legacarta.net](http://www.legacarta.net)).

### **3. Conclusions**

International organizations such as the WTO and the ITC are responsible for providing the government and business sectors with the tools they need to play a bigger and better role in the international trading system.

The WTO has platforms for providing in-person and online technical assistance, as well as various workshops and courses that allow trade and agriculture ministry officials to gain a better understanding of the organization's rules in order to plan, administer and apply the measures that affect agricultural trade. This is important, because the government sector increasingly needs to work in tandem with the business sector, in an environment in which value chains are assuming greater importance.

It is also essential that micro, small and medium-sized agricultural enterprises receive support from intergovernmental organizations, so they can build the capacity to be more competitive in international trade, and take better advantage of the opportunities offered by integration into international markets.

The ITC provides technical assistance through projects, advisory services and training and market analysis tools, making it a key consultative institution for agri-businesses, a number of sectoral industries and public policymakers who require data and more criteria for informed decision-making.

Finally, the work of both the WTO and the ITC involves topics related to IICA's activities, making the strategic partnerships between these entities and their technical cooperation on trade more important. This is especially true of institutional and business capacity building to enable governments and companies to improve their participation in international forums and in trade and integration mechanisms that allow them to obtain greater benefits from international trade.

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