

Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)



# The WTO-IICA Reference Centre

*All our services are free and you can  
request them in person, or by phone or e-mail.*

# What is the WTO?

The World Trade Organization (WTO) was created in 1995 and is the international organization responsible for the global rules and standards (agreements) that govern trade among countries.

The WTO performs various functions:

- It seeks to liberalize trade.
- It is a forum that governments can use to negotiate trade agreements.
- It is a mechanism that governments can use to resolve their trade disputes.
- It implements a system of trade standards.

## Who belongs to the organization, and what purpose does it serve?

One hundred and fifty-seven governments are currently members of the organization. Membership is open to any country that wishes to join.

Its principal function is to ensure that trade flows circulate with the greatest possible fluidity, predictability, and freedom. The member countries sign agreements (contracts) designed to reduce the barriers to trade and thereby help the producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers carry out their activities. The countries' aim in doing so is to attain social, economic, and environmental objectives that will improve the quality of life of their peoples.



All major decisions are taken by all members (each country is represented by ministers or ambassadors). At the WTO, authority is not delegated to a board of directors or to the organization's chief executive. Decisions are usually adopted by consensus.



## What is a WTO Reference Centre (RC)?

It is a place that affords access to all the pertinent information about the WTO via the organization's website ([www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)) in a CD-ROM, printed, or digital format. It may be located at a governmental, academic, or private entity, and serve one or more countries, depending on whether the centre is national or regional.

## Where is the WTO-IICA Reference Centre located?

This centre operates out of the Venezuela Library, located at IICA Headquarters, in San Jose, Costa Rica.

## Whom does it benefit?

The WTO-IICA RC is a regional center that provides services to IICA's 34 Member States. It is open to individuals from the government, business, and academic sectors, and to members of the public.

## What products and services does it offer?

- **Personalized and specialized** guidance on issues related to the WTO and international trade in agricultural products.
- **Onsite consultation and lending of the most recent publications** on WTO-related topics, and the Venezuela Library's extensive collection on agricultural subjects.
- **Access to digital data, information, and other publications** on the WTO, international trade, and agriculture.
- **Organization of onsite or virtual information meetings** and sensitization sessions.
- **Specialized searches** in databases containing information about trade topics.
- **Preparation of market profiles** tailored to the specific needs of users.
- **Preparation of educational materials** on international agricultural trade within the framework of the WTO and IICA.
- **Onsite and virtual training** in the use of the WTO's databases and online courses.
- **Personalized research.**
- **Contact with specialists** in international trade and areas linked to agriculture, such as agricultural health, agricultural economics, policies, trade negotiations, and many more.

Anyone can read WTO publications and watch WTO videos at the Reference Centre or the Library. WTO materials are loaned out only to IICA staff members.

# Why were the Reference Centres created, and for what purpose?

All countries that are members of the WTO (or wish to join the organization) must comply with the rules they agree to observe in order to enjoy the benefits of international trade. However, some countries do not have sufficient resources to do so, or to do so properly.

The Reference Centers are one (of many) Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) tools with which the WTO provides its members. TRTA consists of a series of activities coordinated by the WTO's Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC). The objective of such activities is to help the least developed and developing countries, and transition economies, to operate successfully in the multilateral trading system (by meeting international trade standards). The issues covered include both trade policies and effective negotiation.

ITTC's main objectives are to assist countries to:

- Enhance institutional and human capacity in the field of trade;
- Address trade policy issues;
- Integrate more fully into the multilateral trading system;
- Exercise the rights of WTO membership;
- Fully participate in multilateral trade negotiations

# What do IICA and WTO have in common?

- Both are intergovernmental institutions: IICA works at the hemispheric level, and the WTO at the world level.
- IICA is an observer member of the WTO.
- Their work involves common issues, such as trade in agricultural goods and services, food security, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, intellectual property, market access, and the well-being of the inhabitants of their member countries, among others.
- They are international organizations with extensive experience whose activities have a major impact.
- They maintain close ties and have carried out joint activities during the last two decades.

## Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)



### *Sowing innovation to harvest prosperity*

The **Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA)** is the institution of the Inter-American System that provides technical cooperation, innovation and specialized knowledge to contribute to the competitive and sustainable development of agriculture in the Americas and to improve the lives of rural dwellers in the member countries.

IICA has a **Center for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture** whose remit is to help the countries develop a State vision for agriculture and equip them with tools for prospective analysis and strategic thinking.

IICA is an **observer member** of the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

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