

**Executive summary**

# **Study of technical cooperation actions related to trade policy for IICA member countries**

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**T**ransparency and adherence to WTO rules has become even more important in today's global context, in which countries are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of trade on the environment. Countries are implementing various economic and trade measures to respond to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, several countries in the Americas and around the world are struggling to provide complete, timely information on measures they are implementing and that could affect agricultural trade. For this reason, IICA conducted a study as part of its efforts to assist its member countries in meeting their notification obligations within the framework of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), as well as in improving their participation in the WTO Committee on Agriculture, which is responsible for reviewing compliance with these obligations and analyzing different measures applied to agricultural trade in areas related to market access, domestic support, and competition in the export of agricultural products.

***IICA conducted a study that identifies technical cooperation actions that could be undertaken to respond to the challenges, opportunities and needs of IICA and WTO member countries with respect to improving their participation in the multilateral trade system.***

IICA distributed a questionnaire to collect information on the fulfillment of notification obligations and participation in the Committee on Agriculture.

IICA then analyzed the information provided by the countries regarding the notifications they have submitted to the WTO and the importance of the agriculture sector in each country. Informal consultation processes with specialists in this area were also carried out to complement the information.

***IICA conducted a survey among personnel responsible for matters related to trade and agriculture in its member countries. Representatives from 15 countries responded to the survey.***

The main challenges that countries in the Americas face in meeting their agricultural notification obligations are: difficulties faced in collecting information for the notifications; the lack of specialized personnel; difficulties determining the measures or policies for which they must submit notifications; the complexity of the information regarding which they must submit notifications or the process of preparing notifications; and faulty coordination between national institutions. Furthermore, some authorities are unwilling to submit notifications (due to the sensitivity of the agriculture sector, among other reasons) and have erroneous perceptions regarding the sharing of information and the need to respond to questions about national policies.

***Inter-institutional coordination and political commitment towards the WTO on the part of high-level authorities have been the main success factors that have enabled several countries in the continent to successfully meet their notification obligations.***

### **What are notifications?**

Within the framework of WTO agreements, countries have an obligation to submit notifications or report on the policies and measures they implement in various areas. This requirement seeks to guarantee transparency, which is necessary to monitor compliance with rules aimed at fostering predictable, smooth trade.

Agricultural notifications are related to market access, domestic support, export subsidies, export prohibitions or restrictions and food aid. More information: [https://www.wto.org/spanish/tratop\\_s/agric\\_s/transparen-cy\\_toolkit\\_s.htm](https://www.wto.org/spanish/tratop_s/agric_s/transparen-cy_toolkit_s.htm)



Countries also face difficulties that hinder their participation in the Committee on Agriculture. These include: limited resources to fund the participation of experts at in-person meetings; the lack of specialized staff and the excessive workload of existing personnel in the relevant institutions; insufficient technical capacity to analyze the information provided by the Committee; faulty coordination between national institutions; and the lack of departments dedicated to WTO matters in the corresponding ministries.

***The adequate operation of WTO bodies, with full participation by both developing and developed countries, would guarantee the success of the multilateral trade system.***

The countries that responded to the survey recommended various actions that would enable them to improve their performance in both areas (submitting notifications and analyzing measures through their participation in the Committee).

The ability to make these improvements will depend greatly on the decisions made by their governments. Some of the recommendations are listed below:

- Provide personnel in the Ministries of Agriculture with training to prepare the information required by the WTO.
- Foster cooperation and the sharing of information between partner countries, particularly good practices and actions they have undertaken to overcome difficulties.
- Efforts undertaken at the regional level to monitor agricultural trade policies and better understand how they work and their impact.
- Foster joint, coordinated work between national institutions involved in these efforts, and increase awareness within the private sector of the importance of the Agriculture Committee as a forum for discussing policies that have an impact on their activities.



### The Committee on Agriculture

The Committee on Agriculture oversees the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture, providing WTO members with the opportunity to share information, ask each other questions about the notifications on agricultural policies shared by other members, and raise concerns about each other's agricultural policies. The Committee meets 3 to 4 times a year in Geneva, Switzerland, as well as virtually amidst the pandemic.

- Provide technical training and post-training support (between the WTO and IICA).
- Modernize existing learning tools and courses on trade policy.
- Strengthen the institutions responsible for preparing notifications and analyzing agricultural policies.

*The countries that responded to the survey considered that IICA plays a very important role in complementing the courses delivered by the WTO with a hemispheric vision, as well as in supporting bilateral negotiations involving countries in the region.*

Lastly, based on the analysis conducted, some ways in which IICA could cooperate were identified. IICA could:

- Organize national or regional training sessions and provide advisory support to address specific queries.
- Organize virtual information sessions before or after Committee meetings, to share information on the discussions and provide support in analyzing topics of interest. Additionally, IICA could prepare support documents (such as newsletters or information notes) and disseminate existing tools.



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