



Procedure for Meetings of the WTO Committee on Agriculture and Main Topics Addressed at the June 2013 Meeting

For the last two years, the Center for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture (CAESPA) of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) has prepared a bulletin after each meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agriculture Committee. This bulletin is intended to serve as a brief for IICA officers on the main topics addressed at these meetings¹.

The two main objectives of this bulletin² are to explain the organization of work and working procedures of the Agriculture Committee at meetings. Specifically, this bulletin outlines topics addressed at the Seventieth Regular Meeting held on 13 June 2013 in Geneva, Switzerland.

I. Role of the Agriculture Committee

The primary role of the WTO Agriculture Committee is to oversee the implementation of the Agriculture Agreement and to offer members the opportunity to consult on matters related to the implementation of their commitments. A member may also seek information regarding the development of agricultural policies in the other countries.

In fulfilling its oversight role, the Committee examines the implementation of the Agriculture Agreement and the commitments that WTO members assumed under the Uruguay Round. . The commitments, which are presented in list form and which are based on standards, are reviewed on the basis of notifications³ that members submit.

¹ Find out more about topics addressed in previous meetings, at <http://www.ica.int/Esp/Programas/AnalisisEstrategico/Paginas/Normativacomercial.aspx>

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³ The WTO defines notification as the obligation that applies to all Member countries, for purposes of transparency, to inform the competent authorities of the WTO about their trade measures, in the event that these may affect other Members.

IICA's representatives who are charged with attending these meetings, use the opportunity to coordinate activities for the work plan that IICA and the WTO devise each year, especially those activities that relate to technical training.

II. Meetings of the Agriculture Committee

Regular Meetings of the WTO Agriculture Committee are held annually in March, June, September and November⁴. Each meeting consists of two phases : a) a review process and b) issues of competence.

These are detailed as follows:

A. The Review Process

This first phase covers all issues related to the implementation of the Uruguay Round reform program, in accordance with paragraphs 1 and 2 of Article 18 of the Agriculture Agreement.

This phase is commonly referred to as the "review process", in which WTO member countries are given the opportunity to raise any issue relative to the application of commitments assumed under the framework of the Uruguay Round reform program established in the Agriculture Agreement.

The review process is undertaken based on the notifications⁵ submitted by members to the WTO to verify compliance with their commitments on agriculture. The steps in this phase are carried out in the following order:

- a. Those involving questions raised prior to the convocation notice of the meeting.
- b. Those that are under review and that have not elicited questions prior to the convocation notice of the meeting.
- c. Those that were distributed after the convocation notice of the meeting.
- d. Those raised in previous meetings that have been addressed bilaterally, providing information on the results in the event that the matter is of general interest.

⁴ Two meetings were held during the first six months of 2013, on 26 March and 13 June, respectively.

⁵ Notification requirements in the field of agriculture relate to the following five areas: a) market access for tariff and other quotas, and activation of special safeguards measures; b) domestic support in relation to the Total Aggregate Measurement of Support and the introduction of or notification about domestic support measures; c) export subsidies; d) export prohibitions or restrictions; and e) implementation of the "Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Program on Least Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries" (NFIDCs).

- e. Counter notifications, by means of which members may bring to the Committee’s attention any measure that, in their opinion, should have been reported by another member.
- f. Those relating to delayed responses to questions arising during the review process.
- g. Any country notifications still pending.

B. Other Issues of Competence

The second phase of the meeting deals with issues relating to the Committee’s scope of competence, as well as those issues related to the reports to be presented to other WTO bodies.

During regular November meetings, the Committee offers observer members (such as IICA) the possibility of raising any matters relating to the “Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Program on least developed and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs).⁶” In this particular case, since 2010, IICA has made three contributions on the “Marrakech Decision and food security.⁷”

III. Issues Addressed in the Seventieth Regular Meeting held in June 2013

Various issues were addressed in this meeting during the review process and while notifications were being reviewed, as indicated below:

A. Issues Addressed in the First Part of the Meeting: the Review Process

The table below shows the consulting countries, the countries consulted and the issues addressed.

Consulting country	Consulted country	Issue
United States	Brazil	Domestic support program ⁸ .
Canada	Brazil	Commercial and industrial policy.
New Zealand	Canada	Policy governing dairy products.

⁶ This decision is available at: http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/35-dag_e.htm

⁷ These contributions can be found in the WTO database in English, French and Spanish under the following descriptors: G/AG/GEN/93, G/AG/GEN/97, G/AG/GEN/104. These documents are available in electronic format at the WTO Reference Centre at IICA.

⁸ Domestic support, for the WTO, is any domestic **subsidy** or other measure that maintains the producer’s prices at a level that is higher than those on the international **market**.

United States	Costa Rica	Fulfilling the commitment relative to the Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) ⁹
Switzerland	European Union	Subsidy programmes for Swiss dairy cattle.
United States	Indonesia	Quantitative and other restrictions to the importation of certain food products.
United States	Phillipines	Ongoing use of reference prices applied to imports.
New Zealand	Sri Lanka	Tariffs applied to powdered milk and compliance with binding commitments under the WTO.
Canada and the United States	Thailand	Guarantee Scheme for Paddy/ Rough Rice.

With respect to the review of notifications, the issues that gave rise to questions during the meeting are detailed below.¹⁰

- Thailand's administration of tariff quotas¹¹ and other obligations.
- Imports from Korea, Israel, Japan, and Thailand within the framework of obligations related to tariff and other quotas.
- The context in which Armenia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, European Union, Georgia, Indonesia, Malawi, Mali, Moldova, Norway, Paraguay, Philippines, Switzerland, Ukraine, United States and Uruguay apply their domestic support commitments.

Additionally, notifications submitted by the following countries came under review during the meeting, although no other country raised any questions about them¹². The table below identifies the notifications and the countries that submitted them.

⁹ "Aggregate Measurement of Support" (AMS) means the annual level of support, expressed in monetary terms, provided for a basic agricultural product in favor of the producers of the basic agricultural product or non-product specific support provided in favor of agricultural producers in general, other than support provided under programs that qualify as exempt from reduction under Annex 2 to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.

¹⁰ For any further clarification or consultation, please write to: centroreferencia.omc@iica.int.

¹¹ Refers to a lower tariff rate being applied for a specific quantity of an imported product. A country wishing to surpass this level of imports may do so by paying a higher tariff. This type of quota is permitted by the WTO.

¹² Official documents, along with the notifications submitted by the countries are available in the WTO database. Any of these notifications may also be requested at: centroreferencia.omc@iica.int.

Countries	Subject of the notification
Switzerland	Administration of obligations related to tariff and other quotas
Costa Rica, Hungary, Iceland, New Zealand, and Nicaragua.	Imports within the framework of obligations related to tariff and other quotas.
China, Japan, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Taipei, and Uruguay	Special safeguards. ¹³
Burkina Faso, China, Costa Rica, Gabon, Lithuania, New Zealand, Togo and Uruguay	Obligations related to domestic support.
Canada and Lithuania	Introduction or modification of domestic support measures exempt from reduction.
Burkina Faso, China, Gabon, Japan, Malawi, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Switzerland and Uruguay	Obligations related to export subsidies.

B. Issues Addressed in the Second Phase of the Meeting: Other Issues within the Scope of Competence of the Committee¹⁴.

During the second phase of the meeting, only two matters were addressed: the presentation of the report¹⁵ on informal consultations regarding the list of “major exporters” and brainstorming and exchange of opinions on the working of the Agriculture Committee.

IV. Upcoming Meeting

The upcoming meeting of the Agriculture Committee will be held on 26 September 2013, in Geneva, Switzerland.

For further information, kindly contact Adriana Campos Azofeifa, CAESPA, Specialist in Policies and Trade Negotiations and Coordinator of the WTO Reference Center at IICA, at: adriana.campos@iica.int or telephone (506) 2216-0170.

¹³ Used for the agricultural sector. A safeguard is a temporary increase on an import duty to deal with a surge in imports or a slump in prices, based on special provisions of the Agriculture Agreement.

¹⁴ Additional information on the issues discussed may be requested at: centroreferencia.omc@iica.int

¹⁵ The report was presented by the Chair of the Committee, Guilherme Marquardt Bayer, from Brazil.