



Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Agriculture
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Committee on Market Access
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade
Committee on Trade and Development
Committee on Trade Facilitation

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THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION'S ROLE IN ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY

COMMUNICATION FROM THE UNITED STATES

The following communication, dated 27 March 2023, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of the United States.

INTRODUCTION

1. The world faces an acute challenge of ensuring food security for all people, for current and future generations, while also assuring economic viability and resilience for all those involved in food supply chains. Vital work aimed at addressing this challenge is underway in various fora and international organizations, with each organization contributing in its own areas of competency. These organizations, along with governments and the private sector, are developing or facilitating the development of innovative approaches and technologies to achieve multiple objectives. Such objectives include: ensuring food security, improving the livelihoods of farmers and those involved in agricultural supply chains, sustaining agricultural productivity growth, climate change resiliency, and long-term agricultural sustainability.

2. Trade and transparent, predictable, open markets are vital components in addressing each dimension of food security (i.e., availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability). The WTO agreements have a proven track-record of improving the global food security landscape through their core principles and promotion of strong, rules-based trading and science-based regulatory systems.

3. To further bolster food security worldwide, WTO Members must focus their efforts on addressing each dimension of food security through trade and trade rules in ways that complement the initiatives of other international organizations. Furthermore, WTO Members' efforts should look to build long-term food security resilience through the promotion of policies that encourage more sustainable and efficient agricultural production, particularly in the context of severe challenges related to climate change.

ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH TRADE

Trade and the Movement of Food

4. Trade makes food more affordable and available. Open global markets allow food to move from food surplus regions to food deficit regions, which stabilizes markets by reducing the risk of food scarcity in domestic markets and mitigating food price volatility in both domestic and global markets. Only a small fraction of WTO Members produce more calories than they consume, and even these Members rely on trade for a varied and nutritious diet – a key component of food security.

Furthermore, an open trading system allows for diversified food supply sourcing and allows firms along the food supply chain to adapt rapidly when specific food sources are disrupted. Here, WTO rules and discussions can enhance food security by ensuring Members do not unnecessarily restrict the flow of food and have policies in place to facilitate trade at the border.

Trade and Innovations

5. Science-driven regulatory regimes, coupled with open markets, incentivize innovation. New technologies and innovative approaches are necessary to help farmers overcome the challenges they face in order to achieve the sustainable productivity growth necessary to feed the world. These innovations include not only cutting-edge technological advancements in soil, seed, pest, and farm management, but also innovative managerial and operational approaches to farming, including those utilizing digital technologies. In addition, new technologies and innovative practices will not be one-size-fits-all; innovations need to be tailored to regional differences and contexts. Here, WTO-based work can help enhance food security by encouraging scientifically-sound regulatory schemes and open markets, which will in turn encourage investment in innovation, promote adoption of new technologies and approaches, and facilitate the trade of products produced with new methods. If entrepreneurs do not see global market potential for products produced with new approaches or technologies, the necessary investments will not be made to develop them. Importantly, WTO Members must refrain from requiring others to adopt their approaches to agricultural production (e.g., use or prohibition of specific innovations or approaches) as a condition of trade, as this would set back global efforts to improve agricultural sustainability and food security.

Trade and Development

6. Open markets, governed by a rules-based trading system, and new innovations have provided opportunities for economic growth that have expanded and furthered Members' development goals. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "global agri-food trade has more than doubled since [the WTO's creation in] 1995, amounting to USD 1.5 trillion in 2018, with emerging and developing countries' exports on the rise and accounting for over one-third of the world's total".¹ Vulnerable groups, particularly those who rely on agricultural production for income, including in least-developed and net food-importing developing countries, can benefit from access to global markets, particularly when support is provided to ensure necessary infrastructure is in place to facilitate trade and to access new innovations. Here, the WTO agreements' core function of facilitating global trade can support a more inclusive approach that will contribute to reducing poverty and enhancing food security.

ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

7. The food security challenge is particularly complex given the need to produce sufficient food for a growing world population with a finite resource base that is increasingly impacted by climate change. Researchers have already detected the disruptive impacts of climate change on agricultural production and productivity growth.² Just as farmers and producers need policies that help them adapt to shocks from market upheaval and variable weather, they also need policies that empower them to transition to more sustainable production practices. However, well-intentioned policies, whether aimed at ensuring farmers' livelihoods, enhancing food security, or incentivizing sustainable production methods, if not well constructed, may have unintended negative or counterproductive effects while delivering limited benefits. Here, the WTO as a multilateral deliberative forum can help find ways of encouraging policies that support sustainable agricultural practices, while discouraging those policies that result in over-production, overuse or misallocation of resources, market distortions, or other negative impacts, environmental or otherwise.

NEXT STEPS

8. WTO Members must ensure that trade rules for agricultural products contribute to global food security in the short-, medium-, and long-term. This will require continued promotion of trade and creating an environment that encourages and safeguards practices and innovations that will build

¹ For more information see: <https://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1309369/icode/>.

² Ortiz-Bobea, A., T. Ault, C. Carrillo, R. Chambers, and D. Lobell. 2021. "Anthropogenic Climate Change Has Slowed Global Agricultural Productivity Growth". *Nature Climate Change* 11: 306–12.

long term agricultural sustainability. The WTO framework across agreements (e.g., the Agreement on Agriculture, the Agreement on Trade Facilitation, the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, and the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures) provides a sound basis for this. Strong adherence to WTO agreements will continue to be a vital component in enhancing food security. In addition, progress toward the Agreement on Agriculture's long-term objective of substantial progressive reductions in support and protection remains critical to further promoting trade and incentivizing policies that allow farmers and producers to produce more food in more sustainable ways. Many WTO agreements contain disciplines that, when effectively implemented, can support and facilitate our collective food security goals.

9. In this context, the United States believes that WTO Members should consider the various ways in which they can meet domestic and global food security objectives, including through effective and complete implementation of the WTO agreements. Further, WTO Members should undertake science- and evidenced-based discussions, including in the context of the agricultural reform process, in order to adopt market-oriented, trade-facilitating, equitable, and inclusive approaches that empower farmers to sustainably feed the world.

10. As part of this process, WTO Members should leverage the work of other relevant international organizations and share their experiences regarding efforts to enhance food security, including through policies that promote agricultural sustainability. The United States plans to make additional WTO submissions regarding ways to enhance global food security and looks forward to future discussions on this important topic among WTO Members.
