

Information session
Enhancing transparency and the CoA review process
Chair report

The Committee on Agriculture held an information session on enhancing transparency and the review process on Tuesday 13 September. Representatives of Members, Observers and Observer Organizations were all invited to participate in this information session. (The programme was circulated in document G/AG/GEN/133.)

The Secretariat presented an overview of the transparency obligations related to the Agreement on Agriculture and how these relate to the Committee on Agriculture's review process. The Secretariat highlighted the various online sources of information useful for the work of the Committee, with an emphasis on the Agriculture Information Management System (AG IMS). Members can access a diversity of information through this database, such as the complete set of notifications submitted by WTO Members and data contained in these notifications. The Secretariat also presented the AG IMS function for the search and submission of questions and responses in the context of the CoA review process. Delegates were given a preview of the upcoming function for the online submission of agriculture notifications.

The information session provided a forum for discussion and experience sharing with respect to the preparation and submission of notifications and the implementation of the review process. Costa Rica, Russia and the United States presented their notification procedures and shared their experiences in relation to notification practices. Members stressed the importance of awareness at the capital level of the need and benefits of complying with the

transparency requirements in relation to the Agreement on Agriculture. Members also noted the difficulty they had in obtaining the necessary data to prepare the notifications and stated that coordination among the different stakeholders played an important role. Members highlighted the usefulness of having a formalized notification procedure to create accountability and recognized the importance their own notifications played for training purposes and to create institutional memory. Some considered that responding to questions in the CoA provided them with the opportunity to deepen their analysis of their own programmes.

Brazil, Canada and the European Union presented their experiences with the implementation of the CoA review process noting the importance of this process for obtaining information regarding policies of commercial interest and policies that raised systemic concerns. Members discussed coordination with relevant stakeholders and noted the involvement of the private sector in identifying issues to raise in the review process. Members praised the usefulness of the Ag IMS for submitting and answering questions, accessing all questions, answers and notifications discussed in the Committee, and analysing Members' notified information. Members stressed the importance of compliance with transparency obligations for the review process to work.

New Zealand, Pakistan and Senegal discussed their view on the challenges and opportunities for transparency and the CoA review process. Members highlighted the benefits transparency provided for the work of the Committee in monitoring Members' implementation of their AoA commitments. Members were of the view that the lack of awareness and technical knowledge were some of the reasons why only a small proportion of Members participate in the review process and fully comply with their transparency obligations

Members suggested various ideas for ensuring that the work of the committee would stay relevant. Some of these related organizing events to promote useful exchanges among delegates, including:

- Increasing the use of informal meetings, information sharing events and other side events to the committee to deepen the level of discussions;
- Promoting the sharing of best practices through informal information sessions and Member presentations; and
- Targeting the needs of Members, particularly LDCs, through tailored technical assistance activities including notification workshops to address notification gaps.

Other ideas related to information and enhancing the use of the rich data available at the WTO, such as:

- Enhancing the AGIMS, including technical improvements, modifications to tracking outstanding responses and incorporating information exchanged in the Committee through the EC dedicated discussion;
- Using the roll-out of the on-line notification system to deepen and improve analytical capacity of Members and the Secretariat;
- Exploring links to existing data sources associated with other WTO Committees to promote coherence;
- Augmenting the information provided in the context of the Chair's Annual Report to the CTG; and
- Encouraging the Secretariat to explore options for presenting summarized notified information and synthesis of issues raised in the CoA review process.

This concludes my report.