

Fourth Roundtable Five Highlights and a Quote!

“The one missing piece in the agriculture reform debate for a very long time has been the impact of agricultural policies on the planet, in particular in respect of our fight against climate change.”

George Mina

Permanent Representative of Australia to the WTO

- Agriculture and the environment are inextricably interlinked. Globally agriculture uses around 40% of the global land area, and about 70% of the world’s total freshwater. International trade in food is trade in land, water and energy. In fact, as the United Nations Development Program tells us that were a country such as Egypt to aim for food self-sufficiency it would need three River Niles not one. International trade in food is therefore critical to the efficient allocation of natural resources. It allows water-intensive crops to grow where water is abundant for example, and not in areas of water shortage.
- While some agri-businesses warned against using sustainability to raise barriers to trade, others argued that agricultural trade and sustainability were no longer themes that the world could afford to address separately. Rabobank urged that international trade take place based on the “true cost of food.”
- Nestlé indicated that because agricultural value chains were so globalized, no producer could claim to be operating “sustainably” until the totality of the global value chain was greened. International trade was making it essential to take the sustainability discussion to a global scale. The Argentinean Soybean Chain (ACSOJA) explained that MERCOSUR countries had already significantly reduced agriculture emissions through improved seeds, precision agriculture and a number of other practices. The Global Cold Chain Alliance also detailed how cold chain played a significant role in preventing food from going to waste.
- There was discussion of the need to reform trade-distorting agricultural subsidies and to repurpose them, with companies as large as Nestlé explaining that they are unable to green their supply chain with agricultural subsidies pushing in the wrong direction. The Australian Ambassador stated that while he would give the WTO a “tick” on the oceans, given its recent success with WTO fisheries subsidies negotiations, he would not be able to give it such a “tick” on land. In other words, the WTO has some unfinished business before it on agricultural subsidy reform.
- In other roundtables of Agri-Food Business Day the developing world had also been very vocal on sustainability. The Ambassador of Cameroon made a plea that standards for deforestation should not come at the expense of food security. The need to balance food and environmental security was also echoed by businesses, like the Global Dairy Platform. Clearly, sustainability is a delicate issue, on a which careful balance will need to be struck at the WTO negotiating table.

Keywords:

#natural resources

#climate change

#deforestation

#agriculture emissions

#true cost of food

#non-tariff barriers

#greening global value chains

#cold chain

#repurposing agricultural subsidies

#fisheries subsidies

#food security

#environmental security

#balanced WTO outcomes