

Second Roundtable

Five Highlights and a Quote!

"Having a robust set of recognized international standards helps reduce trade friction."

Jamie Jonker

Chair of International Dairy Federation Science and Programme Coordination Committee.

- Standards and regulations have risen with the rise of international trade in food and agricultural commodities. They have been driven by regulators and consumers needing to ensure that internationally-traded food is safe and nutritious, that food labels do not provide misleading information, that food packaging is appropriate, and many other public policy goals. Other drivers for standards and regulations have included sustainability and fair trade – in other words, the pursuit of environmental and social goals.
- The WTO breaks down food standards and regulations into two different legal instruments. The Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), and the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT). A core principle of both Agreements is that governments must try to base themselves on international standards in the design national requirements to avoid conflicting regulations globally. Industry representatives noted that “harmonization” was key to easing global supply chain blockages, and urged that standards be science-based.
- At the WTO’s 12th Ministerial Conference, WTO Members adopted an SPS Declaration intended to allow the agreement to respond to modern SPS challenges. In it, they launched a work program to address emerging SPS concerns such as the impact of climate change, or the increased pace of technological innovation on trade in food, animals and plants. Various speakers strongly welcomed the SPS work program, stressing the urgent need for the SPS Agreement to catch up with new realities. They argued that sustainability, innovation and international standards needed to be placed at the heart of this new work program.
- Health for Animals noted that international trade was often impeded by the failure of countries to uphold existing international standards; by the use of non-scientific justifications in the standard-setting process; and by the imposition of uniform production standards on countries with fundamentally different production systems in the pursuit of sustainability goals. It argued against a “one-size fits all” approach to sustainability.
- The Ambassador of Cameroon indicated that his country was a major exporter of agricultural products such as coffee, cocoa, cotton and bananas, and that the exports of these products often faced complex rules and regulations that limited their competitiveness. He pointed to the tension between food security, on the one hand, and environmental protection on the other. Taking the issue of deforestation as an example, he argued that standards for deforestation were negatively impacting food security in his country and he called for this tension to be resolved.

Keywords:

#SPS

#TBT
#MC12
#SPS work program
#non-tariff barriers
#obstacles to trade
#global value chains
#international standards
#harmonization
#science-based regulations
#food security
#sustainability