



REPORT (2021) ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON

1.1. The present report is being circulated by the Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture on his own responsibility. This report provides a summary of the activities of the Committee on Agriculture ("the Committee") during 2021.

1.2. The Committee organized three formal meetings in 2021 on 29-30 March, 17-18 June, and 23-24 September¹. Three informal meetings of the Committee were held respectively on 29 March, 17 June and 23 September. Ms. Maria Araceli Escandor of the Philippines chaired the Committee's March and June meetings. In July 2021, the Committee elected Mr. Marcos da Rosa Uranga of Uruguay as the new Chairperson for 2021-2022.

1.3. In accordance with Article 18.1 of the Agreement on Agriculture ("the Agreement"), at each of its meetings, the Committee reviewed progress in the implementation of Members' commitments. This review process is undertaken based on notifications submitted by Members in the areas of market access, domestic support, export competition, export prohibitions and restrictions as well as under the follow-up to the Ministerial Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDC Decision). Between 1 January and 9 November 2021, 302 agriculture notifications were circulated.

1.4. In 2021, Members posed 266 questions in connection with 112 specific notifications during the Committee's review process.² These questions were distributed as follows: 76% related to domestic support issues, 20% to market access, 3% to export competition, and the remaining 1% related to export restrictions and prohibitions and in relation to the NFIDC Decision. Specific concerns were also raised regarding outstanding notifications that some Members had yet to submit to the Committee.

1.5. Members also raised a wide range of matters relevant to the implementation of commitments, independently of notifications, under Article 18.6 of the Agreement. A total of 154 questions on 100 specific implementation matters (SIMs) were raised by 12 Members during 2021. Out of these, 53 SIMs were discussed for the first time in 2021. The remaining matters were discussed on one or more occasions in previous years; 14 of these SIMs have been brought up in more than five CoA meetings where one SIM has been raised on 18 occasions attracting a total of 64 questions.

1.6. Since 2018, the Secretariat has been monitoring the number of outstanding responses under the CoA review process.³ A gradual reduction in the number of outstanding responses has been observed since this exercise started. As of the September Committee meeting, 104 responses were pending for questions raised during 2013-2019 and 47 for questions raised in 2020. The successive Chairpersons continued to encourage Members to increase their efforts to submit the outstanding responses as a means to enhance the efficacy of the Committee's monitoring functions.

¹ The summary reports of these meetings are contained in documents G/AG/R/98, G/AG/R/99, and G/AG/R/100 (to be issued). The September meeting of the Committee was reconvened on 9 November to take up the suspended agenda item relating to the review of the operation of the Bali TRQ Decision (please refer to paragraph 1.12 of this report).

² See G/AG/W/210, G/AG/W/212 and G/AG/W/213.

³ The Secretariat circulated a list of outstanding responses in documents G/AG/W/204/Rev.2, G/AG/W/204/Rev.3, and G/AG/W/204/Rev.4.

1.7. At each meeting the Committee reviewed the status of Members' compliance with their notification obligations under the Agreement based on the Secretariat document summarizing the status of compliance with notification requirements.⁴ While a significant proportion of notifications are still outstanding (about 24% of all notifications from 1995-2019), Members are continuing their efforts to bring their notification record up to date.

1.8. As was agreed at the special meeting of the Committee in June 2020, 'COVID-19 and Agriculture' remained a standing item on the agenda of all committee meetings in 2021. The discussions were organized based on Members' *ad hoc* reports⁵ on their measures taken in the agricultural sector in response to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as contributions by observer international organizations.⁶ At the request of the Committee, the Secretariat prepared and updated a compilation of Members' ad-hoc reports⁷ and developed a new webpage on COVID-19 agricultural measures as part of the WTO's overall trade monitoring exercise.⁸

1.9. In view of the 12th Ministerial Conference slated for the week of 29 November 2021, the November CoA meeting could not take place this year. The two regular standing agenda items of the November CoA meeting, namely, the annual monitoring of the follow-up to the NFIDC Decision and of Members' participation in the normal growth of world trade in agricultural products (Article 18.5) would be taken up at the first Committee meeting in 2022.

1.10. The Committee maintained a standing item on its agenda relating to implementation issues, both in the framework of its follow-up to the Decision by the Doha Ministerial Conference on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns⁹, as well as in the framework of issues and proposals referred to it by the General Council. No Member intervened under this agenda item in 2021.

1.11. The Committee also discussed follow-up to Ministerial outcomes, specifically related to (i) the Understanding on Tariff Rate Quota Administration Provisions of Agricultural Products, as defined in Article 2 of the Agreement¹⁰; and (ii) the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition¹¹.

1.12. On the Bali TRQ Decision, the 2019 review¹² of the operation of the Decision extended the timeline to resolve the issue of the future operation of paragraph 4 of the underfill mechanism contained in Annex A to the Decision. The Committee continued its deliberations on the issue of paragraph 4 in order to reach a common agreement within the agreed deadline of end-2021. This agenda item was suspended during the 23-24 September meeting of the Committee. The meeting was reconvened on 9 November to take up that suspended agenda item. The Committee considered the report¹³ by the Chairperson on this issue along with the draft decision on the future operation of paragraph 4 of the underfill mechanism, and agreed to forward the draft decision to the General Council for its consideration and subsequent transmission to the Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC-12) for a decision, with the understanding that some Members would need additional time to consult with their capitals on the draft decision. The Chairperson's report¹⁴ was accordingly sent to the General Council on 11 November.

1.13. The follow-up to the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition mainly consisted of the annual dedicated discussion on export competition and the second triennial review of the Decision.¹⁵ The annual dedicated discussion took place in the September 2021 meeting based on

⁴ G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.41, G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.42, and G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.43.

⁵ Members' *ad hoc* reports distributed in 2021: G/AG/GEN/163/Add.1, G/AG/GEN/180, G/AG/GEN/160/Add.1, G/AG/GEN/159/Add.4, G/AG/GEN/166/Rev.1, and G/AG/GEN/159/Add.5.

⁶ Contributions by observer international organizations in 2021: G/AG/GEN/183, G/AG/GEN/181, G/AG/GEN/182, G/AG/GEN/184, G/AG/GEN/188, G/AG/GEN/189, G/AG/GEN/190, and G/AG/GEN/191.

⁷ G/AG/W/209/Rev.1.

⁸ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/ag_trade_measures_e.htm.

⁹ WT/MIN(01)/17, para. 2.

¹⁰ WT/MIN(13)/39.

¹¹ WT/MIN(15)/45.

¹² G/AG/29.

¹³ G/AG/W/214 refers.

¹⁴ G/AG/32 refers.

¹⁵ See also the review of the provisions on international food aid contained in the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition as mentioned in paragraph 1.9.

the Secretariat's background document¹⁶, which was prepared on the basis of export subsidy notifications and on Members' responses to a questionnaire. The 2021 exercise was the first time all Members were expected to reply to the questionnaire following the expiry of the grace period foreseen in footnote 17 of the Nairobi Decision.¹⁷ During the September meeting, Members exchanged on specific measures in relation to the implementation of the Nairobi Decision.¹⁸ Members also had the possibility to raise questions in relation to export measures covered by the Nairobi Decision during other Committee meetings in the year.

1.14. At the March 2021 meeting, the Committee initiated the second triennial review of the Nairobi Export Competition Decision as per paragraph 5 of the Decision. Members' main stated interest for this triennial review was to enhance transparency and to improve the existing monitoring and follow-up of the Decision. As several transparency-related issues are also being considered in the ongoing export competition negotiations, the Committee agreed to conclude the second triennial review after MC-12, at the March 2022 Committee meeting, in order to ensure complementarity in the review and the negotiations tracks.

1.15. Regarding the modification of the scheduled export subsidy commitments pursuant to the Nairobi Decision, the latest situation as reported by the Chairperson at the September 2021 Committee meeting was as follows: out of the 16 Members with export subsidy reduction commitments at the time of the Nairobi Decision, 12 Members had their schedule revised pursuant to the Decision, two other Members had submitted their revised draft schedule in 2017 where the certification has been pending, and the remaining two Members¹⁹ had not yet circulated their draft schedules.

1.16. In 2021, the Committee continued its deliberations on possible elements to enhance transparency and the Committee's review process. The issue was considered in three informal meetings in March, June and September. The Committee also continued discussions aimed at improving Members' notification compliance.

1.17. Several online tools support the Committee's monitoring and transparency functions. Since 2012, the AG-IMS platform has facilitated Member submission of questions and responses in the context of the Committee's monitoring of implementation of commitments. At the October 2019 meeting, the Secretariat launched the on-line agriculture notification system²⁰ for use by all Members. In 2021, the Secretariat introduced further enhancements to the AG-IMS Q&A system based on Members' suggestions, including the addition of the option to co-sponsor questions.

1.18. Regarding technical assistance activities, the first phase of the eleventh Geneva-based workshop on agriculture notifications was conducted in a virtual format from 20-22 October 2021. The in-person follow-up to this workshop, or its second phase, is tentatively scheduled to take place in September 2022 in Geneva, Switzerland. In 2021, the WTO's Agriculture and Commodities Division, in collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC), delivered a virtual workshop on agriculture for the delegation of Iraq. Another workshop focusing specifically on agriculture notifications was organized in a virtual format for El Salvador. Additionally, upon request, the Secretariat organized one-on-one trainings on the AG-IMS to assist Members with the use of the online notification submission system.

¹⁶ G/AG/W/125/Rev.14, G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Corr.1, G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Add.1, G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Add.2, G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Add.2/Corr.1, G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Add.3, and G/AG/W/125/Rev.14/Add.4.

¹⁷ The Secretariat organized an information session on how to reply to the annual export competition questionnaire in the margins of the March 2020 Committee meeting.

¹⁸ Section 5 of G/AG/W/213.

¹⁹ Brazil's draft modified schedule incorporating the Nairobi Decision was later circulated in document G/MA/TAR/RS/660 dated 28 October 2021.

²⁰ <http://agims.wto.org/>.

1.19. The following international intergovernmental organizations have regular observer status in the Committee: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Grains Council (IGC), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Food Programme (WFP), and the World Bank. At its September meeting, the Committee agreed to renew the *ad hoc* observer status of the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA) for 2022.

1.20. The dates of the meetings of the Committee in 2022 were announced at the September 2021 CoA meeting.²¹

²¹ G/AG/GEN/192. In light of consultations organized by the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) on the scheduling of the meetings of the CTG subsidiary bodies, and to avoid a potential overlap with a meeting of another CTG subsidiary body, it was later decided to change the dates of the March 2022 meeting of the Committee to 15-17 March 2022 (instead of 7-8 March announced in G/AG/GEN/192).