

Information available from the WTO Regional Reference Centre at IICA

A Regional Reference Centre of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was inaugurated at the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) on June 21. This is the latest in a series of joint actions implemented by the two organizations, which have been working together for over ten years.

The Centre, which the WTO operates in coordination with IICA, is designed to afford officials of the public, private, and academic sectors access to materials they need to consult in order to make decisions on agriculture and international trade.

The purpose of this note, prepared by IICA's Center for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture (CAESPA), is to publicize the reference centre, the information and services available, and how they can be accessed.

I. The reference centres of the WTO

The WTO's reference centres (RCs) were created to help least developed countries (LDCs) and developing countries (DCs) benefit from trade relations, and participate more actively in the multilateral trading system. To achieve those objectives, the RCs provide access to information and (virtual or in-person) training modules dealing with everything involved in the work of the WTO, including publications and training materials produced by the organization's Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC).

What kind of information is available at the RCs?

At the RCs, users can consult information about the structure and responsibilities of the WTO, legal instruments, statistics and trends in international trade, trade policy analyses, and tariff reports. Also available are official documents of the WTO's councils, committees, and working groups, economic research, handbooks, and other documents related to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), among others.

Does it cost anything to access the WTO's information?

The WTO makes it a rule not to charge for the information it generates, so that every country benefits from it. Therefore, it provides free access to the official, legal, informational, analytical, and other documents that it produces. Most of the WTO's publications are available for downloading in a digital format free of charge. Users can also purchase books, journals, CD-ROMs, and DVDs from the WTO's online library.

How can I obtain information from the WTO?

All the WTO's information can be accessed directly via its website.¹ A number of tools available on the site afford access to specialized statistical information.

¹ Links: <http://wto.org/index.htm> (English)

These include:

- **Statistical database (WSDB):** provides access to statistical profiles (in English or French) on trade flows, tariffs (market access), and services (transport, telecommunications, finances, and insurance) in the member countries, observer member countries, and other economies.
- **Tariff information:** offers instruments that provide data about the tariffs applied by WTO member countries. One of them is the Tariff Analysis Online (TAO) facility,² which has two databases –the Integrated Data Base (IDB) and the Consolidated Tariff Schedules (CTS)– that provide statistical information about tariffs and imports.
- **Statistics on international trade:** provides access to lists and sites where users can obtain the annual publications on trade flows and the evolution of world trade in recent years.
- **Maps:** by clicking on the countries and territories shown on the maps, users can see a brief summary of some of their trade and tariff indicators.
- **“Made in the World” Initiative:** provides access to news, discussion forums, and articles on projects, experiences, and practical approaches in measuring and analyzing trade in value added.

Users can also consult the printed material available in the RCs, or request digital information from either the WTO or the RCs. The WTO RC located at the Institute’s Headquarters, in San Jose, Costa Rica, provides those services to IICA member countries.

² Links: <https://tariffanalysis.wto.org/welcome>

In which formats are WTO publications available?³

Nearly all WTO publications are available in both printed and digital formats (access to digital publications is free). The WTO publications available from its online library⁴ or the “Publications” section of its website can be downloaded in PDF format or viewed on screen in an HTML format. Other documents, such as legal texts, are available in text format. Reports containing statistics are produced in two formats: spreadsheet and PDF.

In addition to printed and digital documents, the WTO offers multimedia information. Audio and video resources on various activities –such as press conferences, discussions, interviews on trade issues, and others– can be viewed and downloaded.

What subjects are dealt with in the WTO’s publications?

The publications and other materials produced by the WTO fall into the following thematic categories:

- General information about the WTO: structure, functions, vision, and other topics
- Legal texts of the Uruguay Round negotiations, and trade and other agreements
- Statistics
- Studies and analyses
- Trade
- Dispute settlement
- Resources

What kind of analytical documents does the WTO produce?

The WTO produces two kinds of analytical documents: a) annual publications containing

³ Links: http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/publications_e/publications_e.htm

⁴ Links: <http://onlinebookshop.wto.org/shop/?ES>

an assessment of the outlook for world trade; and, b) reports on studies on specific topics. The latter, prepared by WTO staff members and collaborators drawn from organizations that work with the WTO, do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the WTO's General Secretariat.

What other learning resources does the WTO offer?

The WTO website provides the RCs and the public with other resources for learning about the multilateral trading system, such as:

- **Glossary:** contains very precise definitions of the terms used by the WTO and in international trade. The definitions are not authorized interpretations based on the WTO's legal texts, however.⁵
- **WTO distance learning:** offers several interactive modules for training in issues related to the work of the WTO.⁶

II. The WTO Regional Reference Center at IICA (WTO-IICA RRC)

What resources does the WTO-IICA RRC have available?

The *General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Basic Instruments and Selected Documents (BISD)* database is available from the WTO-IICA RRC in CD-ROM format. It can also be accessed via the public computers located in IICA's Venezuela Library, which also houses the WTO-IICA RRC.

The WTO-IICA RRC also has the following resources:

- Some videos on the WTO (basic information) and on safe trade,

provided especially by the ITTC.

- Books and pamphlets related to the WTO's structure and functions, the rules approved in the Doha and Uruguay rounds, the Agreement on Agriculture, the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, and other topics.
- Annual reports on international trade
- Tariffs and trade profiles.
- Handbooks on various subjects, such as access to documentation online, trade and environment, and trade policy analysis, among others.

Among the staff of the RRC are persons specializing in international trade and WTO matters, who guide and help users to seek, obtain and analyze information on the multilateral trading system, especially as it relates to the international agricultural trade.

How can I access the WTO's resources through the WTO-IICA RRC?

All written queries concerning the WTO (functions, structure, etc.), international trade issues, and the information and training resources available should be addressed to the WTO-IICA RRC (centroreferencia.omc@iica.int).

You can also speak directly with Adriana Campos Azofeifa, the Coordinator of the WTO-IICA RRC and a Specialist in Policies and Trade Negotiations, at (506) 2216-0170; or with her Assistant, Nadia Monge Hernández, at (506) 2216-0358.

⁵ Link: http://wto.org/english/thewto_e/glossary_e/glossary_e.htm

⁶ Link: http://wto.org/english/res_e/d_learn_e/d_learn_e.htm