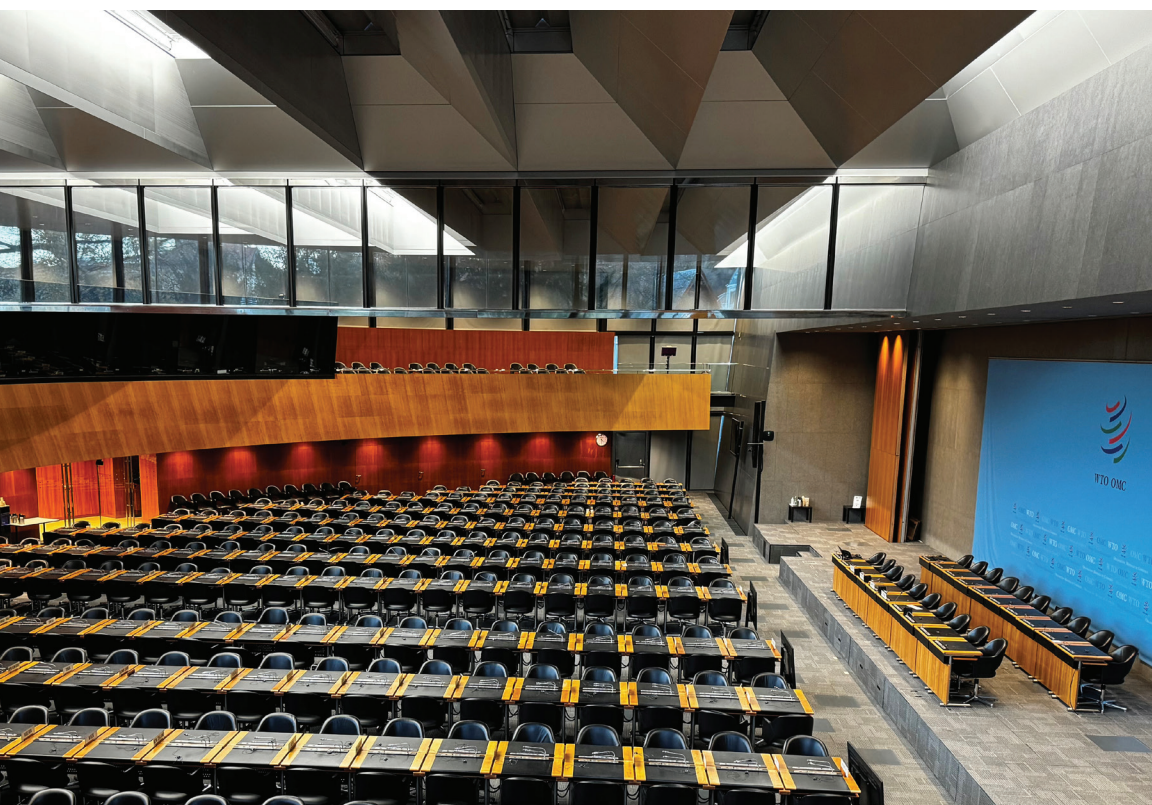


# Delegates' Handbook on Participation in the WTO Committee on Agriculture





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WORLD TRADE  
ORGANIZATION



Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) 2024



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in the WTO Committee on Agriculture  
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Editorial coordination: Adriana Campos

Translation: Catalina Saraceno

Layout: Gabriela Watson

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# List of acronyms

<b>AG-IMS</b>	Agriculture Information Management System
<b>AMS</b>	Aggregate Measurement of Support
<b>AoA</b>	Agreement on Agriculture
<b>CoA</b>	WTO Committee on Agriculture
<b>CoA-SS</b>	WTO Committee on Agriculture in Special Session
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Italy)
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs
<b>GC</b>	WTO General Council
<b>IGC</b>	International Grains Council (United Kingdom)
<b>IICA</b>	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (Costa Rica)
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund (IMF)
<b>ITTC</b>	WTO Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation
<b>LDCs</b>	Least Developed Countries
<b>MC</b>	WTO Ministerial Conference
<b>NFIDCs</b>	Net Food-Importing Developing Countries
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (France)
<b>S&amp;D</b>	Special and differential treatment for developing country Members
<b>SIM</b>	Specific Implementation Matters
<b>SSG</b>	Special agricultural safeguard
<b>TNC</b>	WTO Trade Negotiations Committee
<b>TRQ</b>	Tariff Rate Quota
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UR</b>	Uruguay Round
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme (Italy)
<b>WG</b>	Working group
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organization (Switzerland)

**MEXICO**

**PERU**

**ARGENTINA**

**CHILE**







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# Executive Summary

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) share a longstanding history of collaboration, working together to assist member governments in their engagement within the WTO system, particularly in the domains of agriculture, including agricultural negotiations, and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. As an observer organization to both the Committee on Agriculture (CoA) and the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee, IICA has worked extensively with the WTO Secretariat, providing technical assistance to member governments of that organization that are also IICA members. Within the context of this partnership, the idea to develop a guide for CoA delegates emerged, aiming to optimize the collective efforts of both institutions and enhance transparency. The idea also gained prominence during the discussion in the CoA in the context of the ongoing WTO-wide deliberations on the 'reforms' of deliberative functions of its bodies. The resulting Delegate's handbook, containing a manual of best practices, is a concrete step in our joint effort to support Members in improving their participation in the Committee, facilitating follow-up actions, and ensuring compliance with multilateral rules affecting agri-food trade.

This handbook provides guidelines on how the CoA functions, targeting government officials in the ministries of agriculture and trade, as well as those in the missions in Geneva responsible for overseeing actions on agricultural matters within the WTO. The handbook is organized into four main sections: 1) disciplines of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), 2) the CoA and its mandate, 3) participation in CoA meetings, and 4) tools available to Member countries.

Section One provides an overview of the AoA, the regulatory framework that has governed multilateral agrifood trade since 1995. The AoA provides a framework for the long-term reform of national agricultural policies to ensure fairer competition with fewer distortions. This, in turn, facilitates more transparent, predictable and competitive agricultural trade. The section

also includes a convenient quick-reference guide, offering a review of the main commitments assumed by WTO Members in relation to each of the three pillars of the AoA: market access, domestic support and export competition. The AoA incorporates rules on market access instruments such as tariffs, tariff rate quotas and special agricultural safeguards to guarantee protection and minimal access to domestic markets. It introduces new disciplines on agricultural domestic support measures, classifying them broadly based on the extent to which they distort production and trade, using the concepts of 'boxes' and 'limits'. For the first-time, the AoA introduced quantitative limits on the use of export subsidies and included provisions on some measures that could potentially have an equivalent effect (export competition). Beyond these disciplines in the three pillars, the AoA includes transparency and consultations provisions on export prohibitions and restrictions instituted on foodstuffs applied consistently with Article XI, paragraph 2 (a) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The Agreement further establishes guidelines on transparency and information exchange among Members within the setting of the CoA, affirming Members' right to be informed and the obligation to inform others about the application of and compliance with the AoA rules.

Additionally, the AoA recognizes the need to continue the reform process, engaging in negotiations aimed at reinforcing disciplines aimed at reducing support and protection in agricultural markets. Thus, Section One also explains the difference between the roles of the CoA, focused on monitoring compliance with established rules, and the Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (CoA-SS), serving as a negotiation forum for future disciplines. It emphasizes the crucial role of the CoA in providing information and support for the efforts of the CoA-SS.

Section Two of the handbook provides a detailed account of the establishment, mandate, and operations of the CoA. Additionally, it delves into the review process, which forms the core of the CoA's monitoring function.

In accordance with the agreed disciplines on transparency, WTO Members bear the duty to inform and the right to be informed about the implementation of commitments under the AoA by presenting notifications and other required information (transparency). Moreover, they have the right to collectively examine compliance with these commitments and the opportunity to raise any matters related to the agricultural policies of Members within the framework of the AoA. As such, the Committee serves

as the established forum to examine progress in fulfilling Members' commitments under the AoA. This involves posing and answering questions regarding notifications submitted by Members, and addressing any matter related to the implementation of commitments under the Agreement, as stipulated in Article 18, paragraph 6 of the AoA.

Moreover, this section addresses key aspects that enhance understanding of the CoA's operations, including the procedures governing its meetings. It outlines guidelines on agenda preparation and adoption, the election of a Chair, the conduct of debates, and decision-making processes. The section elucidates the meeting cycle, providing the framework for organizing actions required by delegates and officials, along with established deadlines for their completion. Moreover, it explains various types of key document essential for Committee meetings, particularly those vital for CoA organization, and provides information on different ways to access them. Finally, it discusses the role of observers in Committee meetings and how their contributions can enhance the functioning of the CoA and the debates that it undertakes.

Section Three covers practical details about CoA meetings and offers suggestions on how to improve the participation of delegates. It explains the preparation of the agenda for the three or four annual meetings and provides insights into meeting conduct, aiming to provide an understanding of the review process and the follow-up issues mandated by the AoA and Ministerial Decisions. The section also clarifies the distinction between formal and informal meetings, guiding participants on what actions to take based on the meeting type and what they can expect from these meetings. Emphasizing the importance of debates in informal meetings, it underscores their role in facilitating progress and reaching agreements. Furthermore, the section explains the debate process involved in examining and following up on ministerial outcomes.

In terms of preparation for participation in the meetings, the handbook outlines actions and best practices that Members could implement during the meeting cycle to foster informed and improved participation, and offers suggestions on actions to be taken before, during, and after a meeting. Moreover, the section also emphasizes the coordination, both internally between the delegation in Geneva and officials in the capital, and externally among delegations. This external coordination may assist to exchange observations on notifications, stay informed about relevant

global agricultural developments and news reports, coordinate questions, and seek support for specific ideas and proposals.

Finally, Section Four presents the tools available to Members to improve compliance with transparency obligations, including the presentation of notifications and related information. It also provides means for acquiring more information about the CoA and accessing relevant documents to prepare for active participation in CoA discussions. The WTO assists Members to easily locate legal texts, databases, handbooks, tutorials and any other practical information that facilitates the preparation of notifications and the presentation of questions and answers to other Members through a series of tools. For example, the section includes a detailed explanation of the Agriculture Information Management System (AG-IMS), a public access platform allowing users to consult relevant documents within the framework of the AoA. AG-IMS enables online submission of notifications, questions and answers for each Committee meeting, and responses to the export competition questionnaire (ECQ) forming part of the 2015 Nairobi Decision on Export Competition. Additional tools highlighted in this section include guidelines prepared by the WTO Secretariat to facilitate compliance with notification obligations, as well as a new webpage dedicated to agriculture, featuring sections to support users to better understand the AoA and to find information related to Members' commitments. The page also describes the Committee's operations and the Secretariat's work. Finally, it gives an overview of the technical assistance and consultancy services offered by the IICA and the WTO to assist Members in improving their participation and meeting transparency obligations. Contact information is included for those seeking assistance.



## I. Presentation

The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) is a specialized organization of the Inter-American System that supports its 34 Member States<sup>1</sup> to bring about agricultural development and rural wellbeing (IICA n.d.a). The Institute's International Trade and Regional Integration Program supports Member States to improve their participation in international markets, deepen regional trade integration and contribute to the transformation of agrifood systems. Through the WTO-IICA Reference Center (IICA n.d.b) established in 2012, IICA provides technical consultancy and training services to government officials, academics, students, businesses, communication specialists and the general public from IICA Member States interested in the subject.

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<sup>1</sup> Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

Established in 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) “is the only international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.” (WTO n.d.f). Its agreements, rules and principles are the basis of the multilateral trade system. The organization is in turn a forum that allows its Member governments to negotiate trade agreements, monitor compliance with rules and resolve their trade differences. Everything the WTO does is the result of engagement and negotiations among its Members. While these Members make decisions<sup>2</sup> and set the course of the organization, it is the WTO Secretariat that coordinates all activities and is responsible for its daily operation.

IICA and the WTO have a long history of collaboration in various activities to support their Members in the implementation of commitments related to agriculture, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and participation in the agricultural negotiations. The Institute has observer status in the WTO Committee on Agriculture (CoA) and the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS). It has collaborated closely with the WTO Secretariat to provide technical assistance to WTO Members, and supported the Committees with analysis and data from the region on relevant matters.

Both organizations have sought to further strengthen their relationship and mutual cooperation to provide their Members with the support and tools to participate effectively in WTO activities and contribute to strengthening the multilateral trade system. This joint handbook represents a concrete step in this collaboration effort to help Members improve their participation in monitoring compliance with multilateral rules. The handbook is designed to assist all interested parties, especially officials from agriculture ministries and WTO delegates in Geneva who are responsible for agriculture and the CoA. The suggestions contained in this handbook will enable them to identify and incorporate practical considerations in their engagement in the work of the Committee.

Finally, this handbook aims to serve as a reference document offering clear and simple guidance on various aspects, including the Committee’s

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2 All important decisions are taken by all Members, either by their ministers (who meet at least once every two years in a Ministerial Conference - MC) or by their ambassadors or delegates (who meet regularly in Geneva in the different Councils and Committees).



role, meeting procedures, actions participants should take before, during, and after a meeting, as well as tools to assist them in their initiation to the subject. It is hoped that the consolidated information in this single document will provide the officials with the foundation to increase and broaden their participation in the Committee's work, thereby benefiting the functioning of the Committee and the multilateral trade system.





## II. The Agreement on Agriculture and transparency

This section highlights the role of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) as a multilateral framework for agrifood trade. It presents an overview of the main disciplines covered by this Agreement to regulate the policies that WTO Members may implement to support and safeguard their agrifood sector. The commitments that Members have assumed under the AoA are briefly explained, including its three pillars (market access, domestic support and export competition), for which they are required to submit information on compliance with the Agreement.

## Context on its disciplines, obligations and exchange of information

Before the adoption of the AoA, agricultural trade<sup>3</sup> was highly protected and distorted. Governments had the flexibility to use numerous agriculture-specific exemptions and flexibilities that were not permitted under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) for industrial products. The AoA, which came into force on 1 January 1995 with the creation of the WTO, is one of the outcomes of the Uruguay Round (UR) of GATT negotiations.<sup>4</sup> It establishes a framework for the long-term reform of the trade of agricultural products and national support policies for the sector, aiming to achieve a fairer competition with fewer distortions.

The AoA represented a first step towards a more transparent, predictable and competitive agricultural trade. It prohibited the application of the then heavily prevalent non-tariff measures, including quantitative import restrictions, minimum import prices, discretionary import licensing, and similar other border measures unless justified under general provisions of the GATT or other WTO agreements. The Agreement also introduced new disciplines on agricultural domestic support, especially targeting measures with distorting effects on production and trade, and reinforced disciplines on agricultural export subsidies. Specific provisions, primarily concerning transparency and consultations, are also included on export prohibitions and restrictions on foodstuffs, applied consistently with GATT Article XI:2 (a). Likewise, the AoA recognized that developing countries<sup>5</sup> must have certain flexibilities in implementing the disciplines and commitments, hence it incorporated special and

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3 The terms agricultural and agrifood are used interchangeably in this text. The WTO usually refers to agricultural trade and disciplines for agricultural products, using the definition of products covered by Annex 1 of the Agreement on Agriculture, which does not include fishery and forestry products. IICA uses the term agrifood.

4 The Eighth Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations in the GATT began in Uruguay in 1986 and concluded in Marrakesh with the signing of the "Final Act" in April 1994, which created the WTO and laid the foundation for its comprehensive framework of agreements.

5 There is no definition of "developed" or "developing" countries in the WTO. Each WTO Member decides for itself if it considers itself a "developed" or "developing" country for the purposes of WTO Agreements.

differential (S&D) treatment as an integral element.<sup>6</sup> It also recognized the need to continue the process of reform and included provisions to return to negotiations, in order to reduce subsidies and protection and reinforce the disciplines of the Agreement.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, recognizing the need for follow-up and monitoring in the implementation of new disciplines, the AoA incorporated provisions on transparency and exchange of information among WTO Members and established the CoA as a mechanism to monitor their compliance with the agreement.

Since 1995, the legal text of the AoA (WTO 1995a) (with its 21 articles and 5 annexes), the Members' Schedules of Concessions and Commitments<sup>8</sup>, and the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs) (WTO 1995c) are an integral part of the rules governing multi-lateral agrifood trade, and the Committee on Agriculture is mandated to oversee the implementation of these rules. In recent years, these rules have been complemented by various Ministerial Decisions, including the historic decision to eliminate all forms of export subsidies in 2015 (WTO 2015b). While, in principle, all the other<sup>9</sup> WTO Agreements on the trade of goods apply to products from the agrifood sector, the AoA disciplines take precedence in the event of a conflict between the AoA and the other Agreements.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Developing countries that are WTO Members have the flexibility to reduce protection and support by a smaller amount and over a longer period of time than developed countries.

7 Negotiations began in 2000 in accordance with the provisions of Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

8 These lists are legal instruments that describe the treatment that a WTO Member must give to other WTO Members in terms of the trade of goods, where the maximum tariffs and other non-tariff commitments that each Member has assumed are established. Each WTO Member has its own Schedule of Concessions on goods, which is either annexed to the Marrakesh Protocol to the GATT 1994 or to a Protocol of Accession. Schedules are identified by a unique Roman numeral which has been assigned according to the moment in which a Member has joined the GATT or the WTO.

9 GATT 1994, Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Agreement on Customs Valuation, Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures, Agreement on Safeguards, Agreement on Trade Facilitation, among others.

10 The hierarchy between the AoA and other agreement on trade in goods is stipulated in AoA Article 21.

## What the Agreement covers

The Agreement covers disciplines of general application classified primarily into three main areas or pillars: a) market access (tariffs and other authorized border mechanisms), b) domestic support, and c) export competition (covering subsidies for exports and other export-related similar measures). It contains binding commitments regarding reduced support and protection for agricultural products, which are reflected individually in the schedules of concessions and commitments of each of the Members.<sup>11</sup>

The coverage of products, that is, the products the Agreement rules are applied to, is defined according to the classification of the Harmonized System and includes basic or primary products, products derived from these, processed food products and beverages, agricultural fibers and skins.<sup>12</sup> The Agreement does not apply to fishery products or forestry products.

The AoA includes disciplines on transparency to assess Members' compliance with the rules, with notifications playing a central role in ensuring transparency. Members have an obligation to notify and the right to receive notification from others regarding the implementation of commitments under the Agreement. The AoA also establishes the CoA as the forum that enables Members to monitor compliance with their commitments under the Agreement, i.e. the "review process", primarily through questions and answers put forward in the Committee. These questions can be asked about the notifications submitted by Members, or may be raised under Article 18.6 of the AoA addressing any matter relevant to the application of commitments under the Agreement. The CoA and its review process will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

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11 Commitments in agriculture are recorded in two of the four parts of these Schedules (Part I, Section I-A tariffs and Section I-B quotas and Part IV domestic support (Section I) and export subsidies (Sections II and III). The Schedules can be consulted on the dedicated site: <https://goods-schedules.wto.org/>

12 Annex 1 of the Agreement defines agricultural products as those included in chapters 1 to 24 of the harmonized system, except for chapter 3 (fish and fish products) including additional products defined in the said Annex.

## a) Market access

When the Agreement came into force, non-tariff measures, which impeded or prevented agrifood trade, were replaced with ordinary customs duties (tariffs). This was achieved through a process called “tariffication” which required the establishment of tariffs that represented approximately the same level of protection as the import restrictions they replaced.<sup>13</sup> While tariffs provide Members with protection from imports, they also enable exporters to access import markets in a transparent and predictable manner.

Following the general disciplines of the AoA and the agreements in the Uruguay Round (UR) negotiations, developed and developing Members reduced their tariffs by different percentages and with different implementation periods, and included the final bound tariff for each product in their ‘schedules’ of concessions; the schedules represent commitments not to apply tariffs above the bound rates. The implementation of market access concessions related to tariff binding and reductions of tariffs in Members’ schedules, for both agricultural and non-agricultural products, is monitored by the Committee on Market Access rather than the CoA.

In the pillar of market access, Members must report and monitor in the CoA the implementation of commitments in respect of: a) tariff rate quotas<sup>14</sup> (TRQs) and b) the special safeguard for agriculture (SSGs).<sup>15</sup> Only Members that have TRQs or the right to use SSGs specified in their schedules are subject to the CoA notifications and monitoring in respect of these two instruments.

TRQs in Members’ schedules represent market access opportunities that can have various origins. Some quotas are the result of UR negotiations, as it was necessary to guarantee current or minimum access for products

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13 Many developing countries chose to bind their tariffs at “ceiling” levels, which, in several cases, were considerably higher than those actually applied.

14 A tariff rate quota is a trade policy measure entailing a two-tiered tariff structure on a product: it allows the concerned agricultural products to be imported up to a specified quota amount at reduced ‘in-quota’ tariffs; higher ‘out-of-quota’ tariffs apply to quantities exceeding the quota amount.

15 A special safeguard for agriculture is a trade policy measure that countries can implement as additional protection, allowing the tariff applicable to a product to be increased when certain conditions are met.

that had “excessive” protection, in applying the tariffication method that converted their non-tariff measure into its equivalent tariff. Other quotas result from renegotiations under WTO Agreements,<sup>16</sup> or result from the negotiations of Members that joined the WTO after 1995 (WTO accession processes). At present, over 1,200 tariff rate quotas are part of the commitments recorded in the Schedules of 41 Members (WTO 2022b), of which 15 are IICA Members.<sup>17</sup> The use and administration of quotas are notified and monitored in the CoA.

Equally, the use of SSGs provided in Article 5 of the AoA (WTO 1995a), which allows additional tariffs to be temporarily applied on the imports of eligible agricultural products under conditions set forth in that article, is notified and reviewed in the CoA. The SSG mechanism offers an additional safeguard tool with faster activation than the general safeguard- no proof of injury is required- when trigger conditions are met. However, it is only available for certain products that underwent a tariffication process and for which the concerned WTO Member indicated the SSG acronym against those products on their schedule.<sup>18</sup> Only 34 Members, of which thirteen are IICA Members,<sup>19</sup> have the right to apply SSGs for products that are clearly identified on their schedule of commitments.<sup>20</sup>

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16 For example, renegotiations under Article XXIV and XXVIII of the GATT 1994.

17 Australia, **Barbados**, **Brazil**, **Canada**, **Chile**, China, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Dominican Republic**, **Ecuador**, **El Salvador**, European Union, **Guatemala**, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, **Mexico**, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, New Zealand, **Nicaragua**, North Macedonia, Norway, **Panama**, Philippines, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland-Liechtenstein, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, **United States**, **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, and Vietnam. The draft schedule of the United Kingdom is pending certification.

18 For example, an increase in imports of a product eligible for recourse to SSG in a given year (trigger volume) or a drop in the import price of a shipment of that product below a certain reference price (trigger price) would allow the Member to invoke the mechanism and impose the additional tariff. The SSG cannot be applied to imports within tariff quota commitments, nor can both volume-based and price-based SSG be applied concurrently on a product.

19 Australia, **Barbados**, Botswana, **Canada**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Ecuador**, **El Salvador**, Eswatini, European Union, **Guatemala**, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, **Mexico**, Morocco, Namibia, New Zealand, **Nicaragua**, Norway, **Panama**, Philippines, South Africa, Switzerland-Liechtenstein, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Tunisia, United Kingdom, and **United States**, **Uruguay**, **Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**. The draft schedule of the United Kingdom is pending certification.

20 On these Member's schedules (in the 'section' on tariffs), in a column dedicated to the special safeguard, the acronym “SSG” appears alongside the eligible products or tariff lines.



## b) Domestic support

Within the framework of the AoA, all domestic support that benefits farmers is subject to rules. Domestic agricultural support is broadly classified based on its impact on production or trade, and is grouped using the terminology of “boxes”.<sup>21</sup> Members are allowed unrestricted use of ‘Green Box’ support without any limit (which also means these are exempt from reduction commitments) as long as the measures meet the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the AoA; typically, these are measures that do not distort trade or production, or at most do so minimally. Some examples of these measures are government-funded agricultural research or training of farmers, payments for environmental programmes, and natural disaster relief.

In addition to the Green Box, two additional support ‘boxes’ allow unlimited support (exempt from reduction commitments), subject to specific conditions outlined in the AoA. Firstly, the ‘Development Programmes’ Box allows developing country Members to use input and investment subsidies, as well as support to encourage diversification from growing illicit narcotic crops, provided they adhere to the provisions of Article 6.2 of the AoA (WTO 1995a). Secondly, all Members can freely use the “Blue Box,” which covers direct payments to farmers under production-limiting programmes, provided that they meet the conditions stipulated in Article 6.5 of the AoA (WTO 1995a).

The domestic support measures that do not fit in the three aforementioned ‘exempt’ categories or boxes automatically fall in the Amber Box. Support under the Amber Box has to stay within limits. Typically, this box includes measures that have the effect of stimulating production, including through raising or maintaining producers’ prices at a certain level. All Members have the right to use these measures up to a minimal or *de minimis* amounts (Article 6, paragraph 4 of the AoA) of support without having to include it in the concerned Member’s current AMS calculations. This minimum threshold<sup>22</sup> is defined as a percentage of the value

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21 It is understood that there is a distortion of trade when the prices and quantities produced, bought or sold are different from the levels that would normally exist in a competitive market.

22 *De minimis* threshold is 5 percent for developed country Members and 10 percent for developing country Members; there are some exceptions among recently acceded Members.

of production (VoP) and covers both product-specific support, where the de minimis amount will be calculated based on the VoP of the concerned product during the relevant year, and non-product-specific support, in which case the de minimis support is derived based on total agricultural VoP. A Member's de minimis limit can therefore vary year-on-year depending on whether its VoP increases or decreases.

Some Members have the possibility of granting support within the Amber Box that exceeds de minimis limits. During the UR, Members established the amounts of Amber Box support that they provided during the base period of 1986-1988. Those Members with support above the de minimis level in that period had to commit to reduce it over a defined implementation period. The commitments are listed in their schedules in the form of total aggregate measurement of support (Total AMS) which includes both product-specific and non-product-specific support. The final amount of Total AMS after reduction included in the schedule is known as the Final Bound Total Aggregate Measurement of Support (FBTAMS). Total AMS of a Member in a given year, called Current Total AMS (CTAMS), must not exceed the corresponding Bound Total AMS in the schedule.<sup>23</sup> Currently 33 Members have a positive FBTAMS on their Schedule.<sup>24</sup>

All Members must notify annually their domestic support at the end of the year and those with FBTAMS have specific timelines for the submission of their annual domestic support notifications. These notifications are collectively examined under the Committee's review process, as explained in the following section.

## c) Export competition

The AoA introduced for the first time quantitative limits on the use of export subsidies and included provisions on some measures that could

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<sup>23</sup> See Articles 1, 6, 7 of the AoA and its Annexes 3 and 4 for its definition and general rules for its calculation and limitation.

<sup>24</sup> **Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica**, European Union, North Macedonia Iceland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, **Mexico**, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Switzerland-Liechtenstein, Chinese Taipei, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom, **United States, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela**, and Viet Nam. The draft schedule of the United Kingdom is pending certification.

potentially have an equivalent effect. It prohibits export subsidies, unless these are specified in Members' schedule of commitments. The AoA lists most of the export subsidies that were common in the agri-food sector (Article 9.1) and limits their use by Members in accordance with their commitments on export volume and budgetary outlays for each product or group of products authorized on the Schedules (WTO 1995a). The AoA also clarifies that measures not listed in Article 9.1 (i.e. measures with an equivalent effect) must not be used in a manner that circumvents export subsidy commitments. The binding of agricultural products (or product groups) on Members' Schedules and the subsequent export subsidy reduction commitments come from the base period of 1986-1990. In total, 18 Members (originally 25) committed to reducing subsidies that they granted and to remaining within the level established in their Schedule of commitments, both for product volume and for disbursement amount.<sup>25</sup>

Although all export subsidies are prohibited on any product not included by a Member on their Schedule, as special and differential treatment, the Agreement allowed developing country Members to benefit, during the implementation period, from temporary exemptions to provide export subsidies listed in paragraph 1e) and d) of Article 9 (paragraph 4 of Article 9) to reduce the marketing and transport costs.

In December 2015, at the Ministerial Conference<sup>26</sup> in Nairobi (WTO 2015a), Members agreed to eliminate export subsidies. Developed Members had to do so immediately (with transition periods up to 2020 for select products) and developing country Members with authorized export subsidy levels had to do so by the end of 2018 (with transition periods up to the end of 2022 for some products or product groups). Developing country Members continued to benefit from the provisions of paragraph 4 of Article 9 of the AoA until the end of 2023, and the Least Developed

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25 The 18 Members are Australia, **Brazil**, **Canada**, **Colombia**, **United States**, Indonesia, Iceland, Israel, **Mexico**, Norway, New Zealand, **Panama**, South Africa, Switzerland-Liechtenstein, Turkey, European Union, **Uruguay** and **Venezuela**. Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Slovak Republic, had scheduled export subsidy reduction commitments, but have since become EU member States.

26 The Ministerial Conference is the supreme decision-making body of the WTO and generally meets every two years. The Ministerial Conference can take decisions on all matters covered by any of the multilateral trade agreements.

Countries (LDCs)<sup>27</sup> and NFIDCs (as defined in G/AG/5/Rev.10) will continue to do so until the end of 2030 (WTO 2015b). The agreement reached in Nairobi also imposed disciplines on export credits, export credit guarantees or insurance programmes, international food aid and agricultural exporting state trading enterprises.

The use of export subsidies is notified to the Committee annually and a specific monitoring exercise is performed every year on the application of the disciplines agreed upon in Nairobi. Further details about the annual monitoring exercise under the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition are included in the later sections. Since the grace period set out in footnote 17 of the Nairobi Decision expired in end-2020, all Members are obliged to reply to the Export Competition Questionnaire (ECQ) contained in the annex to the Nairobi Ministerial Decision.<sup>28</sup>

## Transparency

It is the responsibility of all WTO Members to improve and maintain transparency to contribute to the proper functioning of the multilateral trade system and the predictability of agrifood trade. The Agreement provides that Members have the obligation to demonstrate compliance with the disciplines and obligations listed in their schedules of commitments. Members comply with this obligation not only by submitting notifications in accordance with the established formats and guidelines (WTO 1995d), but also by participating in the respective review of those notifications by the Committee.

Notifications are technical documents presented by Members in relation to various disciplines, following the requirements and formats, adopted by the CoA in 1995, (WTO 1995e). There are a total of 12 different notification requirements applicable in the sphere of agriculture under five areas. The names of notifications are identified with initials representing

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27 The WTO recognizes countries that have been designated as LDCs by the United Nations; 35 of the 46 countries on the list are Members of the WTO.

28 Initially formed part of the annex to the Bali Ministerial Declaration on Export Competition (WT/MIN(13)/40-WT/L/915).

the subject area they deal with, which also facilitates Members' consultation on them and the review process in the Committee. The notification obligations applicable to each Member vary, as they depend to a great degree on the specific commitments they have taken on in the AoA. A few notification obligations, such as those related to agriculture subsidies (tables DS:1 and ES:1), apply to all WTO Members. The WTO Agriculture Information Management System (AG-IMS) has evolved and permits Members not only to consult notifications, but also to create and submit them online.<sup>29</sup> The AG-IMS, under its recent enhancements, now also enables online submission of Members' responses to the ECQ, along with online data extraction and reporting functions.

Lastly, Members strengthen transparency when they consult with each other on matters related to the application of the Agreement or on subjects that have an impact on agrifood trade. However, participation of Members in the review process of the CoA is not broad-based, and only a handful of them tend to be particularly active. This handbook seeks to guide WTO delegates and officials, including those from IICA countries, who are responsible for agriculture in the WTO, encouraging them to enhance their effective participation in the Committee.

## Distinction between monitoring and negotiation (Regular CoA vs. CoA Special Session)

The CoA's function is to monitor the implementation of the disciplines contained in the Agreement and in other ministerial Decisions. Its mandate is clear concerning the work of verifying that Members comply with the agreed disciplines and the commitments they have taken on in the different areas or pillars. Therefore, it is emphasized that the Committee does not have the authority or the mandate to negotiate new disciplines.

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<sup>29</sup> This is done with an account and password set by the WTO Secretariat; there are "admin" accounts that allow users to create, edit and submit and accounts that only allow users to create and edit. Members decide who has access to each type of account. Accounts can be requested at [agcd\\_mailbox@wto.org](mailto:agcd_mailbox@wto.org).

So, how can one negotiate in the WTO and continue the process of reform initiated in the UR? As mentioned earlier, the AoA contains a mandate to continue the process of reform. In accordance with the provision in Article 20 of the AoA (WTO 1995a), negotiations began in 2000 in the Committee on Agriculture meeting in Special Sessions. However, with the launch of a new round of negotiations in the WTO in 2001, the Doha Round, comprising ambitious negotiations across a set of issues, the negotiations initiated in 2000 focused on agriculture were effectively subsumed into this broader negotiating framework (WTO 2001). In this sense, the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC), established under the Doha Round, institutionalized the CoA in Special Session (commonly called CoA-SS) as a new body tasked with the negotiations separated from the CoA with a different Chair.<sup>30</sup> Since then, the issues related to the negotiation of new disciplines for agriculture are addressed in the CoA-SS and not in the regular committee or the CoA.

## **Why is the regular Committee's work important for the negotiations?**

Negotiating with counterparts becomes challenging in the absence of sufficient information. By analyzing notifications and replies submitted during the review process in the CoA, it becomes possible to piece together, the different scenarios that underlie the negotiation proposals submitted in the CoA-SS along with the domestic policy rationale behind Members' positions, much like assembling a jigsaw puzzle.

Therefore, active and enhanced participation in the regular Committee and its review process is essential for Members to acquire information that informs and feeds the negotiations. To evaluate and comprehend the position of different Members while forming one's own position in the negotiations, it is necessary to analyze the Members' use of various policy tools such as domestic support programmes, tariffs, export subsidies, and export prohibitions and restrictions as reported to and reviewed in the CoA.

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<sup>30</sup> The acronym CoA-SS stands for "Committee on Agriculture in Special Session."



### III. The CoA: its mandate and operation

As mentioned earlier, the CoA serves as the forum where WTO Members monitor the application of the AoA and assess compliance with the commitments arising from this and other decisions adopted by WTO Members. This section introduces the Committee's mandate, and the review process that enables Members to submit questions on each other's agricultural measures and notifications and exchange information. It addresses important elements that are necessary for Members to understand the operation of the Committee, including the rules of procedure for meetings, the meetings cycle, and the series of key documents. The role of the observer organizations on the Committee is also explained.

## The Committee's Mandate

It is common to hear Members use phrases such as “according to the mandate” or “that is not part of the mandate.” But what exactly is the Committee’s mandate? The Committee, established by virtue of Article 17 of the AoA, had its mandate defined under its ‘terms of reference,’ which were approved by the General Council in 1995:

“The Committee shall oversee the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture. The Committee shall afford members the opportunity of consulting on any matter relating to the implementation of the provisions of the Agreement.” (WTO 1995b).

Members have the opportunity to raise and address aspects related to other Members’ agriculture policies, regardless of whether these have been included in their notifications, or whether they are planned or currently implemented. In general, any issue that affects trade and is related to the disciplines that the Agreement contains can be discussed in the Committee.

According to the working procedures, the Committee’s regular meetings should be held in March, September, and November, with the possibility of additional regular meetings, as needed. Typically, the Committee meets three or four times a year, addressing standard agenda matters within its purview. Additionally, at the request of any of its Members, the Chair may convene extraordinary or ‘special’ meetings to deal with matters of significant importance or urgency. (WTO 1995d).

## What is the review process?

Compliance with AoA commitments is monitored through the “review process,” which consists of submitting, and reviewing notifications via questions and answers. Any other questions can also be raised about the application of commitments under the Agreement, based on the stipulations in article 18.6.<sup>31</sup> These latter questions, known as specific implementation matters (SIMs), are accordingly registered under the AG-IMS.

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31 Article 18.6: “The review process shall provide an opportunity for Members to raise any matter relevant to the implementation of commitments under the reform programme as set out in this Agreement.”



Notifications incorporate basic information on the implementation of Members' commitments in the AoA. However, the level of detail of the information contained in the notifications varies by Members. Consequently, a significant number of questions aim at seeking further details regarding the operation of programmes and measures implemented by the Members as outlined in the notification.<sup>32</sup>

## What questions can be asked?

Any questions about the programmes and policies included (or their absence) in the notifications, details of their operation, eligibility criteria, and clarifications on the calculations or the correctness or completeness of the information submitted, can be raised in the Committee. To understand what to ask, it is crucial to know how to analyze the notifications and the compliance requirements of each Member. The documents available on the Members' transparency toolkit on the WTO website, including those mentioned in section four of this handbook, can be valuable resources for Members in this task.

Ideally, all Members should thoroughly review all notifications to prepare relevant questions. However, practical constraints, such as lack of time or resources, often lead many Members to focus on priority matters or interests, especially with a focus on main trade partners or major players. To facilitate the review of notifications and the submission of questions, the WTO Secretariat has implemented a practice of pre-identifying 'nil' notifications- those indicating that concerned notifiable measures like export subsidies, special safeguards or domestic support have not been used. These notifications are highlighted in the reminder airgram, as explained in the "Meetings Cycle" section.

In the case of general questions related to Article 18.6, commonly referred to as SIMs, Members seek greater detail on a measure or confirmation of information. In some instances, questioning Members rely on external sources, such as news reports, official publications, or third-party information (such as embassies, organizations, etc.), which can be relevant to contribute to this review process.

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32 Some Members also emphasize the necessity of updating these formats to provide greater transparency and improve the quality and submission of notifications.

## Rules of procedure in meetings

At its inaugural meeting in March 1995, the Committee adopted its working procedures ('Organization of Work and Working Procedures of the Committee').<sup>33</sup> These procedures provide detailed information on the structure of the agenda for Committee meetings, the agenda-setting process, and associated timelines (WTO, 1995). Additionally, it was agreed that the proceedings of the Committee would be guided by customary GATT procedures and practices.

The Rules of Procedure for Meetings of the WTO General Council (GC) are the basis for the Rules of Procedure for Agriculture Meetings (WTO 1996) and apply unless the CoA working procedures state otherwise. The CoA Rules of Procedures contain guidelines on the preparation and adoption of the agenda, electing the Chair, conducting the debates (WTO 1997) and taking and adopting decisions.

### Who is the Chair and who elects them?

The Chair of the Committee leads the meeting to ensure that it flows in an orderly manner. Their role is to guide discussions, ensuring that debates keep to the areas of the committee's competence and that the Members stay focused on the point being discussed.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, the Chair must not influence such debates and must maintain a neutral position. The function of the Chair is supported by the Secretary of the Committee and other WTO officials.<sup>35</sup>

According to the rules of procedure, the Chair may be selected from among the representatives of Members, who could be a permanent representative or a delegate from a permanent mission in Geneva. Given the technical nature of the Committee, and particularly since the launch of

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<sup>33</sup> G/AG/1.

<sup>34</sup> WT/L/161, Rule 17 – "The Chair shall declare the opening and closing of each meeting, shall direct the discussion, accord the right to speak, submit questions for decision, announce decisions, rule on points of order and, subject to these rules, have complete control of the proceedings. The Chair may also call a speaker to order if the remarks of the speaker are not relevant."

<sup>35</sup> The WTO Agriculture Directorate designates which of its officials will be responsible for acting as Secretary of the Committee.

the agriculture negotiations and creation of a separate CoA-SS, the CoA often tends to be chaired by the delegate of a WTO Member responsible for agricultural matters<sup>36</sup>.

The process of appointing the Chair begins with consultations conducted by the Chair of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) with the regional groups to solicit nominations for candidates for the chairperson of committees or the CTG subsidiary bodies corresponding to their area, as established in the guidelines agreed upon by the WTO GC (WTO 2002). When the list of nominations is agreed upon by this Council, the Chair is formally elected by acclamation at the first CoA meeting of the year.

The Chair is elected for a period of one year. They begin their post at the end of the first meeting of the year (WTO 1997). In some years, the lack of consensus over the slate of nominations has resulted in delays in the election, causing alterations or disruptions to the normal working procedures of the Committee. While the possibility of the Chair's re-election also exists, it is not automatic, and the standard process of nomination and election described above must be followed.<sup>37</sup>

## Meetings cycle

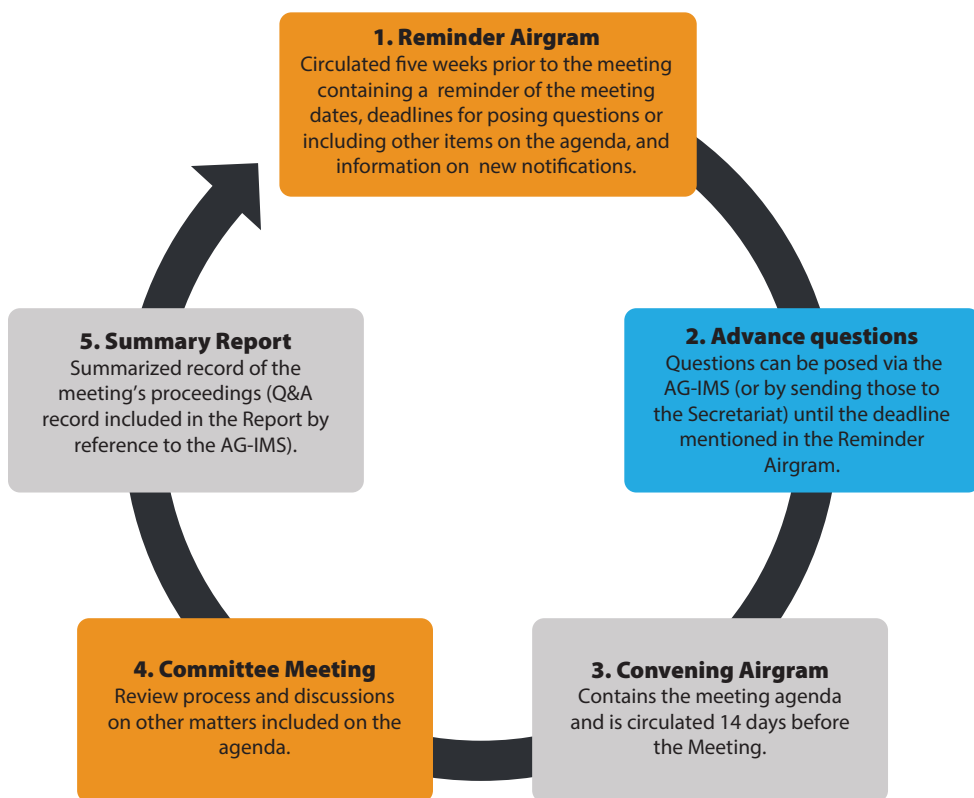
To improve Members' participation, it is crucial to understand the stages of the meetings cycle, which sets the tone for organizing the actions required of delegates and capital-based officials, along with the associated deadlines. The WTO Secretariat has described the five stages of the meetings cycle in the document G/AG/GEN/206, including documentation practices related to each stage (WTO 2022h).<sup>38</sup> Given the established frequency of the meetings, this cycle is repeated three or four times a year:

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36 In "WTO speak" these are commonly referred to as "Ag attachés."

37 In addition to geographical representativeness and balance among Members, there is an informal understanding or expectation on alternating the chairperson between a delegate from a developed country and a delegate from a developing country.

38 The timelines have been revised in the cyclic graphic to reflect the recent changes in the working procedures outlined in G/AG/1/Add.1.



**Figure 1.** Meetings Cycle.

**Note:** The recommendations and good practices for each of the stages in the meetings cycle are developed in the following section dedicated to explaining the Committee Meeting.

## WTO documents

All documents circulated by the WTO follow a nomenclature or classification system according to which they are identified and classified. The unique and most commonly used identifier of a WTO official document is called the 'symbol' of a document. Each symbol, situated at the top right of all documents, consists of a series of letters (or an abbreviation), numbers and suffixes. Numbers are used to indicate sequential order. Suffixes are used in the symbol to denote the status of a document; for instance, 'Add' denotes an addendum, and 'Rev.' signifies a revision.

Symbol is established by following the WTO documents classification (or nomenclature) system and its degree of complexity varies depending on the document series it belongs to, the topic in question and the document type (WTO 2023a).

WTO documents have varying access rights. A document may be “unrestricted”, and hence publicly or freely accessible on the WTO documents online platform. Alternatively, it may be released with restricted or limited access rights denoted by a ‘restricted’ indicator at the top right-hand corner of the document. Restricted documents are accessible only to authorized online documents users.<sup>39</sup> Airgrams, agendas, room documents and work documents are restricted. In the event of derestriction of an originally restricted document, the ‘restricted’ indicator is not removed from the document itself. The best way to find out if a document is restricted or has been derestricted and made publicly available is by searching it on the “WTO Documents Online” platform, without the use of passwords. If the document in question displays the “Restricted” indicator in the results list and appears in gray, it remains restricted and requires a password for access.

## What are the Committee’s key document types?

Document types denote the form or structure of WTO documents that share similar characteristics. The document types commonly used by the Committee are organized according to their function:

- **Airgram** (WTO/AIR/AG/#): documents to announce a meeting (along with important dates such as the date of the meeting, deadline for posing questions and including other matters on the agenda), and the proposed agenda.
- **Decision** (G/AG/#): Reports and decisions. The reports approved by the Committee of Agriculture on different topics, including those that have to be submitted to higher bodies, and the decisions of the Committee of Agriculture.
- **Communication** (G/AG/GEN/#): Documents of a general nature. All

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<sup>39</sup> Password-based access. Permanent representations can accredit officials who require access to these documents so that they have the credentials and password required for accessing ‘restricted’ documents on the document online platform.

the documents of a general nature that contain information and general statements that Members, observers or the Secretariat wish to share are distributed with the symbol G/AG/GEN/#, in chronological order.<sup>40</sup>

- **Working document** (G/AG/W/#): Proposals or submissions made as part of the work of the Committee of Agriculture whether by a Member or the Secretariat.<sup>41</sup>
- **Minutes** (G/AG/R/#): Report or summarized record of proceedings of a meeting.
- **Notification** (G/AG/N/#): Formal notification in writing by a Member to meet the transparency obligation in compliance with provisions of the Agreement; these are recorded by the Central Registry of Notifications.
- **Report** (G/L/#): Annual report to the CTG on the activities of the Committee.
- **Room documents** (RD/AG/#): The purpose of these documents is to facilitate debates on specific questions in WTO meetings (e.g., draft report on a specific matter for further discussions, or presentations by the Secretariat in a meeting of the Committee on Agriculture); symbols in a non-official RD/AG document series are assigned to such documents solely for archiving purposes and to facilitate access. Room documents are not always translated into the WTO's three official languages.
- **Convening notices for informal meetings** (ICN/AG/#) – Information and agenda of informal meetings of the Committee on Agriculture.

Two documents under the 'airgram' category are essential for purposes of the organization of regular Committee meetings and serve as the reference points for the work related to a Committee meeting that delegates or government officials need to undertake: the reminder airgram and the convening airgram (WTO 2022h). Table 1 describes the contents of each.

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40 They may include, among other things, useful information from the Committee on Agriculture, such as meeting schedules, workshop programmes, or communications from other organizations. When Members submit their statements made at CoA meetings for distribution, they are also published as GEN documents.

41 Secretariat background notes on selected topics (e.g. implementation of the Marrakesh Decision on Net Food Importing Developing Countries, annual consultations under Article 18.5) are also published in the G/AG/W/ series and are updated periodically.

**Table 1.** Characteristics of CoA Airgrams.<sup>42</sup>

Reminder Airgram	Convening Airgram
<p>Circulated 35 calendar days before the meeting and contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The date of the upcoming Committee meeting.</li> <li>■ A list of the new notifications distributed since the Committee's last meeting,<sup>43</sup> highlighting the null notifications.</li> <li>■ The deadline for submitting questions on individual notifications<sup>44</sup> or in accordance with Article 18.6 of the AoA.</li> <li>■ The deadline for the inclusion of points in part II of the agenda, regarding other aspects included in the Committee's sphere of competence (i.e., distinct from the "review process.")</li> </ul>	<p>Circulated 14 calendar days before meeting date and contains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The date and time of the formal meeting and, in some cases, information for an informal meeting (date and time).</li> <li>■ Agenda organized into two parts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review process, questions on notifications, and other questions under Article 18.6 of the AoA;</li> <li>- Other matters within the Committee's competence, including the follow-up on Ministerial Decisions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

It is important to remember that the agenda and the meeting documents are circulated during the working week, so if any of the deadlines fall on a non-working day, they will be moved to the preceding business day.

## Documents for Committee meetings

Documents for meetings can be accessed in several ways. The simplest method is to navigate the calendar section on the WTO's main web page. When the concerned meeting is selected, the users will be able

<sup>42</sup> The Committee on 29 November 2023 agreed on new timelines for initiating the preparatory process for a meeting and for submitting question and other agenda matters as per G/AG/1/Add.1.

<sup>43</sup> Included are notifications issued after the distribution of the "convening airgram" from the previous Committee meeting.

<sup>44</sup> Questions may not be limited to the notifications listed in the reminder airgram. Members may raise questions regarding any notification circulated before the deadline for submitting questions, including notifications discussed at a previous meeting of the Committee (see paragraph 10 of the Working Procedures).

to download all relevant documents for that meeting by clicking on the 'Documents' tab in the 'meetings' box.<sup>45</sup> To access restricted documents (e.g., agenda, room, or working documents), it is necessary to connect to the website with delegate access credentials.

## How to access/receive documents

In addition to the calendar, there are various other channels to access and receive communications and documents for the Committee. These are as follows:

### 1) Online WTO documents (*docs online*):

- Contains all the documents circulated by the WTO in the three official languages.
- Can be accessed at <https://docs.wto.org>, both for the publicly accessible documents and those exclusive to Members (i.e. 'restricted').
- Documents can be searched using one of the seven search modules: recent documents, commonly-consulted documents, documents for meetings, by topic, notifications, GATT, and simple search (wider).<sup>46</sup>
- Login and password are necessary to access restricted documents.

### 2) CoA-dedicated page

- Presents general information, news and highlights, links to documents. The website is accessible at : [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/ag\\_work\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/ag_work_e.htm)
- Information on the current CoA Chair.
- Contact information of the Secretariat team responsible for serving the CoA.
- Information on the work of the Committee.
- Rules of procedure and working procedures of the CoA.
- Information on the CoA's work.

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45 The interactive calendar of WTO meetings is available at: [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/events\\_e/events\\_list\\_view\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/events_e/events_list_view_e.htm)

46 Each search module has a "user" handbook with practical usage advice.



- Information on notifications.
  - Key digital tools, including the Agriculture Information Management System (Ag-IMS) containing search fields providing access to notifications, and transparency toolkit.
  - Information on observer international inter-governmental organizations.
- 3) *E-Subscriptions*** (electronic registration for online documents)
- This is a daily email alert system containing the list of documents circulated that day.
  - Provides a rapid review of documents circulated daily.
  - Access and distribution are restricted to delegates or government officials in capital. Registration is via the WTO online documents site (for Members).<sup>47</sup>
  - Initial registration requires the user to indicate the documents of interest and the preferred language. A daily email notifies recipients of the publication of subscribed documents with download links.
- 4) Secretariat email**
- Documents sent by the Secretariat: airmgrams, notes, reports, documents circulated shortly before the meeting.
  - Only authorized delegates or officials on the distribution list receive this type of communication.
- 5) AG-IMS**
- Access to relevant documents and user guides for submission of notifications, and responses to the export competition questionnaire (ECQ).
  - Allows for submission and access to: a) notifications; b) questions and answers in the review process; c) responses to the ECQ; d) reports on notified information on market access, domestic support, export subsidies and export restrictions. The website is accessible at: <https://agims.wto.org/en>
  - Public access for consulting information on the platform, but restricted login-based access for preparing and submitting online notifications, questions and answers, and responses to the ECQ.

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<sup>47</sup> Restricted documents require a password for viewing or downloading.

## Who are the Committee observers and what is their role?

Governments with observer status in the WTO are regularly invited to participate in the meetings of the Committee. These are countries typically in the process of negotiating their accession to the WTO.<sup>48</sup> Besides the observer governments, seven international intergovernmental organizations with competence and a direct interest in agricultural trade policy matters have been granted the status of permanent observers to the Committee: the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Grains Council (IGC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank. Since March 2012, the Committee has annually invited IICA as an ad hoc observer to participate in CoA meetings.

Intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) that seek to be considered as observers should send a request to the Committee, detailing their work and their relevance to the Committee's work.<sup>49</sup> The Committee should discuss and evaluate each request according to the GC guidelines.

Observer IGOs may be invited to contribute to discussions in the Committee on relevant agenda items. On this basis, the IGOs have regularly contributed to the annual monitoring of the follow-up to the Marrakesh Decision on LDCs and NFIDCs, including by way of detailed written contributions. Recently, IGOs were invited to contribute to the discussions under CoA work programme launched pursuant to Paragraph 8 of the Ministerial Declaration<sup>50</sup> on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity.

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48 Broad Terms and conditions for the participation of observer governments in WTO bodies are set out in Annex 2 of the rules of procedure for meetings of the General Council (WT/L/161).

49 They must comply with the general requirements for WTO observers set out in Annex 3 of the rules of procedure for meetings of the General Council (WT/L/161).

50 WT/MIN(22)/28-WT/L/1139.



## IV. CoA Meetings

This section presents practical details for CoA meetings, including participation and how this can be improved. A distinction is made between formal and informal meetings. In each case it is explained what participants should know about the organization of these meetings and what they can expect from them. It also includes actions and good practices that Members may implement over the meeting cycle for an informed and active participation.

### Who participates on the CoA?

The CoA meetings are open to participation from all Members of the organization, Observer governments in the process of accession, and international observer organizations. Each Member decides who should

participate as part of their delegation and selects their representative in each meeting. The make-up of the delegations tends to include personnel from ministries of agriculture, economy, trade, foreign relations and permanent delegations based in Geneva.

Although there is usually no limit on the number of people who can make up a delegation, the costs, logistics and perception of the relevance of the matters to be covered influence the in-person participation at meetings. This has created an inherent disparity in delegations' physical participation, but thanks to the recent routine organization of hybrid meetings (online<sup>51</sup> or in-person), there is an opportunity to strengthen the participation of experts from different ministries and improve the quality of exchanges.

Coordination between the delegation in Geneva and capital-based officials is essential for the preparation and better participation during the meeting. The "mapping" of topics of interest and of the responsibilities of each person is a first step in good practices.

External coordination, between delegations, and even with capitals, helps maintain communication channels and enables participants to exchange observations on notifications, stay informed about relevant global agricultural developments and news reports, coordinate questions, and seek support for specific ideas and proposals.

## Formal meetings, what you need to know

As mentioned above, the Committee meets three or four times a year, normally in the months of March, June, September and November (WTO 1995d). The exact date of each meeting is notified in the preceding meeting. Once the date is established, it is unlikely to change. Only on special occasions, such as ministerial meetings, has the meeting schedule been modified to put forward or back the committee's meeting date.

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51 Online participation in the conference system used by the WTO for its meetings requires the creation of a profile (generated by the Missions in Geneva for capital-based officials) and obtaining access credentials that users can choose once their profile has been created. The guidelines to facilitate the use of the system, such as requesting to speak, simultaneous interpretation and making interventions, are found in the help bar when accessing the system.

The duration of each meeting depends on the agenda circulated to Members, i.e., the number of questions and topics to be addressed. On average, in recent years the meetings have lasted two days.<sup>52</sup> The first part of the agenda dedicated to the review process takes up most of the time.

In the margins of formal meetings, informal meetings tend to be convened that serve to discuss some topics in more detail. The term “informal”<sup>53</sup> in the name may give a misleading impression regarding the significance of an informal meeting, especially for the successful development and preparation of a formal meeting, and the need to participate actively therein. In reality, these meetings offer Members the opportunity to explore technical questions and put forward positions in areas that require the decision and consensus of the Members. This encourages a frank and open exchange that is not recorded in minutes where attribution is given to Members’ statements.

The Secretariat, observers or Members can hold parallel events on matters of interest to them.<sup>54</sup> These events are communicated to the Committee beforehand and tend to be held outside the meeting (before the meeting starts, during the lunch break or after the meeting).

## **How and when is notification of a formal meeting given?**

At the end of each formal meeting, the planned dates for the next formal meeting of the Committee are given (WTO 1995d). The WTO Secretariat also publishes a reminder airgram generally four weeks prior to the meeting, which has become a good practice of the Secretariat. In a recent decision, the Committee agreed for the circulation of the reminder airgram for a meeting 35 calendar days prior to the date of the meeting.

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52 The normal WTO meeting time is from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M. and from 3 P.M. to 6 P.M., Geneva time.

53 These are meetings that do not have official minutes and in which no decisions or results are adopted.

54 Information on events, workshops and training are found in the WTO interactive calendar, available at: [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/events\\_e/wto\\_events\\_e.htm?bodyCode=AGRI](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/events_e/wto_events_e.htm?bodyCode=AGRI)

## How is the agenda set?

The agenda is set in accordance with the working procedures adopted in 1995 which, like the committee's work, is divided into two parts:

- Part I: covers elements related to notifications and the review process.
- Part II: covers all other business included in the scope of the Committee, including reports and contributions from Members and observers.

Part I deals with monitoring: it considers all notifications circulated since the release of the convening airgram for the previous meeting, as well as notifications already reviewed previously. On the draft agenda or the convening airgram, the notifications are divided into various headings: a) notifications in respect of which Members have submitted questions; b) notifications circulated prior to the release of the convening airgram but in respect of which no questions have been submitted; and c) notifications circulated after the issuance of the convening airgram. Also included for discussion are the state of compliance of notifications<sup>55</sup> and any counter-notifications that Members have requested to be included.<sup>56</sup>

Part II includes matters that require debates or follow-ups on other matters mandated by the AoA or by Ministerial Decisions, such as: the review of the WTO's NFIDC list; the monitoring of the Marrakesh Decision on NFIDCs; participation of Members in the annual discussions on trade growth under Article 18.5 of the AoA; the implementation of ministerial decisions agreed under the negotiations; and any other matter that a Member has requested to be included in the discussion.

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55 In November 2009 (paragraph 42(a) of document G/AG/R/56), the Committee agreed that the Secretariat would distribute the room document on compliance with notification obligations as an official and general document of the WTO before each formal meeting of the Committee. It has been circulated periodically by the Secretariat as document G/AG/GEN/86/series.

56 Art 18.7 of AoA allows a Member to bring to the attention of the committee information on any measure that it believes another Member should have presented by means of a notification.

## How and when can questions be asked under the review process?

As indicated above, Members can ask questions on any notification or any subject in the Committee's implementation sphere. They can submit questions over the AG-IMS interface (password-protected)<sup>57</sup> or send them by email to the WTO Secretariat and the concerned responding Members.

For the questions to be included on the agenda, Members must submit them before the deadline indicated in the reminder airgram (typically one day before the date established for the publication of the agenda, that is, at least 15 days before the meeting).<sup>58</sup> With the possibility of submitting advance questions through the AG-IMS, Members can now start to submit questions immediately after the closure of the previous formal meeting; for example, at the end of the September meeting, they can submit questions for consideration at the next meeting in November on any notification or other matters in accordance with Article 18.6.

The WTO Secretariat is responsible for validating and giving the proper format to the questions submitted by Members, assigning keywords, and adding suitable annotations to facilitate searches in the system (WTO 2022h). Following the submission of all questions by Members within the 15-day deadline, the Secretariat releases a compilation document for questions in the G/AG/W/ series, along with the convening airgram, and other documents for the meeting. All questions can be consulted by Members and the general public when they are uploaded to the AG-IMS. A Member can co-sponsor or join a question raised by another Member through the AG-IMS system up until one day before the Committee

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57 This function requires access credentials that are normally held by WTO Missions. To request these credentials, Missions can write to [agcd\\_mailbox@wto.org](mailto:agcd_mailbox@wto.org).

58 The Committee's Rules of Procedure state that advance questions regarding individual notices should be submitted "as far in advance of the meeting as possible, but no later than the day before the notice convening the meeting is to be published." The Committee's Rules of Procedure allow interested Members to raise questions posed under Article 18.6 at any time during the year through the Committee Chair. However, a practice has developed over the years of Members raising questions under Article 18.6 within the same time frame and under the same procedures applicable to questions regarding individual notifications.

meeting. Alternative, Members can also indicate their co-sponsorship at the start of the meeting before the adoption of the agenda.

## Committee Meeting: how does it progress?

Since the June 2023 meeting and thanks to the discussions that were held as part of the informal and formal meetings on improving the functioning of the Committee, the Committee's agenda has been accompanied by an annotated draft agenda that sets out issues that will be covered in the meeting and the type of action expected of Members on each point on the agenda.<sup>59</sup>

The Committee's first item of business at each meeting is the adoption of the agenda. The Chair at that moment requests Members to indicate if they would like to propose any amendments to the draft agenda or the convening airgram, which had been circulated 10 days prior to the meeting (now amended to 14 days following the modification in the CoA working procedures agreed by the Committee in November 2023). Members can propose addition of questions or issues under specific items in Part I or II of the agenda or, alternatively, under 'other business' (covering general matters where detailed deliberations are not anticipated). The Chair may also suggest amendments to the proposed agenda. If there are no objections, the agenda is adopted by consensus with the proposed modifications.

Immediately after the adoption of agenda, the Committee proceeds to consider the questions raised under the **review process** in accordance with Article 18.6 (or SIM) which have been included on the agenda for the first time, followed by those matters discussed in previous meetings. The SIMs corresponding to Article 18.6 are grouped in alphabetical order of responding Members. Each SIM is also assigned an identification number. After the consideration of all questions raised under Article 18.6, Members begin to review the notifications listed in the airgram based on advance written questions. The document containing the full

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<sup>59</sup> For an example, see RD/AG/117 (restricted document).



text of the questions for a meeting, released in G/AG/W/ document series, plays a pivotal role in guiding the Q&A-based discussions under the review process.<sup>60</sup>

The AG-IMS automatically assigns an identification number to each question, with the initial figures corresponding to the Committee meeting number and the remainder indicates sequential order (e.g., Ag-IMS ID# 99123, where 99 refers to the Committee's 99<sup>th</sup> meeting, and 123 is the series number assigned chronologically to the question). These question identification numbers are very useful in enabling Members to locate a question, review its detailed contents, and access the reply and relevant follow-up observations in the Ag-IMS database.

The answers to the questions raised in advance are the focus of the meeting. The Chair directly invites the responding Member to reply to the questions unless the questioning Members request the floor to introduce or elaborate on their questions. Members with follow-up or clarificatory questions may then request the floor for interventions. The agenda progresses to matters related to the notifications; overdue notifications; deferred replies;<sup>61</sup> and counter-notifications. Throughout the meeting, Members have the opportunity to request the floor at any point to express their opinions or provide additional information.

When the review process has concluded, the meeting proceeds with the discussions on other matters within the purview of the Committee, such as following up on various ministerial decisions, mandated reviews,<sup>62</sup> the Chair's report on informal meetings held in the margins of the Committee, and updates on different activities such as technical training and observers' reports. Generally, the Chair presents the status of each subject matter on the agenda and opens the floor to initiate the debates. Members decide when and how to participate in the discussion, based on their

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60 For an example, see G/AG/W/243, the question compilation document for the November 2023 meeting.

61 Starting from the June 2018 Committee meeting and based on the suggestion of the then Chair, the Secretariat distributes a follow-up document on pending responses to facilitate discussions under the agenda item "deferred replies." Since then, the list of outstanding responses has been distributed regularly before each meeting of the Committee, in the documents of the G/AG/W/204/ series.

62 Annual consultations on Members' participation in trade growth and the Decision on measures concerning the possible negative effects of the reform programme on LDCs and NFIDCs.

interests, and request the Chair for the floor accordingly. Lastly, there is an opportunity to address the matters included in “other business”, typically focusing on organizational aspects or issues that were not included on the agenda in time and on which a substantial debate is not expected. Before concluding the meeting, the Chair or the Secretariat informs the Committee of the proposed dates for the next meeting.

In the days following the meeting, the Secretariat circulates a follow-up email to the “Ag attachés” list with the key dates and deadlines for the next Committee meeting.

## **Replying to questions, what you need to know.**

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the review process of each meeting is on responses to the questions raised in advance of the meeting. Members expect complete replies to be provided at the latest during the meeting. Similar to the process for submitting questions, Members are encouraged to use the AG-IMS system to submit replies as far in advance as possible, to allow Members to review them and, where necessary, ask follow-up questions. The Secretariat compiles a list of replies received before the meeting into a document, which is then distributed to Members via email approximately one day before the relevant Committee meeting. The replies supplied through the AG-IMS become available immediately for consultation by Members and the general public. As part of the improvements to the AG-IMS Q&A function, Members can download an up-to-date list of the replies corresponding to a particular committee meeting (in a formatted Word document) at any time, directly through the AG-IMS password-protected site ([Q&A function](#)). Given this function, and to streamline Committee documentation, beginning with the 2019 Committee meetings, the Secretariat prepares a single “annual” compilation of questions and answers for all the Committee meetings in a given year.<sup>63</sup>

The AG-IMS sends informal, personalized reminders to Members who have outstanding responses. The questions that remain unanswered in

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<sup>63</sup> For example, the annual compilations of responses for the 2019, 2020 and 2021 meetings are contained in documents G/AG/W/215, G/AG/W/216 and G/AG/W/218, respectively.

the AG-IMS are incorporated into the Secretariat background document in the G/AG/W/204/ series. An up-to-date version of this document is routinely released prior to each Committee meeting.

## **Informal meetings: what you need to know.**

The real ‘action’ unfolds at these meetings. Ideas are presented and negotiated, concepts are clarified, and all groundwork is laid for decisions in formal meetings. The debates are comprehensive, and the trajectory of discussions can evolve unpredictably, underscoring the paramount importance of prior preparation. At these meetings, the position- whether in agreement or disagreement- are articulated, accompanied by supporting arguments or alternative suggestions.

### **What topics can be discussed in informal meetings?**

Informal meetings can be used to discuss any topic related to the implementation and application of AoA disciplines, the Committee’s working procedures, or the follow-up on relevant ministerial declarations and decisions (e.g., decision on tariff rate quotas; decision on export competition; declaration on response to food insecurity emergency; declaration on the WTO’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics). For instance, at these meetings, the Chair or a Member can propose discussions on improvements to a working procedure, and Members must engage in discussions to explore a possible consensus or understanding on what could be accepted and adopted in formal Committee meetings.

The discussions and decisions within the CoA focus on improvements in the implementation aspects - addressing what the agreement already contains, adhering to ministerial decisions, and resolving issues to improve the functioning of the committee. These discussions do not involve negotiations for new disciplines or deepening Members’ commitments in the different pillars; such tasks fall under the purview of the CoA-SS.

## How does one know that there will be an informal meeting?

Convening notices for informal CoA meetings are circulated in advance of those meetings in ICN/AG/ document series.<sup>64</sup> The Chair proposes the topics to be discussed in these notices. Additionally, the Chair generally provides space for Members to propose the inclusion of additional topics on the agenda.<sup>65</sup> For informal meetings held in the margins of formal or regular CoA meetings, often preceding the regular meetings, the convening airgram of the corresponding regular meeting includes a reminder of the informal meeting, providing details such as the time, venue, and document symbol of the convening notice of that informal meeting.<sup>66</sup>

## How do informal meetings work?

Informal discussions follow a different rhythm, resembling more of a debate, in which the Chair moderates and guides, but it is the Members who determine how and when it is appropriate to intervene on each of the topics. The Chair usually takes up the topics for discussions in the order in which they are included in the meeting invitation or the convening notice.

For each topic, the Chair provides a brief introduction and summarizes the developments from previous meetings, if applicable, along with the current status of the discussion on the topic. When there are proposals to discuss, the Chair typically begins by giving the floor to the Member (or group of Members) who circulated the proposal or document, allowing

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64 To distinguish between informal CoA or CoA-SS meetings, the convening notices for the latter are released in the ICN/AG/TN/ series, with the symbol containing an additional "TN".

65 Members may inform the Chair or make a request to the Secretariat if they wish to propose a topic of interest for discussions in an informal setting; it is advisable to do so well in advance, giving sufficient details to ensure others can appreciate the topic to be discussed.

66 It is advisable to verify and share with interested officials the key information in the convening notices of informal meetings: meeting dates, deadlines (if applicable), topics that require decisions and positions according to the interest of the delegation. It may be the case that the venue of the informal is different from the one designated for the formal meeting.

them to introduce the submission and present a summary. Following the introduction of the proposal, interested Members can request the floor and present their positions on the matter. While Members are free to ask questions or seek clarifications on the proposal, the exchange is less structured compared to formal meetings; and questions raised in informal discussions may not necessarily receive an immediate or definitive reply. Usually, the proponent Member(s) speak at the end to provide their reply or reaction to the issues raised by others in the discussions.

## **When does a topic move from an informal meeting to a formal one?**

When it is evident that the discussion has concluded and consensus on the proposed topic is discernible, the Chair may invite Members to consider whether the matter should be brought to the formal Committee for decision.<sup>67</sup> In all cases, the Chair provides a report on the discussions in the informal meeting to the formal Committee, which is then included in the record or the summary report of the formal meeting. At this point, the Members still have the possibility to reconsider their positions regarding the topics discussed. The reports of the informal meetings do not attribute interventions to specific Members.

## **Preparations for meeting participation: what to do before, during and after a meeting.**

Participation in the Committee, whether by submitting questions or replies, or intervening in other topics of discussion, is both a right and an obligation of Members in the sphere of transparency. To improve participation, it is necessary to first address some myths or beliefs that impede the involvement of some Members. For example:

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67 The Chair may convene as many informal meetings or individual consultations with Members as he or she deems necessary to advance an issue.

Myth	Reality
"Questions generate diplomatic incidents or damage bilateral relations"	One must not think that asking questions can cause a diplomatic incident. It is simply a matter of participating in an exercise for enhanced transparency, to which all Members are entitled to.
"Asking questions means pointing out that there is a problem or specific concern"	Questions are simply requests for additional information; they do not necessarily indicate a problem.
"Asking questions of another Member will trigger questions being asked about my own country"	Questions seek clarifications or additional information on measures and their adherence to rules, regardless of the motivation of the Members asking the questions. Therefore, questions should not be considered as reprisals for participating in the review process, instead, asking and answering questions only contributes to transparency.

## Good practices for preparing for a meeting:

Preparation for a meeting primarily concerns the first three stages of the meetings cycle. The following practices can be beneficial in each of the preparation stages for a Committee meeting.

### **1. Reminder airgram (first notification, generally five weeks before the meeting):**

- Delegates in Geneva should ensure that they are registered on the Ag Attachés list maintained by the Secretariat to guarantee receipt of all communications relevant to Committee meetings.<sup>68</sup>

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68 To be part of this list, a request must be sent to [agcd\\_mailbox@wto.org](mailto:agcd_mailbox@wto.org). The newly launched E-delegate platform offers a convenient, user-friendly, and flexible option to manage access to various WTO bodies, including the CoA (and CoA-SS), and to receive emails from the Secretariat.

- Send the reminder to officials in Geneva and capital-based officials involved in agricultural matters, as well as those responsible for preparing notifications. Emphasize the deadline for submitting questions or other items on the agenda.
- Review the notifications list, taking into account ‘nil’ notifications; also draw attention to notifications from other Members that may be of interest (prior mapping of products of interest by some Members).
- Enhance coordination between Geneva-based and capital-based delegates. Conduct a periodic review of topics of interest for raising possible questions under Article 18.6.
- Submit questions as far in advance as possible, using the AG-IMS.<sup>69</sup>

## **2. Advance questions**

### a) Good practices for the review of notifications:

- Conduct internal consultations to identify interests and find Members with similar interest and concerns (exporters/importers of the same product) to coordinate and share information on notifications, policies or programmes within the Committee’s scope.
- Ensure rapid access to information for a systematic and clear review: consult the Schedule of commitments of the notifying Member in question, prior notifications, questions raised in the review process, and incomplete replies.
- Refer to the handbook on Notification Requirements for quick consultation on disciplines and the Members obliged to notify (WTO 2015c).
- Utilize the Cairns Group<sup>70</sup> document “What to look for when reviewing notifications”, available on the WTO website for the benefit of all delegates. The document contains suggestions and examples of basic information that could facilitate the preparation of questions for each type of notification (Cairns Group n.d.).

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69 This function requires access credentials that are normally held by WTO Missions. To request these credentials, the Missions can write to [agcd\\_mailbox@wto.org](mailto:agcd_mailbox@wto.org).

70 Negotiating group composed of agro-exporting countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Philippines, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, Thailand, Uruguay and Viet Nam.

b) Good practices for the submission of questions:

- Conduct prior mapping: establish a clear understanding of products and markets of interest for submitting questions.
- Facilitate internal coordination on matters of interest identified in notifications that require complementary clarifications or information.
- Coordinate internally on matters of interest identified by interested parties that require clarification, in accordance with Article 18.6 of AoA.
- Verify, using AG-IMS, whether similar questions have been asked by other Members (search for key words and previous meetings).
- Send a courtesy email or report to the delegate, stating the intention to ask a question.
- Submit questions through the AG-IMS as early as possible.
- Review Members' compliance with commitments in areas actively pursued in the negotiations and seek clarity on elements with presumed inconsistencies.

### **3. Committee Meeting**

The large number of questions addressed by the Committee at each meeting, and the way in which some Members address the responses (grouped together or in a different order than proposed in the questions) can make it difficult to track the progress of a meeting. Good practices and suggestions for the Committee meeting include the following:

- Utilize the question compilation document of the meeting to pre-identify questions of interest.

Actions for Members answering questions:

- Clearly identify the order and the identifiers of the questions that have been submitted and those that are being answered (including the SIM numbers and the AG-IMS identifiers corresponding to each question).
- Confirm whether the answers, along with any follow-up information, have been incorporated into the AG-IMS.



## Actions for Members requesting answers:

- If the answers to the questions were sent via the Ag-IMS in advance of the meeting, share the answers with the capital-based officials responsible, especially if the answer leads to follow-up questions.
- Request clarification from responding Members during (reply) and after the meeting, as necessary.
- Contact the concerned responding delegations to follow up on incomplete answers.
- In cases where no answer is provided, the Member may consider repeating the question at the next Committee meeting.<sup>71</sup>

## Summary report—Review of the records of the Committee’s proceedings

The minutes or summary report of each meeting is available on the WTO website under *documents online*. The reports are originally published as ‘restricted’, then made public after 45 days. Since the March 2010 meeting, the Secretariat has distributed the compilation of questions and answers (Q&A) as a separate document in the G/AG/W/ series.<sup>72</sup> Since then, the Secretariat has discontinued its practice of summarizing the questions and answers in summary reports and has rather included the Q&A-based record in the report by reference to relevant AG-IMS identifiers. For a period, Members’ follow-up complements and observations continued to be included in the summary reports until they began to be the part of a separate Q&A compilation document. Under the current practice, the summary reports routinely comprise a tabular list of all questions raised at a meeting under specific agenda items, with hyperlinks to the relevant AG-IMS identification numbers, providing access to questions, answers,

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71 Members may resubmit (i.e. repeat) a question that has not been answered. These questions are included in the agenda item on “deferred replies to questions raised in the review process.” Members only need to enter the question identifier in AG-IMS, after which the system will automatically reproduce the content of the question for presentation.

72 Since 2019, the Secretariat has prepared a single “annual” list of questions and answers for all Committee meetings in a given year.

and follow-up comments. Regarding matters other than Q&A, especially those under part II of the agenda, the summary reports provide a detailed account of what happened in the discussions on each topic, with Members' positions and statements included in a summarized form with attribution. This document is crucial to follow discussions at Committee meetings on topics of interest, and to appreciate Members' positions. Chair's oral reports on informal CoA meetings are routinely attached to summary reports. Any discrepancy noted by a delegation in the summary report compared to its actual interventions made at the meeting can be communicated to the Secretariat for correction. The Committee's Rules of Procedure also provide that any delegation may verify the draft summary report containing their statements prior to its release. In such cases, interested delegations should advise the Secretariat within 10 days of the close of the concerned meeting.

## Annual debates, specific issues and proposals

### 1) Members' participation in the normal growth in global trade of agricultural products (Article 18.5) (WTO 1995f).

The AoA sets the obligation for Members to annually consult on their participation in the growth of trade in agricultural products, as part of the Committee's work. This exercise is undertaken every year in November CoA meetings within the framework of Members' export subsidy commitments under the AoA. These consultations accordingly rely on Members' notifications in the area of export subsidy circulated in the ES series. To facilitate the annual consultations, the WTO Secretariat also prepares a detailed background note in the G/AG/W/32/series containing data on export volumes and values for select products and product groups, and the evolution of the world market shares of the leading exporters in respect of those products<sup>73</sup>.

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<sup>73</sup> In view of the exercise being undertaken within the framework of export subsidy commitments, the Secretariat relies on the product list used for the purposes of scheduling export subsidy commitments and included on page 24 of document G/AG/2.

Members in these consultations typically intervene to highlight changes and trends that, in their judgment, require clarifications or greater scrutiny. Some Members also allude to the need to review the current product list used for the purposes of collecting trade statistics and examining evolution of trade shares.

## 2) Decision follow-up

The Committee also bears the responsibility to follow up on the implementation of decisions agreed by higher bodies, including the WTO Ministerial Conference or the General Council. Some of these decisions have originated under the ongoing agriculture negotiations. Consequently, the Committee's agenda maintains an item, namely "Implementation of Ministerial Outcomes", in part II allowing for follow-up discussions on relevant specific decisions, as needed. In some cases, the frequency and timing of follow-up discussion is provided directly in the specific decisions. For instance, the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition requires an annual dedicated discussion to examine developments in that pillar. At the request of a Member, any implementation aspect of the follow-up to a decision may be included on the draft agenda. Discussions under the follow-up to a decision usually take the format of a flexible debate, where Members choose how and when to participate, similar to discussions under informal meetings, albeit typically with more prepared interventions. In some cases, these discussions also include a Q&A component, similar to the modality of discussions under the review process<sup>74</sup>

### ***a. Follow-up to the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (Marrakesh Decision) (WTO 1995g):***

The Decision adopted in 1995 establishes certain mechanisms to ensure that the application of the agriculture reform programme of the UR "does not adversely affect the availability of food aid at a level which is sufficient

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74 This is usually the case for the annual export competition exercise.

to continue to provide assistance in meeting the food needs of developing countries, especially least-developed and net food-importing developing countries” (WTO 1995, para. 3).

Under Article 16 of the AoA, the Committee has the responsibility to monitor the follow-up to the Marrakesh Decision. The Committee has established notification requirements, mandating donor Members to report on measures adopted within the framework of the decision in their annual Table NF:1 notifications. The Committee undertakes annual monitoring of the follow-up to the Decision in accordance with and under paragraph 18 of the Working Procedures. Members’ Table NF:1 notifications are a key input for the annual monitoring. Additionally, the Secretariat prepares a background document in the G/AG/W/42/ series containing detailed information on the application of the Marrakesh Decision.

***b. Review of the NFIDC list:***

At its meetings in March, the Committee reviews the list of Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDCs) of the WTO. Alongside Least Developed Countries (LDCs), according to the classification of the United Nations, NFIDCs are designated as the beneficiaries of measures under the Marrakesh Decision on measures concerning the possible negative effects of the reform programme on the Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (Marrakesh Decision). The list of NFIDCs is established by the Committee. (WTO 1995g).

A net food-importing developing country Member may submit a request to the Committee for inclusion in the NFIDC list at least 15 days prior to the March Committee meeting in any year. The request should be accompanied by relevant statistical data in respect of total and net imports, on a value and quantity basis, and of their relative importance as a proportion of domestic consumption of the products concerned. The request may be sent to the Secretariat within the stipulated timeline, and the Secretariat notifies other Members about the request. Any interested Member can consult the statistical data accompanying the concerned request at the offices of the WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division or by sending a request to the Secretariat to receive the data. The matter is then included on the agenda of the upcoming March meeting of the Committee for consideration. Typically, the requesting Member presents the request at

the meeting, and other Members can make relevant interventions. Once the Committee decides to include a developing country Member in the NFIDC list, the Secretariat circulates an updated list in the G/AG/5/ series. The most recent update to this list was in 2023, when Tonga was included (WTO 2023c).<sup>75</sup>

**c. Review and monitoring of the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition.**

*i). Annual examination process*

Under the Ministerial Declaration on export competition (WTO 2013) (document WT/MIN(13)/40-WT/L/915) adopted at MC9 in Bali in 2013, Members committed to increase transparency and improve surveillance in relation to all forms of export subsidies and all export measures that have an equivalent effect, and agreed to conduct annual dedicated discussions to examine developments in the field of export competition to support the reform process. The Declaration states that the examination process should be carried out based on timely notifications, complemented with information compiled by the WTO Secretariat on the basis of Members' replies to the questionnaire included in the annex. The questionnaire covers information on export subsidies, export credits, export credit guarantees or insurance programmes, international food aid and agricultural exporting State Trading Enterprises.

The Ministerial Decision on export competition (WTO 2015b), adopted in 2015 at MC10 in Nairobi, mandated the elimination of export subsidies within an agreed timeframe, and strengthened disciplines on other export measures with equivalent effect. The decision also reaffirms Members' commitment to the annual examination process consistent with the Bali Declaration. Therefore, starting in 2013 and particularly since 2016, the Committee has undertaken annual dedicated discussions on export competition following a specific track as set out in the Bali Ministerial Declaration on export competition.

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<sup>75</sup> The latest list can be consulted under the symbol G/AG/5/Rev.12.

This annual examination process follows the cycle outlined below:

- The exercise commences with a message from the CoA Chair inviting Members to respond to the ECQ (annexed to the message) by a certain date. Members can respond to the ECQ either on-line via the AG-IMS or by sending their response to the Secretariat which will incorporate their response to the AG-IMS. Since the expiry of footnote 17 of the Nairobi Decision in end-2020, all Members have been required to reply to the ECQ.
- Based on Members' responses to the ECQ distributed by the CoA Chair and the information taken from their relevant notifications, the Secretariat circulates a background document<sup>76</sup> (G/AG/W/125/ series and its four addenda) on export subsidies, export credits guarantees or insurance programmes, international food aid, and agricultural exporting state trading enterprises several weeks in advance of the date of annual examination process.
- Before the scheduled CoA meeting for conducting the annual examination process, Members may submit advance written questions following the general timelines and procedures as for the CoA review process.<sup>77</sup> Members may pose questions regarding export competition, including the follow-up to the Nairobi Decision, at any CoA meeting.
- After the conclusion of the annual examination process, as per current practice, the Secretariat circulates an updated version of the background document. This updated version incorporates late responses received after the final deadline (G/AG/W/125/ series and its four addenda).

Since the adoption of the Nairobi Decision, a total of eight annual examinations have been conducted, with the most recent one taking place in June 2023.

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76 With the launch of the ECQ facility under the AG-IMS, allowing online submission of Members' responses to the questionnaire and facilitating online data extraction and reporting functions, there is potential for streamlining the Secretariat's background document by providing Members access to comprehensive information through a combination of the background note and reports generated via the online ECQ facility.

77 The AG-IMS includes a specific option to accommodate the Q&A process on the follow-up to the Nairobi Decision whereby Members could submit and respond to those questions via the AG-IMS.

## *ii) Triennial review*

The committee also reviews the disciplines contained in this Decision every three years, according to the following stipulation:

The regular sessions of the Committee on Agriculture shall review every three years the disciplines contained in this Decision, with the aim of enhancing disciplines to ensure that no circumvention threatens export subsidy elimination commitments and to prevent non-commercial transactions from being used to circumvent such commitments (WTO 2015b).

Discussions under the triennial review take place in informal sessions, drawing on Members' submissions and inputs, along with support from the Secretariat. Members also take due account of the discussions on similar issues in the export competition pillar under the negotiations track of the CoA-SS. Following these informal deliberations, a draft report of the review and recommendations is prepared for the consideration of the Committee in a formal session. Two triennial reviews have been conducted to date (WTO 2018, WTO 2022e), with a primary focus on enhancing transparency and the implementation of the Nairobi Decision.

### ***d. Examination of the functioning of the Bali Decision on tariff rate quota administration (Bali Decision)***

At the Ministerial Conference in Bali (December 2013), Members adopted a Decision on the "Understanding on tariff rate quota administration provisions of agricultural products, as defined in article 2 of the agreement on agriculture" (hereinafter Bali Decision) (WTO 2013b). The decision also incorporates a TRQ underfill mechanism for monitoring tariff rate quotas with low fill rates, or with lack of notifications. In the case of quota underfill, a four-year consultation process will be initiated, during which information will be supplied to verify whether the underfill is due to the administration method. If so, the mechanism requires Members to modify the administration method used for this quota for a minimum of two years. Paragraph 4 of the underfill mechanism provides for special and differential treatment for importing developing country Members. The Committee on Agriculture is to monitor the implementation of the

Decision including the recourse to the underfill mechanism. In September 2022, the Committee approved the Secretariat tracking register<sup>78</sup> to record matters raised under the mechanism. The mechanism has not yet been used.

The Decision also provides for a review of its operation no more than four years following the adoption of the Decision. This review was conducted by the Committee during the 2017-2019 period, and the report and resulting recommendations, which can be found in annex 2 of the document G/AG/29, were adopted by the Committee in October 2019 and approved by the GC in December 2019. The recommendations provide measures and processes aimed at increasing transparency and improving notification practices. On the issue of the future operation of paragraph 4 of the underfill mechanism, Members reached an agreement on 31 March 2022, providing greater clarity and predictability for developing importing Members to achieve a 'closure' of the underfill matter in the final stage of the Underfill Mechanism (WTO 2022d).

Under this agenda, the Committee focusses on the follow-up to the specific recommendations agreed during the 2017-2019 review of the operation of the Bali Decision. The Secretariat background note in the G/AG/W/183/ series (WTO 2022b) facilitates those discussions. One of the agreed recommendations of the 2017-2019 review provides for regular triennial reviews of the operation the Bali TRQ Decision after the conclusion of that review. Accordingly, the first such triennial review commenced in 2022 with the adoption of the report and recommendation of the review in June 2023. The approved report includes an agreement among Members on enhanced transparency of MA:2 notifications in respect of TRQs with countryspecific quota allocations in the Schedule. The notifying Members in such cases are encouraged to report imports disaggregated by supplying countries, along with total in-quota imports. Members also agreed to review the MA:1 notification format in G/AG/2 to enable Members to include the required information on the implementation of paragraphs 2 to 5 of the Bali TRQ Decision in their MA:1 notifications. (WTO 2023b). The next triennial review should commence in 2025.

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78 G/AG/34.



### 3) Follow-up of other ministerial results

#### *i) Work programme pursuant to paragraph 8 of the Ministerial Declaration on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity (WTO 2023d).*

At the Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12) (WTO 2022a), ministers agreed on a declaration on food insecurity. They instructed the CoA to initiate a dedicated work programme to examine ways of making the Marrakesh Decision more effective and operational and to consider the food security needs and challenges of LDCs and NFIDCs especially during an emergency.

The Committee commenced discussions on the elaboration of the work programme at its June 2022 meeting just a few weeks after MC12. The Committee agreed on a work programme along with the four thematic areas for collective deliberations– access to international food markets; financing of food imports; agricultural and production resilience of LDCs and NFIDCs; and horizontal issues. (WTO 2022g).

To facilitate access to information, the Secretariat has set up a webpage on the work programme, available at: [https://www.wto.org/english/tra-top\\_e/agric\\_e/wrkprog-fsldcs\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tra-top_e/agric_e/wrkprog-fsldcs_e.htm)

#### *ii) Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics (WTO 2022j).*

At the MC12 in Geneva (2022j), Members also adopted the Ministerial Declaration on the WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics. Paragraph 24 of the declaration asks the relevant WTO bodies, including the CoA, to analyze lessons that have been learned and challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and proposes a stock-taking exercise in 2024.

The Committee commenced deliberations on the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to agriculture at a special meeting in June 2020. Transparency has remained central in the Committee's discussions on the pandemic. Members' "ad hoc" reports on their agricultural measures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic facilitated an informed exchange of views in the Committee. Since September 2022, the

Committee has considered this matter within the overall guidance of the MC12 Declaration.

### **How to submit documents for consideration in the CoA.**

Proposals and other contributions by Members are usually distributed as work documents (G/AG/W/#) or room documents (RD/AG/#) and can be discussed in formal or informal meetings. Submission for sharing information and promoting transparency on a matter are circulated as 'general' or G/AG/GEN/ series document. Author Members must send their submissions by email to the WTO Secretariat for processing and distribution. The deadline for including other documents on the agenda is the same as the date for submitting questions, 15 days before the meeting.

It is recommended to "socialize" proposals well in advance through consultations with other Members and their inclusion initially in informal meetings, with the purpose of obtaining greater support (or less resistance) to the ideas proposed in the document.

### **Good practices for participation in debates:**

- Submit proposals or documents well in advance to allow delegations adequate time for analysis and discussion.
- Follow the good practices suggested earlier for submitting questions for the review process (e.g., mapping interests, timely submission, consultation with interested Members, review of previous questions).
- Identify whether a decision is required or anticipate potential actions for each debate, so as to have timely clear instructions.
- Review the notes and reports prepared by the Secretariat for each topic, and the relevant notifications. Trade interests and priority markets should be considered for this.
- Review the contributions by observer organizations to enhance interventions and react to specific topics.
- Consult the information and debates in other international organizations on the subject.
- Consult with other delegates on their positions on proposals or their impressions of documents that will be discussed, to anticipate critical points and seek alliances or support on topics of interest.
- Prepare general discursive lines in advance and adjust them as the debate progresses.



## V. Tools available in the WTO Secretariat and IICA

### a) AG-IMS

As mentioned earlier, the AG-IMS permits users to consult Members' all agriculture notifications, records of Committee's deliberations since 1995, and data and reports based on Members' notifications and responses to the export competition questionnaire (ECQ). The System, through its password-protected interface, also enables online submission of notifications, questions and answers for each Committee meeting, as well as responses to the ECQ. Since its implementation in 2013, the System has become an integral part of the Committee review process, as it has improved transparency and the overall functioning of the meetings.

At the same time, the AG-IMS has continued to be a dynamic tool capable of adjusting and improving based on evolving needs. In recent years, the system has incorporated numerous improvements and enhancements primarily driven by Members' requests and suggestions. The modifications that have been made to the system in recent years include among others: a) enabling early submission of questions and answers (Members can now submit questions for a meeting immediately after the end of the previous meeting; similarly, responses can be submitted prior to the Committee meeting); b) predefined categories for the formulation of questions (repeat, co-sponsor and follow up questions, including those under Article 18.6 and the follow up to the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition); c) allowing a Member to join or co-sponsor a question already raised by another Member; and d) Export Competition Questionnaire (ECQ) on-line tool enabling online submission of Members' responses to the ECQ and online data extraction and reporting functions. (WTO 2022h). The AG-IMS hosts training material and user manuals under its [help](#) section for users.

AG-IMS is public: anyone can access and consult the notifications, questions, and answers as soon as they are included on the platform. However, to submit information on the platform, it is necessary to have an account and password, which must be requested from the WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division.<sup>79</sup>

## **How are Members notified that they have questions to answer?**

The Member to whom a question is addressed receives an email alert, indicating that another Member has entered a question, and also receives an invitation to answer as soon as possible. The system incorporates the contact details of permanent missions and any question that is submitted to a particular Member will be sent to the concerned permanent mission's institutional email.

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<sup>79</sup> The delegations decide which of their officials are authorized to manage this account that allows them to ask or answer questions.

A good practice in submitting questions is to select the Geneva delegates who appear in the field “Send email to” field, so that they also receive a copy of the question. It is useful to identify delegates who monitor the CoA under the WTO eRegistration portal<sup>80</sup>.

## b) Transparency toolkit

Members’ transparency toolkit, accessible on the agriculture webpage of the WTO public website, makes information and links available to Members and the general public to:<sup>81</sup>

- The legal basis: the Agreement on Agriculture articles and decisions on aspects related to transparency and notifications.
- The form and place where key documents can be found for preparing and consulting notifications.
- The WTO resources available online: databases, handbooks and tutorials related to improving the submission and review of notifications.

## Technical Cooperation Handbook on Notification Requirements

The WTO Secretariat has prepared this handbook as a practical guide to help Members comply with their WTO notification obligations. For notifications in relation to the AoA, the handbook is organized into five parts: 1) an overview of notification requirements; 2) a list of the notification obligations derived from the AoA; 3) links to relevant document(s) concerning guidelines and formats for preparing notifications; 4) a link to a list of notifications since 1995 and to the AG-IMS; and 5) the text of the agreement (WTO 2022k). Each section provides links to requirements and relevant documents, facilitating easy consultation.

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<sup>80</sup> eRegistration is the WTO portal for the registration of officials, to which mission delegates and officials registered in the system have access. It includes the directory of the WTO Secretariat and the directory of Member Missions. Its functions include creating the individual profile with contact information and specifying what topics each delegate covers. It is available at: <https://eregistration.wto.org/login>.

<sup>81</sup> WTO Members’ Transparency Toolkit is available at: [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/transparency\\_toolkit\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/transparency_toolkit_e.htm)

For delegates, this handbook serves as an excellent quick-reference tool that can help them to prepare notifications and verify information as part of their preparation for participation in the Committee. The handbook is available at:

[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/handbook\\_on\\_notifications\\_complete\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/handbook_on_notifications_complete_e.pdf)

## **Handbook on notification requirements under the AoA**

Prepared by the WTO Secretariat, this handbook focusses on notification requirements under the AoA. It presents in an educational manner the requirements and notification formats divided into five major thematic areas: market access, domestic support, export subsidies, export prohibitions and restrictions, and follow up to the Marrakesh Decision. For each area, the handbook presents corresponding notification format, accompanied by an explanation of what must be notified together with the pertinent references. The handbook refers to examples of notifications for the purposes of illustration, without implying a judgment on the quality or content of the notifications (2015c). The handbook can be consulted at:

[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/ag\\_notif\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/ag_notif_e.pdf)

## **New CoA website**

The WTO Secretariat has developed a new webpage for the Committee on Agriculture aiming to improve access to essential information about the CoA's functioning, procedures, and relevant documents. It includes informative sections that help Members better understand the CoA's work, including presentations on the subject by the Secretariat, a description of various documents managed by the CoA, a description of the areas covered by the CoA, meeting dates, and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) about Committee operation and the Secretariat's work. Access to some information on the webpage is restricted to Members only. (WTO n.d.b.) The website can be consulted at:

[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/agric\\_e/ag\\_work\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/ag_work_e.htm)

## Glossary of Agriculture Terms. WTO

The WTO website contains a glossary of the “WTO technical jargon” commonly used in the organization in its three official languages. Although not exhaustive, this resource is developed to facilitate understanding of terms used in the WTO and in international trade. The definitions presented are only for information purposes and do not constitute authorized interpretations of WTO legal texts (WTO n.d.e.) The glossary can be accessed at the following link:

[https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/glossary\\_e/glossbysubject\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/glossary_e/glossbysubject_e.htm)

## Technical assistance and contacts

### 1) *WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division*

The personnel of the WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division can advise Members on the preparation, verification and submission of notifications. They can also be consulted on subjects under discussion and matters of participation on the Committee. The Division has an important role in the preparation of background documents to facilitate the CoA review process. The Division has officials specializing in the different pillars and disciplines who can provide consultation to delegates of the missions or capital-based officials. The contacts of the Secretariat personnel can be found in the protected section of the page of the Committee on Agriculture.<sup>82</sup>

### 2) *Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC)*

Technical assistance activities aim to help developing country Members take full advantage of the multilateral trade system. The ITTC coordinates these activities in the WTO Secretariat, based on technical assistance and training plans. The WTO mandate to conduct technical cooperation activities is established in different WTO agreements and decisions. Through

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82 General contact: [agcd\\_mailbox@wto.org](mailto:agcd_mailbox@wto.org).

their Missions in Geneva, Members may request the design and implementation of technical assistance programmes (in-person or online), with the purpose of training government officials and representatives of the private sector and the academic sector on the Agreement's disciplines, notifications, negotiations and other areas of trade policy related to agriculture. Technical assistance requests can be made via the following link: <https://tams.wto.org/><sup>83</sup>

### 3) *The WTO-IICA Reference Centre*

Since 2012, through its WTO reference center, IICA provides its technical assistance services in international agricultural trade regulations. Its technical assistance and training services, free for its 34 Members, consolidate knowledge of the WTO's role, agricultural trade negotiations and countries' agriculture commitments.<sup>84</sup>

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83 Contact: <https://tams.wto.org/form/help-request-tame>.

84 Contact: Office of Technical Cooperation [dct@iica.int](mailto:dct@iica.int)



# Glossary of terms<sup>85</sup>

**Ag attaché:** a delegate of a Mission in Geneva responsible for agriculture.

**Aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS):**

- Trade-distorting AMS has two components. **Non-product specific and product-specific:** the product-specific AMS is calculated for each basic agricultural product and typically covers support measures such as market price support and non-exempt direct payments. Non-product specific support is support provided in favor of agricultural producers in general. Only members with an AMS commitment in their schedules of commitments can provide AMS support beyond their de minimis level and up to this commitment. Current AMS calculations are calculated based on Annex 3 of the AoA.
- **Bound TotalAMS:** refers to the maximum support limit recorded in the Schedule of Commitments.
- **Current AMS:** refers to the amount of support granted and notified in a certain year.

**Box:** term used for the classification of domestic support.

- **Amber box:** Domestic support for agriculture that is considered to distort trade and therefore subject to reduction commitments (i.e., subject to limits). Technically calculated as “Aggregate Measurement of Support” (AMS)
- **Green box:** Domestic support for agriculture that is allowed without limits because it does not distort trade, or at most causes minimal distortion (Annex 2 of the AoA).

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85 Based on the WTO glossary available at [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/glossary\\_e/glossary\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/glossary_e/glossary_e.htm)

- **Blue box:** type of support provided under government programmes that aim to limit production. Currently, Blue Box support is not subject to any limit provided that such support adheres to the criteria set out in Article 6.5 of the Agreement on Agriculture.

**Circumvention:** Getting around commitments in the WTO such as commitments to limit agricultural export subsidies.

**Committee on Agriculture:** the Committee established in Article 17 of the Agreement on Agriculture and in charge of the review of the implementation of the Agreement.

**Committee on Agriculture in Special Session:** Committee on Agriculture in a Session dedicated to the agriculture negotiations. The Chair of the Committee in Special Session is different from the Chair of the regular Committee on Agriculture.

**Distortion:** When prices and production are higher or lower than levels that would usually exist in a competitive market.

**Domestic support:** In agriculture, any domestic subsidy or other measure designed to support agricultural production and producers; it covers measures such as general services, development programmes, payments made in the context of production-limiting programmes, and those aimed at maintaining producer prices at levels above those prevailing in the international market, direct payments to producers, including deficiency payments, and input and marketing cost reduction measures.

**Export competition:** One of the pillars of the Agreement on Agriculture covering export subsidies and other export measures which could potentially provide loopholes for governments to circumvent their commitments, such as export finance (credit, guarantees and insurance), international food aid, or the activities of exporting state trading enterprises. A Decision on Export Competition was adopted by ministers in December 2015 at the 10th Ministerial Conference in Nairobi, Kenya.

**GATT:** General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, which has been superseded as an international organization by the WTO. An updated General Agreement is now the WTO agreement governing trade in goods.

- **GATT 1947:** The official legal term for the old (pre-1994) version of the GATT.
- **GATT 1994:** The official legal term for new version of the General Agreement, incorporated into the WTO, and including GATT 1947
- **Tariffication:** Procedures relating to the agricultural market-access provision in which all non-tariff measures are converted into tariffs.

**Market access:** the conditions, tariff and non-tariff measures, agreed by members for the entry of specific goods into their markets.

**Ministerial Conference:** the top decision-making WTO body.

**de minimis:** Minimum amounts of trade distorting domestic support that all WTO Members can use, calculated as a percentage of the value of production (5% of the value of production for developed Members, and up to 10% for developing country Members). De minimis can be product-specific and non-product specific.

**Notification:** A transparency obligation requiring member governments to report trade measures to the relevant WTO body if the measures might have an effect on other members.

**Schedules:** In general, a WTO member's list of commitments (e.g., bound tariff rates, access to services markets). Goods schedules can include commitments on agricultural export subsidies and domestic support. Services commitments include bindings on national treatment, and also "schedule of concessions," "schedule of specific commitments."

**SPS:** Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

**Special and differential treatment:** Special treatment given to developing country Members, including least-developed countries in WTO agreements. It could take the form of longer transitional periods to implement obligations and the assumption of lesser obligations.

**Tariff binding:** Maximum duty level on a product listed in a member's schedule of commitments; it represents the commitment not to exceed

the duty applied on the concerned product beyond the level bound in the schedule. Once a rate of duty is bound, it may not be raised without compensating the affected parties.

**Tariff rate quota:** Import regime in which quantities inside a quota are charged lower import duty rates than those outside (which can be high).

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