



Agricultural Trade and Food System Transformation Virtual WTO Agriculture Symposium

**THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER 2020
CLOSING SESSION
17:00**

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Closing Remarks

**Good evening everyone in Central European Time,
And hello to anyone watching us from a different time zone,**

We have now come to the end of the 2020 virtual edition WTO Agriculture Symposium. This has not been the first, and will certainly not be the last, of our dialogues on the agricultural sector and trade. Our dialogues have been very useful, as they have enabled us to discuss in a positive atmosphere the trends and challenges facing the agricultural sector, which is vital not only for trade but the very survival of human life.

I am sure you will agree with me that our knowledge of agriculture issues – the challenges, prospects and linkages with other topics, has been enhanced by this two-day discussion. Over the course of this period, we have participated in webinars that covered a range of topics running the gamut of food security, food safety, nutrition, environmental sustainability, and the impact of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector and trade.

In addition, in two sessions towards the end of the Symposium, trade policy experts brainstormed on potential future-looking disciplines in agriculture, and farmers teamed up with the WTO to tell us first-hand about their experiences with the Agreement on Agriculture.

We are grateful to the speakers who have joined us from all over the world, across time zones, to make this Symposium possible. We had speakers logging-in from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania; for some of them in the early hours of the morning. The same applies to viewers, who joined us from government, the private sector and civil society from all four corners of our planet.

Above all, what this level of engagement reflects is that there are very important conversations to be had on international trade in food and agriculture. Discussions that are vital not only for the fulfillment of WTO's mission, but also critical for the realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations Secretary-General has fixed an important rendezvous for discussion next year on food systems, through the United Nations Food Systems Summit. The WTO will be an active participant in the Summit, to remind the world that international trade is a vital piece of the food security puzzle.

I thank Agnes Kalibata and Michael Fakhri for their participation in this year's Symposium. We will be working with them closely to ensure that the WTO's role and contribution are fully appreciated at next year's Summit.

Ladies and gentlemen, while it may feel like the COVID-19 pandemic divided us, in many ways it has also united us. The way in which the international community, leaders of international organizations, and the G20 coalesced to call upon policy-makers to keep food markets open, and to not allow a health crisis to degenerate into a food crisis, is evidence of how COVID brought us together. It is clear that countries are determined not to waste this crisis and put in place mechanisms that would help the world cope better if there were to be future occurrences.

As mentioned multiple times over the course of this Symposium, international food supply chains have resisted the pressures of the COVID pandemic, and markets have by and large remained open. I wish to extend a special

thank you to the FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu, who joined us in opening this year's Symposium, and whose support for open markets amplified the WTO's call.

It is undeniable, however, that COVID-19 will usher-in an era of increased governmental intervention in the economy. Governments across the globe are under pressure to assist consumers who have been impoverished by the pandemic and who will need help with food purchases. They are also under pressure to assist farmers who have suffered reduced sales due to the pandemic. And we must remember that the pandemic has been playing out against a backdrop of rising trade tensions, and tit-for-tat retaliatory measures with an impact on food and agriculture, that have exacerbated the pressures of COVID. What all this means is that the WTO – the only multilateral organization out there with a mandate to govern international trade – will have an even more important role to play in the future.

Celebrating 25 years of the WTO, and 25 years of the Agreement on Agriculture, should be a moment to remind ourselves of the foresight that our forebearers had. They created an institution designed to act as a stabilizing force in times of crisis. We must strengthen this stabilizing force and not weaken it. The WTO restrains Members from implementing protectionist measures in times like this. It reminds countries that they have neighbours, preventing beggar-thy-neighbour policies.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the WTO was quick to establish an internal COVID-19 Task Force that created a web portal for all new trade policy measures taken in the wake of the health crisis. That transparency, and

international accountability, must be cherished. The global economy is more integrated today than ever before, and we must therefore think and act in unison.

Ladies and gentlemen, while the COVID-19 era has turned our existence virtual, one of the objectives of this Symposium was to make the WTO as "personal" to you as possible. Through each of the sessions, you have met a different member of the WTO Agriculture and Commodities Division team, acting as the moderator. From Doaa, Majda, Ulla, Melvin, Cedric and Fabrizio, to Erik from the Trade and Environment Division who has collaborated with us, we have sought to put faces to the names you may have heard remotely. We are here to serve you, the stakeholders of the multilateral trading system. We are not anonymous, you have now seen many members of the WTO agricultural team, and I would urge you to call upon each and every one of them, and to draw on their knowledge and expertise.

While I am here to close the 2020 edition of this Virtual Symposium, I would like to immediately open the conversation on the 2021 edition. This conversation is not over, it is in fact just beginning. In the coming months, we will be consulting all stakeholders to see how to best organize our next rendezvous, and how best to tailor it to your needs.

Finally, I would be remiss if I were to close without thanking the entire WTO team that has worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make this Symposium possible; whether from Conference Services, Video Services, Communications and Media, or the Agriculture and Commodity Division. While three names in particular

come to mind, Liliana, Helen and Celine, I wish to thank absolutely everyone who made these two days possible.

Until our next Symposium, please stay in touch and stay safe.
