



On-line course for IICA member countries: “Agriculture and the WTO”

In this note,¹ The Center for Strategic Analysis for Agriculture (CAESPA) wishes to inform interested personnel in the member countries of IICA that the WTO course “Agriculture and the WTO” is now available on line and free of charge.

IICA, in its capacity as an observer member of the WTO Committees on Agriculture and on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, urges personnel in the member countries to register for this course, which is aimed at strengthening institutional capabilities and ensuring the countries’ effective participation in the multilateral trade system.

Introduction

The WTO offers on-line courses, taught by WTO experts, dealing with a number of trade-related topics of interest to the Organization. One such course, “Agriculture and the WTO,” has recently come on line and is available to all staff of governmental agencies and intergovernmental institutions interested on this matter.

Those who register for the course, which is available in Spanish, English and French, will receive a username and a password to use in accessing the course contents, tools (e-mail, helpdesk) and evaluations.

Course tools, evaluations, chats, discussion boards and instructors are not available for non-governmental personnel. However, other materials such as course contents, videos, slide presentations and self-training evaluations can be accessed by any person interested in learning about the WTO and international trade rules.

The training materials prepared by the WTO experts have been developed using teaching methods that include presentation of examples, case studies, evaluation reviews, reading guides, videos and slide presentations. These materials may be downloaded free of charge from the WTO webpage to the computers of the participants, and printed out. A WTO instructor will be available to answer any questions regarding the course and to moderate discussion boards and chats.

¹ Prepared by Adriana Campos Azofeifa, Specialist in Policies and Trade Negotiations and Coordinator of the WTO Reference Centre at IICA, and Nadia Monge Hernández, her assistant. October 2013. San Jose, Costa Rica.

Content of the course

The course comprises eight modules, which address the following subjects:

- *The WTO and the multilateral trade system*: The objectives, functions and structure of the WTO, as well as the principles of the multilateral trade system, are analyzed. This module focuses on the standards that apply to the trade of goods, which are the legal foundation of the Agreement on Agriculture.
- *Introduction to the Agreement on Agriculture*: The structure, the commitments and the disciplines of this agreement are explained; what trade in agricultural products encompasses is addressed; the negotiations of the Uruguay Round on agriculture are explained; the products covered by the Agreement are identified; and the relationship between the Agreement and other WTO agreements is explained.
- *Access to markets in the Agreement on Agriculture*: The conceptual framework of the standards related to market access in the Agreement is described; “tariffication” and the tariff reduction commitments assumed by the members during the Uruguay

Round are explained; the lists of concessions are described and the commitments regarding tariff quotas are explained;² the provisions regarding special treatment related to market access are explained; the provisions related to special safeguards are described;³ the prohibition of non-tariff border barriers is explained; and, lastly, the notification requirements of the members of the WTO regarding access to markets for agricultural products are addressed.

- *Domestic support measures*:⁴ The conceptual framework of the standards related to domestic support is explained; an explanation is provided of the green box⁵ and of other

² Refers to the application of a lower tariff for a specific amount of an imported good. When a country wishes to import more than that amount, it may do so, but must pay a higher tariff. This type of **quota** is allowed by the WTO.

³ Used for the agricultural sector. It is a temporary increase of an import duty in response to an increase in **imports** or a drop in prices, based on special provisions in the Agreement on Agriculture.

⁴ In agriculture, any internal **subsidy** or other measure that keeps producer prices above the price on the international **market**. For example, the direct payments the government makes to encourage production, or the measures aimed at lowering the costs of inputs, and marketing intended to benefit only agricultural producers. The **Agreement on Agriculture** identifies two types of domestic support: i) that which does not **distort** trade or has only a minimal effect, and ii) that which distorts trade.

⁵ In agriculture, types of **support measures**. // **Green box**: **support measures** that are not linked to production levels or prices. They are allowed because they are believed not to **distort** trade. // **Blue box**: **support measures** subject to production levels and prices, but which require farmers to limit production in order to reduce the distortions such measures may cause. They are allowed if there is a commitment to limit production or other conditions that will reduce the **distortion** of trade. // **Amber box**: **support measures** directly associated with

measures exempt from the blue box, development programs and de minimis levels of support;⁶ internal support subject to reduction commitments (amber box) is described; and the notification requirements of the members of the WTO regarding internal support measures for agricultural products are addressed.

- *Export competition:* The conceptual framework of the standards of the Agreement on Agriculture that are related to subsidies for exports is presented;⁷ the agreements reached by the countries are described; the standards applicable to products not included in the specific reduction commitments are explained; the provisions related to special and differential treatment vis-à-vis subsidies for exports are explained; and the notification requirements of the members

of the WTO regarding this topic are addressed.

- *Export prohibitions and restrictions and net food importing developing countries:* This section focuses on explaining the standards related to export prohibitions and restrictions that apply to food products, and explains the decision regarding the potential negative effects of the reform program in net food importing developing countries, and the obligations it creates.
- *Agricultural negotiations:* This module deals with the original mandate of the negotiations: Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture; the Doha Mandate established in the Doha Development Round; the cotton initiative and the topics discussed at the WTO Ministerial Conferences.
- *Conclusions:* A review of all the topics addressed in the course, with a series of readings and recommended additional materials.

production levels and maintaining international prices. They are subject to reduction commitments because they are believed to **distort** trade. There are exemptions for developing countries (sometimes called a "**special and differential treatment**" box).

⁶ Minimum amounts of **internal support** allowed, even if they **distort** trade.

⁷ Economic advantage that a government gives directly or indirectly to the producers of certain **goods** or services to improve their competitive position. Some economic support measures are prohibited because they distort trade (subsidies for exports and subsidies for national content), and others are subject to reduction commitments. A subsidy can cause **harm** even if it is allowed.

Duration

On average, the course will require from 50 to 60 hours of study and will be available on line for approximately six weeks, during which participants can set their own schedule and access the course at any time.

Evaluation

Participants who successfully complete the course with a passing grade will receive a certificate signed by the Director General of the WTO.

The WTO Reference Centre at IICA

Participants may use the technical, physical and electronic resources of the WTO Reference Centre at IICA to clear up questions they may have during the course.

Contact points

Anyone interested in learning more about the course may access the WTO on-line training website (<https://etraining.wto.org>),

which offers information on registration, requirements and other details. No username or password is required to consult this website. The WTO Reference Centre at IICA can also offer you information on the course in person, by telephone or e-mail (centroreferencia.omc@iica.int).

If interested, please contact Adriana Campos Azofeifa, Specialist in Policies and Trade Negotiations and Coordinator of the WTO Reference Centre at IICA, at adriana.campos@iica.int, or by phone (506) 2216-0170; or Nadia Monge Hernández, technical assistant of the WTO Reference Centre at IICA, at nadia.monge@iica.int, or by phone (506) 2216-0358.