



## COVER SHEET

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## ON INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL TRADE REFORM

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*Despite over a decade of talks on reform, agriculture remains the most highly subsidised sector in the world economy. The aim in this paper is to consider international agricultural trade reform. A review of the literature on international agricultural trade reform reveals several dominant themes. The first concerns the influences of national interests, both domestically and internationally. The domestic positions of the USA and the EU are seen by many to dominate international policy. A second theme centres on the argument that trade reform is good. This position is highly contested in the literature and policy debates with both sides appearing strongly supported. A third theme is the prospects for further trade reform and international negotiations. How the Uruguay Round has advanced, or failed to advance, international trade is one issue. Subsequently, examining the future of Doha and other negotiations post Cancun raises important issues about multilateral, bilateral and other approaches.*

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### 1 Positions and Interests

#### 1.1 *A leading duo: The USA and the EU*

The United States of America and the European Union are central players in international agriculture and in particular, international negotiations such as the Uruguay Round (Guyomard, Bureau et al. 2000). Their domestic agricultural subsidies and related policies have been the subject of much discussion. Both countries underwent substantial liberal reform during of the 1990's however further reform is still necessary (Paarlberg 1997).

There is considerable agreement in the literature that the development of USA and EU agricultural policies has been strongly influenced by each other's policies. Blandford (1996) agrees with authors such as Mahe and Roe (1996) who believe the evolution of USA and EU policies have been closely linked in the recent past and suggest this trend is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Guyomard & Bureau et al. (2000) believe the USA Fair Act will force the EU to reform its agricultural policy and will shape CAP design in the future. Blandford (1996) agrees stating, "it is undeniable that pressure from exporters, particularly the

United States, has been a catalyst for change in the Common Agricultural Policy” (p.1324).

Several researchers including Guyomard & Bureau et al. (2000) and Jolly (2001) agree that both countries need to use their domestic reforms to shape not only each other’s reforms, but to also further international reforms. The key to more profound agricultural liberalisation remains whether or not the USA and the EU will liberalise their current policies and move away from protectionist practices (Tyers 1993; Jolly 2001). This appears true both broadly and in particular cases. It remains to be seen if mounting internal pressures for fundamental sugar policy reform, for example, in both the USA and EU will ultimately move the world closer toward free trade in sugar. As Trebeck (2002) puts it, “the USA and the EU hold the key to our future” (p. 18).

### **1.2 The United States of America, USA**

The USA entered the Uruguay Round with the belief that “an international sharing of the policy reform burden among farm producers in all countries would reduce the actual burden that producers in any one country would have to bear” (Paarlberg 1997, p. 420). In other words, there would be less pain by taking a multilateral rather than a bilateral or unilateral approach to agricultural reform.

The USA has supported and implemented radical reform in both its domestic and international policies however these policies have not always been compatible. For example, until recently the USA has championed the cause for agricultural reform (Trebeck 2002). However, America’s recent Farm Act of 2002 will provide billions of dollars in extra support for America’s farmers over the next decade. Trebeck (2002) believes “the US Farm Bill represents massive backsliding from previous policy stances” (p. 16). Despite statements to the contrary, the Farm Act cannot be reconciled with a policy of agricultural liberalisation (ACIL Consulting 2003). Protective agricultural policies in the USA have been firmly in place and in fact, have been growing for at least half a century (*ibid*). The negotiated trade agreement between Australia and the USA (AUSFTA) as well as current comments by USA Presidential candidates would seem to reflect such protective-at-home thinking.

This domestic stance is contrary to the USA position in present WTO negotiations that supports:

- tariff rate quota reform
- comprehensive long-term agricultural trade reform
- maximising market access opportunities
- eliminating export subsidies and taxes
- reducing domestic support
- special and differential treatment for developing countries
- food security

In Doha talks the USA has stated that continued successful agricultural trade reform rests upon the willingness of members to provide non-discriminatory market access opportunities in conjunction with the reduction of trade distorting support (WTO 2002). Yet the final form of the US Farm Act effectively signals other things and is likely to further and markedly influence the course of WTO negotiations.

### **1.3 The European Union, EU**

The EU's traditional approach to agricultural policies is to adopt protectionist practices, including farm subsidies and import barriers. These measures are the world's biggest in size and most trade distorting in effect. The EU has always resisted agricultural liberalisation in the GATT/WTO (ACIL Consulting 2003). Weyerbrook (1996) states the underlying cause is the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which has regulated the EU agricultural sector since the very early days of the EEC. Major reform packages in 1984 and 1988 temporarily alleviated but did not eliminate CAP problems. Two more reform packages offered in 1992 and 1999, each more radical than the last, were also adopted. Despite continual proposals for reform, research has found that ongoing CAP reform does not meet many targets set out in the Uruguay Round and are unlikely to comply with future WTO commitments (Weyerbrook 1996; Guyomard, Bureau et al. 2000).

As in the Uruguay Round, the EU finds itself in a delicate position in accommodating previous and multiple commitments in the current Doha Round (Landau 2001). For example, the EU has appeared to rule out any reform of its CAP until at least 2006. However, it appears obvious that big changes to the CAP are necessary for the EU to deliver on promises made at Doha. At present in the Doha Round the EU is in favour of:

- improving market access opportunities
- levelling the playing field in export competition
- reducing domestic support but continuing blue box support measures
- special and differential treatment for developing countries
- animal welfare
- food safety

“The concept of multifunctionality is at the core of the EU position” (Landau 2001, p. 915). Both the USA and the Cairns Group have argued that the EU is using the concept as an excuse or convenient justification for meeting other objectives, including protectionism (Landau 2001). The concept is misused and reflects an agenda weakening international commitment to reduce agricultural policies that distort international markets (*op cit*). Essentially, new types of protection have replaced the old. The EU and other countries have exploited the loopholes and fine print of the modalities to evade liberalisation (ACIL Consulting 2003).

Support for CAP reform is certainly high with pressure coming from international, regional and domestic arenas. Internationally, continued pressure by other

countries will be an important ingredient in promoting further reform (Blandford 1996). It has been suggested that it “will be vital for those countries who have an interest in further reform of the CAP to support strongly the multilateral negotiations on agriculture” under the auspices of the WTO (*op cit*, p. 1324). Regionally, it is likely that “new members of the EU will add to the pressure for reform and for a shift toward more market-oriented policies” (*op cit*, p. 1325). Domestically, pressures for further reform of the CAP are likely to intensify both within and outside of the farm sector (Blandford 1996). Prospects for freeing farm trade are seen to depend largely on the EU (Tangermann 1999). The Doha Round can only succeed if Europe agrees to deep reductions of its trade-distorting agricultural subsidies, which can only happen if the CAP is reformed. The offers that the EU made at Cancun were seen by most as markedly inadequate, to the professed surprise of EU representatives.

#### **1.4 Cairns Group**

Early in the Uruguay Round, the Hawke Government successfully convened the Cairns Group of agricultural exporters to advance agricultural trade liberalisation. The Cairns Group effectively put agriculture on the multilateral trade agenda during the Uruguay Round and has since kept it there (Trebeck 2002). Anderson and Morris (2000) maintain “the group’s efforts contributed substantially to establishing a framework for reform in agriculture in the Uruguay Round”(p 389).

The levels of protection in the Cairns Group countries as a group are much lower than those in industrial countries (Tyers 1993). Further, Tyers (1993) believes that the Cairns Group countries have a legitimate grievance against countries with high agricultural protection. The overall aim of the Group is to bring agriculture more in line with trade in other goods and to achieve this goal is supporting several agendas in WTO negotiations including:

- reductions export restrictions and taxes
- improvements in market access conditions
- reductions in domestic support
- special and differential access for developing countries

The Cairns Group, with Australia as its leader, has led the debate in protesting about the untoward effects on outsiders of the rules adopted by trading blocs such as the EU (ACIL Consulting 2003). Initially it was hoped the Group would serve to accelerate reform in the USA and the EU but this has not occurred (Paarlberg 1997). The USA and the EU are also posing problems for the Group in current Doha negotiations. The Australian Minister for Trade Mark Vaile (2003), speaking on behalf of the Group, believes the current WTO draft guidelines for agricultural trade reform fall short of what the Group had been seeking. Further, the Cairns Group is concerned that if key players (USA, EU and Japan) are not prepared to play a constructive role, the Doha Round could be headed for trouble. This appears likely after Cancun and subsequent weak revitalisation efforts.

## 1.5 Summary

The economic well being of countries, such as those represented by the Cairns Group, can be disproportionately affected by decisions taken by key countries (Trebeck 2002). Therefore, success in advancing agricultural trade reform will be highly dependent on the positions taken by all key players towards reform, but particularly the larger ones. As discussed, and as summarised in Table 1 below, there is only limited agreement about what should be on the agenda let alone on what positions might be adopted.

**Table 1: Doha Proposals Offered in Phase 1**

	USA	EU	Cairns Group
<b>Export competition</b>		*	*
- Export restrictions, taxes			*
<b>Domestic support</b>	*	*	*
- Blue box		*	
<b>Market access</b>	*	*	*
- Food quality		*	
- Tariff-rate quotas	*		
<b>S&amp;D access</b>	*	*	*
<b>Non-trade concerns</b>		*	
- Animal welfare		*	

## 2 States of Play

### 2.1 Trade reform: Limited gains?

It appears agreed that trade reform does create benefits however, the size and scale of these benefits has been widely contested. Pritchard (2003) challenges the arguments made by those pursuing trade liberalisation who rest their efforts on the assumption that trade liberalisation will generate manifest benefits for national and international economies. For example, Walker (1994) states the signing of the Uruguay Round was “heralded as a victory which will trigger global welfare gains of up to \$274 billion” and that such hypothetical gains have been “widely advertised by bodies such as the GATT, the OECD, and the World Bank” (p. 539).

However, most of the expectations from the Uruguay Round have not been realised and the projections of gains from trade have been overly optimistic. Anderson and Morris (2000) state that “little reduction in agricultural protection will have occurred by the end of the implementation period” (p. 385). A report by ACIL Consulting (2003) agrees finding that agricultural support in OECD countries is now back to where it was prior to the Uruguay Round. Other bodies have also reached similar conclusions. The OECD in 1995 concluded in a disappointed tone that “the Uruguay Round agreement may not necessarily lead to a reduction in the level of support to farmers” (Paarlberg 1997, p. 429). The Economic Intelligence Unit also concluded in 1995 that “the impact of the Uruguay Round on world agricultural trade would be much smaller than

suggested at first sight” (*op cit*, p. 430). Essentially, the Uruguay Round has not kept its promises of increases in trade and economic prosperity.

On the other hand, McGuirk (2002) believes that remaining trade barriers impose costs on all countries and provide an opportunity for substantial gains from reciprocal trade liberalisation. Roberts & Buetre et al. (2002) agree stating that most of the distortions to international agricultural trade and markets have arisen from protection by developed countries. Therefore, developed countries and especially developing countries will gain from trade liberalising reforms.

## **2.2 Australia**

Since the early 1980s Australia has championed agricultural trade liberalisation. Pritchard (2001) believes Australia has clearly demonstrated its commitment to trade reform through its role:

- in promoting multilateral agreements during the Uruguay Round
- at the forefront of regional initiatives including APECs 1994 Bogor Declaration
- in arguing strongly for a new WTO trade round
- pursuing a free trade agreement with the United States

However, Pritchard (2003) also argues that Australian policy over the last 20 years has almost solely relied on assumptions that multilateral agricultural trade liberalisation would deliver large benefits for rural exporters, benefits that would trickle through the economy. There has been a tendency for trade policies to be ‘oversold’ to the Australian public by both the trade bureaucracy (notably ABARE, DFAT and RIRDC) and many agricultural economists (*ibid*). The latest case of overselling trade benefits is arguably the Australia-USA Free Trade Area.

Despite its bilateral tendencies Australia is still pushing hard for multilateral agreements and is using its position as chair of the Cairns Group to pursue this agenda. Australian Trade Minister Mark Vaile stated that the revised guidelines for world agricultural reform do not go far enough towards the far-reaching agriculture mandate agreed by WTO members in Doha with the latest draft reform package not reflecting the concerns of Australia and other Cairns Group members (Vaile 2003).

Things seem to have gone from bad to worse for Australia. The failure of the WTO members to agree on guidelines for agricultural reform by the March 31 2003 deadline was a serious setback for the Doha Round as have been subsequent events. The whole round of multilateral trade talks is at risk. Australia’s Trade Minister assigns responsibility for this failure squarely at the feet of members such as the EU and Japan, who are continuing to oppose efforts to bring about genuine reform on agricultural trade (Vaile 2003). The Trade Minister envisaged Cairns Group discussions to build the political momentum necessary for a strong outcome on reform by maintaining pressure on agricultural protectionists and

forging alliances with developing countries for the WTO farm negotiations (Davis 2003). Yet recent Cairns Group discussions appear to offer few bright prospects.

Actions by countries such as Japan and the EU are also causing particular trouble for Australia. A new tariff by the Japanese and quarantine challenges by the EU are recent developments in the Australian trade saga. Responding to the Japanese tariff, Vaile insists that any new WTO agreements on agricultural trade tighten the circumstances in which countries can impose tariffs in response to import surges (Davis 2003). Regarding the EU, the Trade Minister stated that Australia “will not sit idly by and watch the Europeans work up another no-reform proposal that will preserve agricultural protection for decades to come” (Vaile 2003).

### ***2.3 Developing Countries***

The majority of WTO members are developing countries. Many developing countries are irritated by the WTOs failure to include products of export interest to them (including agriculture) in previous rounds in any meaningful way (ACIL Consulting 2003). Roberts & Buetre et al.(2002) found that protection remains high and is concentrated in areas of particular interest to developing countries. Developing countries are unhappy with the backsliding from the promising agreements reached during the Uruguay Round (ACIL Consulting 2003). These countries have not received trade benefits as expected and feel they are bearing the costs of implementing difficult and complex Uruguay Round agreements. Seeing few benefits they are reluctant to engage in further multilateral negotiations (McGuirk 2002).

Many developing countries spent considerable effort and resources into their pre-Doha proposals and were able to wring important concessions from America and Europe in return for agreeing to launch a new round. However, the first draft of the Ministerial Declaration paid little interest in them and Doha negotiations have since stalled (Roberts, Buetre et al. 2002). It is argued that the second draft of the Doha Ministerial Conference has also been dominated by the positions of a few powerful Northern WTO members, especially the USA and the EU (Anonymous 2001). This is contrary to the current WTO Ministerial Declaration that states the needs and interests of developing countries are at the heart of the current work program (WTO 2001). It also states that special and differential treatment for developing countries will be an integral part of all elements of the negotiations. Future negotiations on agriculture will need to address the particular interests of developing countries to ensure success.

## **3 Current Developments**

### ***3.1 The Uruguay Round***

The Uruguay Round placed agriculture on the agenda for the first time in a substantive form (ACIL Consulting 2003). Earlier rounds of GATT negotiations had never been successful in liberalising agricultural trade until the Uruguay Round. “The Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (URAA) is regarded by



many economists as major progress in the international debate on trade liberalisation” (Herrmann, Kramb et al. 2001). The URAA was the first important step toward a further reduction in trade distortions.

The Uruguay Round committed WTO members to fundamental reform aimed at correcting and preventing restrictions and distortions in world markets. The URAAs long-term objective was to establish a fair and market-oriented trading system through a program of fundamental reform (WTO 2001). During the round, discussions on agriculture were dominated by the differences between the USA and the EU. These differences were evident in the proposals offered during negotiations and their resolution determined the rate of progress towards agreement. Only when the Blair House Accord broke the agricultural deadlock between the two countries in 1992-93 did the Uruguay Round come to a conclusion (Paarlberg 1997).

Much has been said about the lack of success of the Uruguay Round negotiations on agriculture in making a large step towards liberalising agricultural trade (Tangermann 1999). Paarlberg (1997) argues that the Uruguay Round did achieve reform but suggests that these reforms would have been achieved anyway even if the Uruguay Round had never been launched. Many economists have the general impression that the decline in the level of protection has not been very strong (Herrmann et al. 2001). “In practice, the gains achieved in the Uruguay Round have been largely lost” (ACIL Consulting 2003, p. 4). Nonetheless for all its shortcomings, the Uruguay Round was the most ambitious thus far and successfully ‘broke the ice’ with agriculture, creating a framework which can be built upon in the Doha Round (ACIL Consulting 2003).

### **3.2 The Doha Round**

Many consider agriculture to be the single most important issue in the Doha negotiations. It has become evident that agriculture is under much more pressure in the current WTO negotiations than during the Uruguay Round. It is hoped that further progress will be made on the three key pillars of the URAA - market access, domestic support and export subsidies. The main protagonists in the Doha Round so far are the same as in the Uruguay Round of negotiations: the USA, the EU and the Cairns Group (Landau 2001). Notable in negotiations has been the diversity amongst WTO members, in particular the stances of the three central players regarding how to advance on the key pillars of reform.

The Doha Round calls for a more coherent approach to trade and development. It puts the needs and interests of the developing countries at the heart of the WTOs work program (McGuirk 2002). The world’s current agricultural markets are grossly distorted by policies of both rich and poor countries. However, most of the distortions to international agricultural trade and markets arise from protection by developed countries. Mendoza (2002) believes a successful conclusion of the Doha negotiations will help reduce the current imbalances in the world economy, thus helping developing countries improve their development prospects.

Unfortunately the Doha Round looks as if history may be repeated, with drawn out negotiations as in the Uruguay Round. WTO members yet again failed to meet the deadline for agricultural negotiations. Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi “expressed disappointment over the failure by WTO member governments to agree on a framework for future agricultural trade reform but said progress in the global trade negotiations can still be achieved provided governments continue to work towards bridging their differences” (WTO 2003). However, some negotiating parties seem in no hurry to ‘bridge their differences’ with a tendency for negotiators to stick to their starting positions and therefore offering little in the way of narrowing the wide gaps (WTO 2003).

### **3.3 The EU Problem**

It is widely agreed that European agricultural reform has become a make or break issue. The French government has been the most steadfast on the issue of CAP reform, showing no signs of backing down on its opposition to plans to reform the EU CAP (Paris 2003). At the 2003 OECD Ministerial, Australian Treasurer Peter Costello argued for CAP reform on the basis that it would not only be good for free trading nations like Australia, but was also in Europe’s own best economic interests (*ibid*). However, officials including those from Australia and Brazil have stated that even if the European Commission was able to push through its CAP reform plan it would still have to make more concessions, particularly to improve access to its own markets in agricultural produce (*ibid*).

### **3.4 A Failing Round?**

The IMF has warned that global trade negotiations are faltering, adding to the fragility of the world economic outlook and increasing the risk of a confrontational approach to trade disputes (Davis 2003). According to Stoler (2003), the current round of multilateral negotiations has proved difficult because it is the first real attempt to deal with agriculture. Before the meeting at Cancun, it was feared that the agenda might become unmanageable and that ambitions for the round would need to be watered down (Davis 2003). Dr Supachai himself remarked that “we need to do a lot of catching up before Cancun” (Paris 2003).

Stoler (2003) is more optimistic than most regarding future negotiations suggesting past trade negotiations have become bogged down but managed to resolve themselves. Australia and other major trading countries such as Indonesia and Brazil have too much invested in the Doha round to let it fall apart (Stoler 2003). For example, since Cancun forums such as the 2003 Annual OECD Ministerial meeting, although not a formal trade negotiating forum, was dominated by the need to breathe life into the Doha Round (Paris 2003). Following Cancun there is now a much more widespread appreciation of the problems facing the Doha Round. So far there are at best mixed signals as to which way things might advance. A clear tension is visible in the roles anticipated by various nations of multilateral and bilateral agreements.

### 3.5 FTA's

There has been strong debate regarding whether or not the lack of progress in the Doha Round could fuel a proliferation of bilateral and regional trade deals such as the FTA between Australia and the USA (Davis 2003a). The Australia-USA FTA remains an issue of strong disagreement. Wallace (2003) believes it is being overhyped. Importantly, a free trade agreement with the USA will not stop unsubsidised Australian farmers having to compete with heavily subsidised American farmers (*ibid*).

Others are concerned that the USA will use the proposed FTA with Australia to put off major cuts in agricultural protection. Wright (2002) states the FTA proposal will be used to undermine the Cairns Group (by putting Australia offside with developing nations) so as to take major cuts in agriculture out of the Doha round.

Estimated gains from bilateral trade reform have been bandied about. A high and early estimate of \$4 billion is now subject to revision. ACIL Consulting (2003) suggested that Australian farming and national interests would be better served if our negotiators pursued global trade liberalisation in the WTO Doha Round rather than a bilateral trade liberalisation in an Australia-USA FTA context.

## 4 Conclusion

The outlook for agricultural trade reform is not promising. Increasingly there appears to be limited common ground for agreement on liberalisation initiatives. USA activity is moving towards hub and spoke arrangements with a recently announced 'compete to liberalise with us' approach. The EU is soon to be accommodating within its own boundaries agriculturally-oriented members on less than equal terms. To expect multi-speed, multi-tier Europe to liberalise broadly when it now discriminates between its own members appears fanciful. The Cairns Group is under challenge, including post-Cancun by the emerging G18/21 led by China and India. Australia's preoccupation with an AUSFTA appears to have led to a relative neglect of other areas. Given the pursuit of such particular agendas, the wider issue of agricultural reform at the international level may well be sidelined, if not abandoned completely, at least for the short term.

Future discussions and developments will reveal more on this matter. One likely scenario is limited and limping reform. If acrimony were to build further, the whole trade liberalisation in agriculture agenda may falter altogether. A three bloc 'trade in' world with a residual 'out' world, including perhaps the continent of Africa, may emerge. The prospects for Australia and for its businesses in such a world would appear uncertain, especially if it were caught between an American and Asian bloc accompanied by a growing intolerance of Europe.

While such scenarios are interesting there is a deeper issue that needs immediate attention. Arguments for (and against) trade liberalisation in agriculture, and elsewhere, need effective and critical review. Current arguments and methods of

estimating gains are now demonstrably ineffective or of limited credibility in many important circles. A more adequate analysis of trade liberalisation is needed. Improved analysis of impacts would be a key part of this, as would a better understanding of the influences of regimes and frameworks.

Further, the likelihood of any one country influencing the future of trade reform in ways acceptable to others appears low. Cooperation on any of the issues is increasingly doubtful. The question remains of how to break the current impasse?

The core problem appears equally one for business, government and community. The inability of business to bring about the supposed gains needs examination as do the evolving roles of governments. If community alienation and perhaps impoverishment is to be redressed, trade liberalisation, particularly in agriculture, will need to be seen as involving more than a pious hope or an exposure to exploitation. It would indeed be tragic if past real gains were imperilled and future ones forfeited due to a lack of mutual recognition of problems and issues. It is time to critically and more comprehensively evaluate the issues and arguments about trade liberalisation, particularly for agriculture.

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