

EU technical “road-map” sparks buzz in farm talks

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AGRICULTURE NEGOTIATIONS

Chairperson David Walker agreed on 21 May 2010 to give WTO agriculture negotiators more time to discuss issues among themselves following an EU presentation on a comprehensive “road-map” for drafting tables that will eventually contain their market access commitments.

THE STORY SO FAR

2000:
Agriculture negotiations launched(March).

2001: **Doha Development Agenda launched.**
Agriculture included (November)

2004:
“Framework” agreed(August)

2005: Further

His announcement came at the end of a week of meetings and consultations, in which much of the focus was on the process of the present phase of the negotiations. During the week Ambassador Walker also held consultations on some of the substance of the talks, including the special safeguard mechanism (SSM) for developing countries (see “jargon buster” on the right).

A key part of recent work has been the technical exercise of preparing possible draft “templates” or blank forms for governments eventually to list (or put in “schedules”) their commitments — explained below.

On Wednesday 19 May, the EU presented a chart — a “road-map” — describing what could be needed to build up these templates in market access, the most complex area of the negotiations.

The key feature of the EU’s roadmap is a complex chart tracing final commitments back to various

agreements in
**Hong Kong
Ministerial
Conference**
(December)

2006: **Draft
modalities**(June)

2007: **Revised
draft modalities**
(July)

2007-2008:
**Intensive
negotiations
with working
documents**
(September-
January)

2008: **Revised
draft modalities**
(February, May
and July)

2008: **The July
2008 package**
and the chair's
report

2008: Revised
draft modalities
(February, May,
July and
December)

levels of supporting data and calculations.

The EU said its chart is a draft because it is based on the current draft "modalities". At the top of the EU's chart are column headings for the tables, so that the spaces below can be filled with information identifying each product, the present tariff commitment, the new commitment after the proposed formula's cut has been applied, and other details.

Below that, the chart proposes supporting tables dealing with all the market access provisions that might apply to the product, for example, the tariff formula, whether the product is "sensitive" (taking a smaller cut), whether a maximum or "cap" is applied, and various other features, including those for developing countries.

Additional supporting tables might be needed, and in some cases the actual calculations might have to be provided. This would include calculating the average cuts across all products because developed countries will have to meet a minimum average cut and developing countries will be able to scale down their cuts if the average exceeds a maximum.

Members said they found road-map useful, not only because it describes comprehensively the tables and templates that have to be created, but also because when members discuss a particular question (a draft table, supporting data or calculation) they can locate it on the chart.

However, some members argued that a few templates will have to wait until outstanding issues in the "modalities" have been settled.

Negotiators will now consult among themselves (described as "intersessional" discussions), before the next session of the full membership in the week of 5 July 2010.



Source WTO