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## **Canada's Domestic Consultation Process and WTO Agriculture Negotiations Consultations**

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**Market Access Group  
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## **Canada's Domestic Consultation Process and WTO Agriculture Negotiations Consultations**

Openness and transparency are the key to informed debate. Canadians' ability to communicate directly with government improves public understanding of trade, and informs citizens and policy makers of the challenges of advancing Canada's priorities within a complex and changing international trade environment.

Three successive annual surveys of *Canadians Attitudes toward International Trade* demonstrate that, by any yardstick, citizens' awareness, understanding and support for the importance of trade to Canada's economy has increased. Nearly three quarters of Canadians (72%) support trade and Canada's trade policies.

Departmental consultations, industry involvement and citizen engagement are only one component of a larger commitment to transparency that will be increasingly important in any new round of trade negotiations. The Department uses every opportunity to work with Canadian Parliamentarians and our trading partners to strengthen consultative mechanisms and public engagement, at home and in international fora.

This paper first provides an overview of Canada's domestic consultation process, which includes Parliamentarians, federal-provincial-territorial collaboration, industry involvement and sustaining public outreach and engagement. As an illustration of our open and transparent consultation process, we then examine the elaboration of Canada's negotiating position for the WTO Agriculture negotiations.

Canada's Domestic Consultation Process: Citizen Engagement and Outreach on Trade Policy

The importance of Parliamentarians: the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade (SCFAIT) and the Standing Committee on Agriculture

To assist elected officials with their obligation to inform and exchange views with their constituents on public policy issues, the Department ensures that Parliamentarians are kept up-to-date and engaged on trade policy developments and events. Since the Third Ministerial in Seattle, Minister Pettigrew has requested the support of the SCFAIT and its Sub-Committee on Trade and Investment to initiate public hearings on Canada's priorities within the WTO and the FTAA; the G-8; market access for Least Developed Countries; and other issues. Other Parliamentary committees, such as the Standing Committee on Agriculture, have also been involved in hearing Canadians' views on Canada's trade policies and positions. Canadian Parliamentarians regularly participate in multistakeholder consultations and roundtable discussions; as panelists and speakers for information sessions sponsored by industry associations and NGOs; and as advisors to Canada's trade delegations.

We are also working in various multilateral fora to examine and strengthen the Parliamentary role during the negotiation and implementation of trade agreements.

In October 2000, Canada released detailed proposals on how the WTO could become more transparent and open to the public. The proposals, which are available on the Government of Canada web site, outline actions that the WTO could undertake to ensure the global public better understand the WTO's mandate and is more engaged in its agenda. While not altering the basic architecture of the WTO as a government-to-government negotiating forum, Canada is supporting consensus within the WTO on the establishment of a permanent mechanism to more closely associate Parliamentarians and elected officials with the work of the WTO and in connecting the WTO with citizens and the global public.

### **The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: the Consultations Framework**

The Department uses a range of **permanent consultative mechanisms** to ensure that the views of industry, non-governmental and public interest groups, and Canadians at large are taken into account in the development of Canada's trade agenda:

- Federal-Provincial-Territorial Relations (C-Trade)

The launch of a new round of negotiation at the WTO along with active regional and bilateral trade negotiations are putting more emphasis in maintaining a continuing dialogue on a more frequent basis with provinces and territories. C-Trade members meet quarterly to review overall and emerging trade issues. In sectoral consultations like services, provincial and territorial officials have been instrumental in helping to organize Cross-Canada consultations for federal representatives. Consultation and consensus-building also take place at higher levels, with regularly scheduled meetings of Minister and the Deputy Minister with their respective provincial and territorial counterparts.

These consultations are more acute with international trade opening up areas where implementation of trade agreements falls under provincial or shared jurisdiction, with Quebec and Alberta periodically seeking a more formal role in the planning and conduct of trade policy.

In November 2001, the Department established a joint working group to address trade concerns of municipal and community-based interests.

- Sectoral Advisory Groups on International Trade (SAGITs)

SAGITs were established in 1986 to provide advice to the Minister for International Trade on federal government policy pertaining to trade; their structure was reviewed and revised in February 1998. Central to the SAGIT process is the open exchange of ideas and information between the SAGIT members and government. There are twelve active SAGITs representing various industry sectors: 1) Agriculture, Food and Beverage, 2) Apparel and Footwear, 3) Cultural Industries, 4) Energy, Chemicals and Plastics, 5) Environmental, 6) Fish and Sea Products, 7) Forest Products, 8) Information Technologies, 9) Medical and Health Care Products and Services, 10) Mining, Metals and Minerals, 11) Services, 12) Textiles, Fur and Leather.

Each SAGIT is comprised of senior business executives with some representation from industry associations, labour/environment and academia. Members serve in their individual capacities and not as representatives of specific entities or interest groups. Members are appointed, for a two year (renewable) term, by the Minister for International Trade to whom the SAGITs report. The Agriculture SAGIT reports both to the Minister for International Trade and the Minister of Agriculture. Each SAGIT meets three to four times annually and members serve without remuneration.

The SAGIT process continues to be a valuable mechanism to offer confidential advice to senior officials and the Minister on trade policy issues. Central to the SAGIT process is the open exchange of ideas and information between SAGIT members, Departmental officials and the Minister's Office, and other government departments. The twelve SAGITs conduct their work via restricted web sites, on conference calls and in face-to-face meetings. In 2001/2002 there were close to 30 SAGIT meetings. Officials are now reviewing ways to optimize the SAGITs' value-added role, with renewed emphasis being placed on each SAGIT operating as a group with the goal to reaching more in-depth policy consensus.

- Multistakeholder Information Sessions and Sectoral Consultations

The Department holds periodic information sessions to address issues of interest to a broad spectrum of Canadians, to which the Minister and the Deputy Minister often participate, as well as Parliamentarians engaged on the issues. In partnership with other government departments and agencies, the Department coordinates ongoing sectoral consultations with identified and committed stakeholder groups that cover a range of issues already under negotiation, such as the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

### **Sustaining Public Outreach and Engagement**

Consultations are productive and rewarding only if Canadians are kept up-to-date on our trade policy negotiations and agreements. The Department **informs Canadians and sustains public engagement** and solicits input on the issues using various means:

- Deputy Minister's Outreach Program

The Deputy Minister meets regularly with his colleagues in other federal government departments to sustain interdepartmental policy coordination, and meets at scheduled intervals with his provincial and territorial counterparts to ensure open exchange of information and collaboration between the levels of government, particularly in areas of shared jurisdiction affecting the implementation of trade agreements.

In addition to these commitments are frequent informal meetings, dinners and roundtable discussions conducted across Canada that also provide additional opportunities for in-depth and issues-specific discourse on policy concerns with business and industry associations, NGOs and public interest groups; and the academic community.

- Trade Negotiations and Agreements Website

Since its launch in May 1999, the TNA website has been critical to the Department's capacity to meet public demand for accessible and up-to-date information, drawing exponentially greater numbers of users who also provide input and views through our 'Consultations with Canadians' electronic mail feature.

- Government of Canada Public Access Programs

The Department encourages the use of the existing mechanisms to reach Canadians. As instruments of public record, Canada Gazette Notices will continue to be used to inform and elicit citizen's views on the issues of importance to them. The Department is also making greater use of Communications Canada's customized information services, including 1-800 numbers and linkages via the Canada Site portal.

### **WTO AGRICULTURE NEGOTIATIONS CONSULTATIONS**

Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Lyle Vanclief, on behalf of the Government of Canada, in 1997 committed to a full consultative process as part of Canada's development of an initial negotiating position for the World Trade Organization (WTO) agriculture negotiations.

In the lead-up to the development of Canada's negotiating position, government officials consulted with agriculture and agri-food stakeholders through widely distributed discussion papers, in presentations and discussions at various WTO-related conferences, annual meetings and other ad hoc gatherings with stakeholders. The Government of Canada also funded a series of regional conferences in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec and Nova Scotia in order to further explore industry stakeholder views about the anticipated start of negotiations at the WTO.

From November 1998 to March 1999, Minister Vanclief met privately with a broad range of industry stakeholders to seek their views through frank and open exchanges. The Minister also announced in more detail the public consultation process leading up to, and beyond the start of the WTO negotiations, at the opening Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food take note hearing on the upcoming multilateral trade negotiations on agriculture. These hearings took place from October 1998 to March 1999 and heard views from over 35 industry stakeholders.

The culmination of the Government of Canada's early consultation efforts was a national conference, "Toward an Agricultural Trade Position: Dialogue with Canadian Industry," attended by industry, provinces and the federal government, held in the Spring of 1999, which played an integral part in the development of Canada's negotiating position. In July 1999, federal and provincial ministers met in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan to exchange views on Canada's initial negotiating position, which was officially unveiled in August 1999.

The Government of Canada then sought the views of crown agencies, provinces and key stakeholders as it prepared its negotiating proposals for the WTO agriculture negotiations and through a series of discussion papers to refine its negotiating approach in certain areas. More recently, The Government of Canada held a series of regional information sessions in 2002 to update a wide range of stakeholders on the process and dynamics of the agriculture negotiations, as well as the range of issues being discussed.

As part of that process, The Government of Canada released an information document on the negotiations entitled “Making Progress in Global Agricultural Trade: An Update on the WTO Agriculture Negotiations” (<http://www.agr.gc.ca/itpd-dpci/english/consultations/infodoc.htm>) and a supplementary information document entitled “Making Progress in Global Agricultural Trade: A Further Update on the WTO Agriculture Negotiations” (<http://www.agr.gc.ca/itpd-dpci/english/consultations/infodocII.htm>).

In addition, the Subcommittee on International Trade, Trade Disputes & Investment of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, as part of its hearings on “Building an Effective New Round of WTO Negotiations: Key Issues for Canada,” held an agriculture day in March 2002.

The Government of Canada has also broadened its stakeholder base to include non-traditional groups such as developmental non-governmental organizations. As part of that effort, officials, in September 2002, held a consultation with these NGOs to discuss Canada’s efforts to address food security and rural development concerns in the agriculture negotiations of the Doha Development Agenda. In addition, Minister Vanclief, International Trade Minister Pierre Pettigrew and Minister of International Cooperation Susan Whelan participated in a roundtable discussion organized by the Canadian NGO Food Security Policy Group in November 2002.

Since the beginning, the Government of Canada has consulted with the industry-based Agriculture, Food and Beverage Sectoral Advisory Group on International Trade (SAGIT), the Federal Provincial Agriculture Trade Policy Committee and the Federal Provincial Territorial Committee on Trade (C-Trade) regarding their views about Canada’s initial negotiating position, various Canadian negotiating proposals and discussion papers tabled as part of the WTO agriculture negotiating process and on Canada’s approach in the negotiating sessions. In 2002, the Government of Canada created the Agriculture Trade Negotiations Consultations Group which provides timely and technical advice to Canada’s Chief Agriculture Negotiator. It has since become the focal consultative body for industry stakeholders in the WTO agriculture negotiations. The Government of Canada has also held ongoing industry meetings with stakeholders from the agri-food sector, including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance and representatives of the supply-managed industries.

The Government of Canada will continue to consult the full range of Canadians and the provinces over the course of the agriculture negotiations through a variety of ways, including meetings with industry associations, and provincial and industry advisory groups. The Government will also continue to inform Canadians on

developments in the negotiations through Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's trade policy website <http://www.agr.gc.ca/itpd-dpci/indexe.html>).

