

IPC Alert

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DON'T SEND THE SINGLE UNDERTAKING TO THE UNDERTAKER...

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Is Doha dead? A lot of people seem to think so: They say the Doha round of World Trade Organization talks should be scrapped because it has produced nothing but aggravation and controversy. The upcoming ministerial meeting in Geneva, which starts on Nov. 30, may give these skeptics additional fodder because it's the first high-level meeting of its type that doesn't focus exclusively on the Doha round.

Competing approaches to the Single Undertaking have their merits, and many of them can proceed even as countries work toward a comprehensive pact under the WTO. Yet these alternatives have significant drawbacks --and none can rival the benefits of a finished Doha round. This is particularly true for the heavily distorted agricultural sector, since countries with defensive agricultural interests require trade-offs in other areas. Agriculture is the only sector in which export subsidies are still allowed and where tariffs of more than 100 percent are common.

Bilateral and regional trade agreements are relatively quick and easy to achieve, which is one of the reasons they've proliferated in recent years. Recent agreements do provide more meaningful market access in agriculture, but still lead to a confusing set of diverse obligations.

Plurilateral agreements among subsets of WTO members have the potential to resolve special problems involving standards, subsidies, and anti-dumping rules, but they also threaten to undermine the very purpose of the WTO, which is to involve all member nations rather than only some. They may represent a greater risk than they're worth.

Finally, sectoral negotiations, which focus on agreements within certain industries, hold the promise of immediate advances. By their very nature, however, they are confining. Their gains occur wholly within sectors rather than across them. Trade-offs between sectors can't take place. These types of agreements would almost certainly leave agriculture untouched.

The Single Undertaking is hard work. The ongoing talks involve a bewildering array of complexities. The participation of so many countries adds the extra burden of multi-member consensus. But negotiations that tackle a wide range of subjects present opportunities for countries to make trade-offs within and across sectors, which is especially important for further reform of the international agricultural trade system.

There may come a day when Doha must be abandoned--and the Undertaking sent to the undertaker--but that time is not now, not by a long shot.

OPTIONS FOR PURSUING AGRICULTURAL TRADE LIBERALIZATION

IPC's latest position paper "The Doha Round and Alternative Options for Creating a Fair and Market-Oriented Agricultural Trade System" examines the likely effectiveness of a number of options for agricultural trade liberalization.

On December 1, IPC will host a session entitled "Options for Pursuing Agricultural Trade Liberalization" at the Geneva Trade and Development Symposium at the margin of the WTO Ministerial. For more information about this session, and to access both the position paper and the executive summary, [click here](#).

About IPC

The International Food & Agricultural Trade Policy Council (IPC) promotes a more open and equitable global food system by pursuing pragmatic trade and development policies in food and agriculture to meet the world's growing needs. IPC convenes influential policy makers, agribusiness executives, farm leaders, and academics from developed and developing countries to clarify complex issues, build consensus, and advocate policies to decision-makers. More information on the organization and its membership can be found on our website: www.agritrade.org.