

CAIRNS GROUP FARM LEADERS’ STATEMENT TO CAIRNS GROUP MINISTERS

MONDAY 3 SEPTEMBER, 2001

PUNTA DEL ESTE, URUGUAY

Farm Leaders of the Cairns Group, which is comprised of 18 fair-trading agricultural exporting countries, have come together this week in their continuing pursuit of a fair and equitable rules-based trading system for agriculture. We appreciate being with you today and thank you for your continuing efforts on our behalf.

Fifteen years ago here in Punta del Este, the Cairns Group established itself as the third force at the multilateral negotiating table to push for agricultural trade reform as the highest priority. The result of the Uruguay Round negotiations was at least a start in liberalising farm trade — the first start ever. However, the Agreement on Agriculture had too many loopholes. Total support for farmers has escalated and returned to where it was in 1986 and some markets are still highly protected.

The Agreement on Agriculture was a framework to include agriculture formally into the GATT and to provide a foundation to continue negotiations in the future. It was known that there would have to be a big push to reform agricultural trade and ensure compliance with commitments in agriculture ‘next time’. The ‘next time’ has arrived. We now have to apply immense pressure to achieve that objective. If we do not achieve that now it will only be harder later with serious debilitating effects on our rural producers and our rural communities.

Trade reform remains one of the most important reforms the world can make to improve prosperity and alleviate poverty. World Bank and OECD research shows this. Many countries in the world today are struggling because they share little of the growth in world trade. The rich countries of the world must not be allowed to distort trade to the detriment of developing countries. Negotiations should have a favourable outcome to fully and fairly integrate developing countries in the multilateral trading system by providing for special and differential treatment. Agriculture remains one of the most corrupted markets in the world today and reform would make efficient producers and consumers better off — it is as simple as that.

The Cairns Group is in a unique position, as the third force to provide the leadership sorely needed to strengthen the WTO. Non-trade concerns, such as food security, environment and labour standards must not be allowed to be used as a disguise for protection and should be dealt with in the appropriate international bodies. The WTO and its rules-based system is being weakened by the abuse of anti-dumping rules and non-trade concerns in contradiction of the spirit and rules of the last round.

Cairns Group Farm Leaders have deplored the plight of efficient agricultural producer-exporters many times before. The time has come to draw a ‘line in the sand’

and look to increasing pressure on the Europeans, Americans, Japanese and Koreans for significant progress towards liberalising agricultural trade. Trade ministers should be prepared at some stage to:-

- Delay the start of another round of talks until an acceptable negotiating agenda for agriculture is agreed to, that will deliver real progress in agricultural trade reform — namely the aggressive reduction of single-stage tariffs; the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers; the elimination of export subsidies; and the aggressive reduction of trade-distorting domestic supports.
- Send a clear message to the US Congress to pass Trade Promotion Authority before Doha, unencumbered by environment and labour concerns. This would provide a clear signal to the world that the US is serious about trade reform and is prepared to show leadership on the issue.

We appreciate the continuing efforts of trade ministers in pursuing the goal of making trade in agriculture, as in the industrial sector, subject to compatible and enforceable WTO rules. This is the best way that ministers can deliver the real opportunity of prosperity and growth to our farming communities and countries as a whole. We recognize your role today is harder than ever before as millions of people are still suffering in poverty and are hoping for a better world.

The objective now must be to achieve at Doha a strong mandate that gives us confidence that the next round will deliver real and meaningful gains in agriculture for the small trading nations and the developing world.

The Farm Leaders therefore urge you to remain ambitious and resolute in pursuit of agriculture reform through the WTO.

Argentina
Sociedad Rural Argentina

Australia
National Farmers' Federation

Brazil
Confederacion Nacional da Agricultura

Canada
Canadian Federation of Agriculture

Chile
Sociedad Nacional de Agricultura

Colombia
Sociedad de Agricultores de Colombia

Guatemala
Comision de Negociaciones Comerciales Internacionales (CENCIT)

New Zealand
Federated Farmers of New Zealand

Paraguay
Asociación Rural del Paraguay

South Africa
South African Agricultural Union

Uruguay
Asociación Rural del Uruguay