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International farm leaders call for agricultural trade reform

FARM leaders from key Cairns Group countries have delivered a strong statement to world trade Ministers calling for agricultural trade reform, particularly in the area of agricultural market access, which remains decades overdue.

“We believe that with strong political leadership and vision, the Doha Round of World Trade Organisation negotiations can be successfully resumed and concluded – the current window of opportunity has not yet closed,” David Crombie, Chair of the Cairns Group Farm Leaders and President of the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF), said.

“Cairns Group Ministers this week have an obligation to the farmers they represent to focus their discussions on concrete ways to re-energise the Doha negotiations.

“It is vital that this week’s meeting of the Cairns Group demonstrate leadership and while we acknowledge there are political challenges, we urge Ministers to work towards restarting and concluding the negotiations.

“Ministers must focus their discussions on diagnosing problems and finding solutions. Platitudes and generalised statements will not do.

“Developed countries need to bring more to the table on market access and domestic support. Developing countries, too, need to improve their position on issues like special products and safeguards.

“The final Doha agreement must address the real deficiencies and distortions that exist in current trade rules.

“Put simply, a ‘*Doha-lite*’ deal is not acceptable.

“Our long-standing position is that this Round will not be judged on whether it concludes successfully with the signing of a final agreement. Ultimately, it will be judged on how much new commercial trade it creates in Australia.

“Time is short – we must not lose this opportunity. The work of Cairns Group Ministers, therefore, remains as vital as ever.”

Countries and organisations that participated in the Cairns Group Farm Leaders (CGFL) meeting in Cairns include: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, Paraguay, South Africa and Uruguay, along with the Global Dairy Alliance and the Global Sugar Alliance.

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Note: The joint CGFL Communique follows.

CAIRNS GROUP FARM LEADERS' COMMUNIQUE

CAIRNS 19 SEPTEMBER 2006

FARM leaders' from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, New Zealand, Paraguay, South Africa and Uruguay met yesterday to discuss the stalled Doha Development Round of multilateral trade negotiations.

As a group, we remain extremely disappointed that the negotiations have been suspended. We do not accept the premise that the current window of opportunity for the WTO negotiations has closed. We believe that with strong political leadership and vision, the Round can be successfully resumed and concluded in a manner that delivers on the Doha mandate agreed by all Ministers in 2001, the provisions of the July 2004 framework agreement and the declaration from the 6th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Hong Kong.

Agricultural trade reform, in the areas of agricultural market access, domestic support and export competition, remains decades overdue. Future generations will not forgive us if we do not act now.

Delivery of the Doha mandate will be the best means of addressing global poverty and of allowing farmers, particularly those in developing countries, to realise their full economic and social potential. The world community cannot afford to give up this chance.

Therefore, we believe that the Ministers, meeting in the coming days, have an obligation to the millions of farmers they represent to focus their discussions on concrete ways to re-energise the Doha negotiations so that they can deliver a high-quality outcome. This week's meeting of the Cairns Group offers an ideal and important opportunity to demonstrate the leadership necessary to establish a pathway forward.

With this in mind, while acknowledging the very real political challenges, we collectively urge all Ministers to work urgently towards restarting and successfully concluding the negotiations.

Ministers must focus their discussions on diagnosing the problems and towards finding solutions. Platitudes and generalised statements will not get the Round moving again.

Agriculture remains at the heart of a Doha deal, so all WTO members must now focus on finding the required political will to bring these talks to a successful conclusion.

We call particularly on developed economies to bring more to the table on market access and domestic support. This remains the key to unlocking the entire Doha Development Round.

In addition, we call on leading developing countries to be fair and reasonable on issues like special products and safeguards. Rules in these areas must allow for new trade flows – not create new permanent barriers to change. But genuine special and differential treatment will be essential to allow developing countries to develop.

In working to bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion, however, we remind our Ministers and others that a limited agreement will not be acceptable or sufficient for the world's farmers.

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The final Doha agreement must address the real deficiencies and distortions in current trade rules that affect our livelihood and opportunities. Ministers must focus on a comprehensive agreement that delivers substantial improvements in real market access (including through ensuring that the market access categories are used for their intended purposes as intended by the July 2004 Framework Agreement), substantial reductions in trade distorting domestic support and eliminates all forms of export subsidies.

Put simply, a *Doha-lite* deal is not acceptable. Farmers cannot afford an outcome from this Round that falls short of the original Doha mandate.

We underline and repeat our long-standing position that this Round will not be judged on whether it concludes successfully with the signing of a final agreement. Ultimately, this Round's value will be judged on the extent to which it delivers freer agricultural trade, resulting in improved opportunities for better farm income.

Therefore, we urge our Cairns Group Ministers and others who seek a truly liberalising outcome not to weaken in their resolve. We understand the challenges ahead. But as farm leaders we will fully support our Ministers in their endeavours to deliver the high-quality Doha Round agreement that the world needs.

This Round has the opportunity to provide agriculture with a positive trading environment for decades to come. Time is, however, short. So we urge world leaders not to let this opportunity to reduce inequities in global trade and to promote world economic development slip by.

The work of Cairns Group Ministers and your work with other groupings and countries to promote global consensus therefore remains as vital as ever. We wish you well with your deliberations over coming days. Farm leaders, stand ready to assist this process in any way we can.

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