

Stallman: Global Trade Vital, But Smaller Agreements Filling Gaps

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — While urging the World Trade Organization to tackle numerous, stifling barriers to global agricultural trade, the American Farm Bureau Federation will continue to encourage the U.S. government to aggressively pursue bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade agreements to secure markets for U.S. agricul-

tural exports.

Addressing attendees at the World Agricultural Forum recently, AFBF President Bob Stallman said the WTO must "move and move now" to address the use of tariffs and non-tariff trade barriers, such as the imposition and maintenance of "non-science-based sanitary and phytosanitary" measures to

block trade.

"In the meantime, we support and encourage our government to work with like-minded countries and pursue other trade-enhancing measures, be they bilateral, regional, or multilateral," Stallman said. "And we certainly want to see (the United States end) all unilateral sanctions and food embargoes, which

penalize only the domestic producer."

Stallman said the multilateral work conducted under the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Food System initiative sets a good example for what U.S. farmers believe should result from a "fruitful WTO round."

"The resultant infrastructure of the (APEC) plan will permit participating nations to hit the ground running and take fuller advantage of the new trading system than those nations who are not prepared," he said. "The fundamental reforms we seek will build the foundation the APEC system anticipates and rests upon."

Global progress, however, also is essential. Stallman said there has been some "movement in the WTO agricultural negotiations that are now under way. Progress in these talks has been impressive as negotiators pursue their charge, even though a trade round was not launched as planned in Seattle in 1999."

Stallman said WTO member countries have established deadlines for the coming year that, when achieved, "will put agriculture in a good negotiating position once a round is successfully launched." Farm Bureau supports the commencement of WTO talks this November in Qatar.

Leading up to those talks, Stallman said Farm Bureau is paying "continuous attention to details and is closely monitoring the ongoing trade discussions as we look ahead to new opportunities."

"From the results of past rounds, it is clear to U.S. farmers that this round must include all sectors as a comprehensive,

single undertaking (that does not exclude agriculture)," he said.

"Trading agricultural favors for other sectors' benefits will no longer be acceptable domestically."

Stallman said a major goal of American farmers during WTO talks, as well as farmers in many other nations, is "the elimination of export subsidies now and tariff barriers eventually, within a specified deadline, recognizing and addressing the impact on import sensitive products."

He also said U.S. farmers will push for implementation of health and food safety standards that are based on science as is already required by provisions of the Uruguay Round Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement.

"This concern does not deal with changing, but rather following the rules that have been agreed to," he said. "Products enhanced through biotechnology need to be judged on their merits, not on political science."

He said the WTO dispute settlement process also must be streamlined so that its rulings "pave the way to promote, rather than restrict trade."

"This is crucial because the credibility of the WTO depends in part on dispute settlement rulings that steer the direction of global trade," Stallman said.

Overall, Farm Bureau supports WTO progress along the lines of the goals stated in the long-range plan for the multilateral APEC initiative.

"An open food system will enable participating countries and companies to build and grow, once the new trading regime takes hold," Stallman said.

"U.S. farmers want fairer and freer trade because we see profit opportunity certainly. But there is far more trade moves more than products. Trade moves ideas and ideals. It promotes social as well as material gain. We need to maintain an atmosphere that encourages openness to innovation, promotes enterprise, and rewards those who participate within the rules."

Stallman said that a tide of public sentiment for more open trading rules "will benefit producers and consumers, while building a more peaceful world." U.S. farmers, he said, are eager "to share in this progress as we seek our own prosperity while promoting improved standards of living globally."

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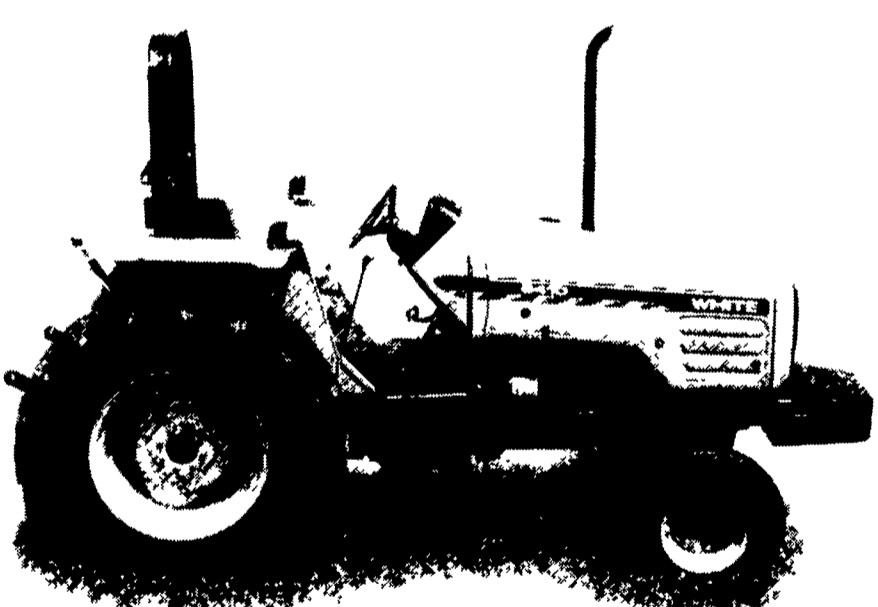
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