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Sale of the Century?

**Peoples' Food Sovereignty:
Part 1 - the implications of
current trade negotiations**



**Friends of
the Earth
International**

Note: this report was drafted prior to the tragic events in the US on 11th September 2001. Friends of the Earth International cannot predict with any certainty what changes this will have on global trade but will clearly have implications for some of the issues contained in this report.

This report is the *fourth* in a series of five from Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) covering the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference and the proposed new round of negotiations (*Sale of the Century? The WTO's 4th Ministerial series of reports*).

Summary

Food and food security will be key issues in the forthcoming trade negotiations at the WTO's 4th Ministerial Conference, whether or not a new round brings new issues into the WTO. This is because members are mandated to renegotiate agriculture and food within the WTO as part of a previous agreement reached during the last Uruguay Round. These negotiations are already underway.

The WTO's Agreements on Agriculture (AOA) and Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), agreed during the last Uruguay Round of negotiations, have had a great influence on farming around the world. Together these agreements have strengthened a global system of trade in food and agriculture that supports large-scale, export-oriented, industrial production at the expense of small-scale, sustainable farming.

This is true in the North, where the AOA has maintained a predominantly regulated system benefitting large farms and Northern transnational corporations (TNCs). It is also true in the South, although the direct impacts are quite different. Here, the AOA is to a large extent *liberalising* agricultural trade - by increasing access to Southern agricultural markets - and the TRIPs Agreement is *regulating* production by local farmers. Together, these two WTO agreements are having a particularly devastating impact on agriculture in the South, where farmers frequently find themselves unable to compete with the prices of cheap imported agricultural products and food. Their situation is all the worse since the TRIPs Agreement also fails to recognise the traditional knowledge of farmers and indigenous groups and works against the transfer of technology that might assist farming and food security in the South.

The progressive industrialisation of agriculture combined with WTO rules on standard setting are also having a marked impact on food safety standards. By way of a series of high-profile transatlantic disagreements, it has now become clear that food standards and consumer concerns are being undermined by current WTO rules. These rules severely limit the application of the precautionary principle and are heavily influenced by TNCs. It also seems that those countries exporting genetically modified food may try to ensure that the WTO takes up the highly controversial issue of trade and biotechnology.

Overall, the current process of trade liberalisation, combined with an emphasis on export-led development, is associated with growing land alienation, declining food security, increasing hunger, negative impacts on rural life and the environment and the concentration of business within larger producers. In particular, net food importing developing countries are predicted to find themselves with higher food import bills. Furthermore, farmers and indigenous groups in the South are losing both productive capacity and control of the food crops they have developed over many generations, and consumers are finding it increasingly difficult to locate and purchase safe and healthy food.

For these reasons, Friends of the Earth believes that the WTO is a totally inappropriate institution to address food and agricultural issues. Any further trade-focused negotiations concerning the AOA, TRIPs and other agreements (the General Agreement on Trade in Services, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and Technical Barriers to Trade) are likely to make an already serious situation worse. FOEI is calling for food and agriculture to be taken out of the WTO through the dismantling of the AOA and the removal or amendment of relevant clauses in other agreements. Instead of focusing primarily on trade, an alternative and enforceable framework for multilateral rules should be based around peoples' food sovereignty (see Box 1), national and local needs for employment and food security, targeted support for rural communities and sustainable agricultural practices, high food quality standards, access to appropriate technology, and recognition of the contribution of farmers around the world to crop diversity.

Box 1: 'Food security' and 'food sovereignty'

There are many different ways of defining food security, but the basic principle is to ensure access to an adequate supply of safe and nutritious food for every individual. Whilst there is little disagreement over this principle, there is much debate about how to achieve it. Prior to the 1970s, the 'conventional wisdom' was that food production was such an important domestic objective that it should be dealt with separately from trade. Times have changed, however, and the prevailing view is the opposite, in theory at least. Many officials argue that deregulated trade will achieve an adequate supply and distribution of food and that governments should therefore relinquish control over food trade policy. In other words, food should be treated like any other industrial commodity. As a result, the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations saw agriculture and food issues placed firmly within the WTO, although measures to liberalise agriculture in some Northern countries were limited. Many countries and organisations reject this position and argue that countries should have the right to determine their own policies on such an important issue as food security, i.e. 'food sovereignty'.

Introduction

Negotiations on agriculture - and thus on food and food security - will take place as part of the WTO's 'built-in agenda', whether there is a new round or not. These negotiations are inextricably linked to the results of the Uruguay Round, which dealt with:

- Agricultural policy (in the World Trade Agreement on Agriculture (AOA));
- Consumer and health policy (World Trade Agreements on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)); and
- Intellectual property (the Agreement on Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs)).

Also relevant in this context is the body that sets global standards for food - the Codex Alimentarius Commission (see Box 11). Codex is recognised explicitly by the World Trade Organisation and therefore constitutes part of the 'food trade system'.

Box 2: Basic food facts

Food is the most basic need of humankind. Even though trade in agricultural products topped \$580 billion in 1995, it is estimated that about 820 million people (14% of the world's population) are now malnourished.¹ In Sub-Saharan Africa, average calorie intake in 1995 was still below the daily minimum calorie requirement of 2,300.²

What happened in the Uruguay Round?

The Agreement on Agriculture

International trade in agricultural and food products is now regulated through the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA), agreed during the Uruguay Round. This Round was the last of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) negotiations and ran from 1988 to 1994 (GATT was the predecessor to the WTO). Negotiations to completely liberalise agriculture are still a long way off, but even so the negotiation of the AOA was grossly inequitable and stacked against developing countries. It is already contributing to decreased food security and environmental degradation. When finally agreed, the AOA was based on a bilateral negotiation between the US and the EU. Many developing countries were opposed to the AOA, but since it was presented as part of a comprehensive package, to be accepted on an 'all or nothing' basis, they were forced to concede.

The theoretical aim of the AOA is to reduce agricultural support and protection so as to correct and prevent distortions in world agricultural markets. However, what actually emerged was an Agreement that largely *liberalised* agricultural trade in developing countries and maintained a largely *regulated* trade system in developed countries. Key outcomes are increased market access for companies exporting to the South, dumping of food products in other markets (particularly developing countries), and the prediction that net food importing developing countries will find themselves with higher

import bills. The overall result is an agreement that benefits large transnational corporations and large farms, at the expense of small and subsistence farmers.

The Agreement on Agriculture is complex, but basically covers commitments in three main areas: market access, domestic production subsidies and export subsidies (developed countries had until 2000 to meet these commitments whereas developing countries have until 2004). In terms of food and food security, the main points of the current AOA are that:³

Existing domestic production subsidies and export subsidies are to be reduced. The domestic production subsidies that are directly linked to production and thus distort trade (these subsidies are commonly referred to as the Amber Box) are subject to WTO disciplines and are to be reduced. However, because of the 'reference years' selected, the EU and US have been able to avoid further significant reductions in both domestic and export subsidies. On the other hand, developing countries with little or no existing subsidies are prohibited from providing new ones above a maximum level. Thus the industrialised world has been able to maintain high domestic production subsidies (see Box 3) and high export subsidies (see Box 4) whilst the AOA prevents the developing world from adopting similar support mechanisms.

Box 3: Subsidies

Some of these figures for the total amounts of agricultural subsidies in developed countries are taken from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). They need to be treated with caution. They have been widely criticised and many observers fundamentally disagree with the way they have been calculated. However, they reveal that such subsidies within OECD countries remain extremely high. For example:

- In 1998 and 1999, annual support to agriculture in OECD countries was approximately US\$360 billion.⁴ This fell to \$327 billion in 2000 which is approximately two times the *total GDP* for all least developed countries.⁵ Despite the AOA (the aim of which is to reduce agricultural support), these amounts are higher than the era prior to the early 1990s. For example, between 1986 and 1988, annual support to agriculture in OECD countries was \$308 billion.⁶

- Recent OECD figures estimate that producer support per farmer between 1998-2000 was as follows (it is assumed this is annual support): Iceland \$32,109, Switzerland \$31,231, Norway \$30,978, Japan \$25,190, Korea \$21,785, United States \$20,803, EU \$16,028, OECD \$11,334.⁷

- In 1999, EU domestic support was approximately 70 billion Euro and was predicted to fall to about 63 billion Euro (\$56 billion) in 2001.⁸

Some subsidies are exempt from reductions: The AOA currently allows certain forms of direct payment subsidies, provided they are not linked to production (commonly known as the Green Box) or are applied so as to limit production (commonly known as the Blue Box). The Green Box includes measures such as environmental payments, support for rural infrastructure and insurance schemes. The Blue Box includes payments based on unit size of farm and numbers of animals. However, production has remained high - particularly in the EU and the US - as the support system has not been significantly reduced and, on balance, continues to favour large farms at the expense of the small ones. Large farms tend to be more intensive and highly mechanised. They benefit from new and more powerful agro-chemicals, further damaging the environment.

In addition, as the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy states: "*With farm incomes so low in many developed countries, it is difficult to believe that a payment of any kind will not be used to increase production.*"⁹ There is also now growing recognition that current US "*farm programmes do substantially boost production, with even claimed 'production neutral' payments being responsible for maintaining total agricultural output at higher levels than would be likely without them.*"¹⁰ Thus, the continuation of production surpluses at a global scale (which has been compounded by relatively weak global demand) has continued to drive farm gate prices down (but this has not necessarily been passed on by way of lower consumer prices, see Box 5). This has the effect of further increasing production. Small-scale farmers in the UK have warned Friends of the Earth that this puts them into a vicious cycle. Falling farm gate prices only compels them to farm more intensively (putting further pressure on prices) as they attempt to reduce costs and improve margins from their land or livestock.

Dumping is 'accepted' as part of the rules in the AOA (dumping is usually defined as goods sold in an importing country at prices below the exporting country's cost of production or below the price for the same good in the domestic exporting market). The commitment to cut the volume of export subsidies was set at just 21% for developed countries by the year 2000: effectively 79% of export subsidies are still 'allowed'.^{11,12}

Moreover, subsidised domestic production in developed countries is also often dumped into other markets, particularly developing countries (see Box 4). Dumping has severe consequences for their domestic food production. Countries in which dumping occurs may be able to take counter actions through the WTO. In practice, such action is very complex (i.e. they have to prove injury to a domestic industry) and costly and thus beyond most developing nations.

Box 4: Examples of dumping

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the EU exported beef using subsidies of about US\$2.60 per kg. In 1991, the EU spent the equivalent of US\$116 million disposing of beef worth only US\$31 million. During the 1980s, increased exports to West Africa undermined the price of beef produced in Burkino Faso, Mali and Niger by 30% to 50%.¹³

Whilst campaigns to stop these subsidised exports of beef to Africa were successful, intervention stocks in the EU are projected to rise. The EU has confirmed that because European prices are higher than world prices due to the CAP, they can only export with subsidies.^{14,15} Others believe that in "[b]oth the USA and the EU, virtually all agricultural production now profits from some measure of direct payment. This means that practically everything exported from those countries involves some level of dumping."¹⁶ Examples of dumping include:¹⁷

- Imports of EU dairy surpluses by India;
- Exports of EU pork surpluses to West Africa, eastern Europe and Russia (through the use of export subsidies);
- Exports of US pork to the Caribbean.

One of the most documented examples is in Mexico. Under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Mexico opened up its market to maize from the US. It is expected that up to 15 million farmers and their families (many from indigenous farming communities) will be displaced as a result of Mexico now competing directly with US maize imports from the mid west. At the time of the signing of NAFTA, US maize was available at the Mexico border some 50% cheaper than the domestic cost of production in Mexico. Because Mexico is a critically important centre of origin for maize, it is expected that the enormous genetic variety and diversity of this crop cultivated by these same communities - which has greatly contributed to their own and global food security - will also be lost.¹⁸

Box 5: Lower farm gate prices and impacts on consumer prices

Lower farm gate prices have not necessarily been passed onto consumers. The UK provides some examples. According to the UK's Meat and Livestock Commission, between 1995 and 1998 "*multiple retailers had not shared any of the decline in overall industry return, at a time when producer prices [for beef, lamb and pork] had declined substantially.*"¹⁹ Falling UK beef prices between 1992 and 1995 were generally reflected in corresponding changes in the retail price index (RPI) for beef. But between 1995 and 1997 there was a 20% drop in beef prices to producers. This was not reflected in the RPI for beef, which remained almost constant.²⁰

The AOA requires signatories to convert all non-tariff barriers to imports into 'equivalent' tariffs and to then reduce these tariffs (commonly known as 'tariffication'). Since the industrialised countries already had much greater non tariff-barriers to start off with they were able to convert these into tariffs that are still highly prohibitive. Even after reductions, these tariffs are an effective barrier to many imports (see Box 8).

The AOA contains a Peace Clause which expires at the end of 2003. Articles 3.1 and 5 of the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Agreement of the WTO expressly exclude agricultural subsidies allowed under the Agreement on Agriculture from the list of subsidies that are 'actionable' (i.e. can be brought to WTO dispute processes).

The SCM Agreement also refers to Article 13 of the Agreement on Agriculture (the Peace Clause). This calls on WTO members to use 'due restraint' and not challenge agricultural support measures (i.e. fully conforming export subsidies and those in the Blue and Green Boxes) that are used by other countries so long as they are kept below 1992 levels. However, this restraint appears only applicable to subsidies usually found in developed countries. Those usually found in developing countries seem to be open to countervailing duty actions.²¹ Some have also questioned the tightness of the Peace Clause and believe that, in practice, countervailing duties could be imposed.²²

Box 6: Trade liberalisation and further examples of impacts in the South

Following the signing of the Uruguay Round and the implementation of the AOA, India is now struggling to compete with cheap imports of agricultural products such as oilseeds. Import tariffs on oilseeds were reduced from 65% to 16.5% between 1995 and 1998. One estimate concludes that the livelihoods of three million people have been lost.²³

In the same way, trade liberalisation of maize could jeopardise up to half a million livelihoods in the Philippines due to lower prices. The Philippines is liberalising its imports of a range of agricultural commodities under the AOA. For maize, tariffs on imports will be halved over the next four years. According to the UNDP, who stated in 1997, "depending on world price trends, maize imported from the United States could be available at 30% below current market prices by the end of the decade." This would drive down domestic farm prices and undermine local production.^{24,25}

In Brazil, the introduction of large scale, mechanised soya production for export in the state of Parana displaced over 100,000 farms of less than 50 hectares between 1970 and 1980. With less demand for labour, net migration from rural areas in Parana reached 2.5 million during the 1970s many of whom moved to Rondonia where they started to clear forest. And recent soya expansion is now focussed on states much closer to tropical rainforest, such as Para.²⁶

Developing countries have 'special and differential treatment' options. They can provide certain subsidies - such as investment or to low-income producers. However, these cannot exceed 1992 levels. Since subsidies in developing countries were low in 1992, there is a limit to what can be done to support the production of food for domestic consumption. Such support is never likely to reach the US\$16-20,000 per annum that the EU and the US still pay each of their farmers (on average).

Special safeguard provision. Domestic markets can also be protected under the 'special safeguard provision' (SSG) when there are surges in import volumes or a sudden fall in prices. Some have commented that the EU sets its trigger prices for SSG at artificially low levels, allowing it to introduce protective tariffs more easily.²⁷

Box 7: Trade liberalisation and impacts in the North

Trade liberalisation required under the NAFTA has resulted in excess supply and dramatically falling US farmgate prices. Between 1995 and 2000, the bushel price of corn fell by 33%, 42% for wheat and 34% for soybeans. Since NAFTA came into effect, 33,000 farms with annual income of less than \$100,000 have disappeared.²⁸

In 1999, over 20,000 farm workers left the sector in the UK. Falling prices in the UK is, to a significant extent, due to trade liberalisation. For example, small farmers cannot compete with lower prices from abroad, the sources of which are usually from large, export-oriented agricultural practices. Early potatoes from North Africa are often available some 30% cheaper than local UK production. Similarly, milk products from abroad are invariably available at some 20% cheaper than UK milk.²⁹

Latvia joined the WTO in 1998 and found that, almost immediately, imports of pork increased dramatically. Under WTO rules, to protect their domestic market and the livelihoods of their farmers, countries are only able to take temporary measures for a period lasting up to 200 days. Barriers (increased tariffs) were put in place during the second

half of 1999. However, it appears that the European Commission then ‘lent’ on Latvia not to extend the temporary measures beyond this period. The EU is a major exporter of surplus pork to Latvia (often through the use of export subsidies, see Box 4) and threatened to impose measures to restrict imports into the European Union from Latvia on butter and other milk products. The Commission is also able to exert leverage on Latvia as the country attempts to accede to the EU. Barriers were lifted leading to the loss of many thousands of domestic producers.³⁰

Box 8: Total tariffs on selected products after ‘tariffication’^{31,32}

US		EU	
Sugar	244%	Beef	213%
Peanuts	174%	Wheat	168%
Milk	83%	Sheep meat	144%
Japan		Canada	
Rice	550%	Cheese	289%
Wheat	353%	Eggs	236%
		Butter	360%

Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights

The Agreement on Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) impacts on peoples' ownership of and access to food and seeds and has the potential to significantly reduce genetic diversity. It permits northern transnational corporations (TNCs) to claim traditional plant varieties or plant uses as 'inventions' that must be respected the world over. TRIPs was first brought into the GATT in the Uruguay Round and implemented in a way that favoured large Northern corporations. TRIPs and the use of patents expropriates knowledge from farmers and indigenous peoples in developing countries who, in many cases, have been cultivators, researchers and protectors of plants for thousands of years. This practice is commonly referred to as ‘biopiracy’. Biopiracy is not the result of the absence of Intellectual Property Regime (IPR) systems in the developing world but a direct consequence of the imposition of western style IPR systems (based on the US patent regime) through the TRIPs Agreement.

It is Article 27.3(b) of the TRIPs Agreement that calls for WTO members to protect intellectual property over plant varieties. They can do this either by patent or by an effective *sui generis* (that is, alternative) system, or a combination of the two. The Article allows: “*Members to exclude...from patentability plants and animals other than microorganisms, and essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals other than non-biological and microbiological processes. However, members shall provide for the protection of plant varieties either by patents or an affective sui generis system or by any combination thereof. The Provisions of this sub-paragraph shall be reviewed four years after the entry into force of the WTO Agreement*”. Patents often raise the price of products, blocking technology transfer and making food and pharmaceuticals more expensive. This exemption is of potential benefit to developing countries who want to resist patents on biological resources, in order to promote food security and health.

Yet developing countries faced, and continue to face a number of dilemmas. They had until January 2000 to comply with TRIPs obligations to protect the rights of those who develop new plant varieties (and many countries have requested extensions in implementing their commitments). Furthermore, developing countries have at least three serious obstacles to overcome if they want to use a *sui generis* system. They have to ensure that the protection is effective. In order to do that they will have to devote considerable resources to developing new legislation and new legislative bodies. Finally, they must defend their action in light of the fact that almost all WTO support so far has been focused on UPOV-style protection (Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants). This again is invariably based on developed country models.³³ In addition, many are questioning whether it is possible to comply with the both the TRIPs Agreement and

the Convention on Biological Diversity. Article 8 (j) of the latter calls on each contracting party to respect, preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities.

Developing countries want to preserve the exemption under Article 27.3(b). However, the US has often pushed for full life-form patenting and may do so under the in-built review of the TRIPs Agreement. Full-life form patenting would require IPR protection for all animals and plants *per se*, as well as plant varieties and microbiological processes, and raises many ethical concerns.

Box 9: TNCs, patents and food security

Under WTO enforced patent law, Monsanto has the right to take farmers to court if they collect and use seeds from its patented plant varieties. In the USA, Monsanto has opened more than 475 such 'seed piracy' cases nation wide. The use of patents has increased dramatically in recent years as biotechnology and genetic engineering companies have sought protection for 'inventions' such as Monsanto's Round-up Ready soya bean and the 'terminator gene'. Although Monsanto and other companies have now pledged not to commercialise its 'terminator' technology, companies - such as Syngenta - continue to research and/or patent biologically-engineered sterile seed. The latest patent was awarded to Syngenta in November 2000. In addition, companies are developing research and/or patents "*for a new generation of GM plants whose traits can be switched on or off with the application of proprietary chemicals.*" This has been called 'traitor' technology. Since May 2000, Syngenta and Dupont have both secured patents for this research.³⁴ The creation of Syngenta will bring into one company "*over half the world's patents that have been identified on Terminator and Traitor Technology*".³⁵

Monsanto has been granted extremely broad patents on a wide variety of food items such as the brassica family and on neem products. Similarly, US company W.R. Grace has patented certain pesticide properties of the neem tree. This tree has been used for centuries by people in India for a variety of uses, including for pest control. In 2000, a panel of the European Patent Office withdrew the patent given to the company endorsing "*the arguments of the critics of the patent that the process for extracting the oil from the neem tree was actually in use in India long before the 1994 patent application...The core issue for the EPO examiners was the question of whether a purported invention, as claimed by the US multinational, has never before been conceived as an idea...[and] ruled that the patent granted in 1995 is characterised by a 'lack of novelty'*".³⁶ This example however highlights that patents are awarded that do not recognise indigenous or traditional knowledge and the 'benefits' will exclusively go to companies and those consumers that can afford their products.

'High standards' or 'trade barriers'?

Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)

The SPS deals with food safety and standards. Through the SPS, the WTO is able to determine what measures are necessary to protect human, animal and plant life or health. Members are 'encouraged' to use international standards where they exist, such as those developed by the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) or the Codex Alimentarius Commission (see Box 11). Countries may maintain higher standards, but only if they can demonstrate 'scientific justification' (under WTO rules, consumer and ethical concerns are not acceptable reasons for trade barriers.)

The SPS has already been used by the WTO in food-related disputes such as the European Union's ban on the imports of hormone-treated beef (imposed due to consumer and health concerns). The SPS requires that appropriate risk assessment, involving an analysis of the available scientific evidence, must be undertaken before trade barriers can be introduced.

There has been some debate about whether or not the SPS agreement permits reference to the precautionary principle in its Article 5.7 on so-called 'provisional measures': "*In cases where relevant scientific evidence is insufficient, a Member may provisionally adopt sanitary or phytosanitary measures on the basis of available pertinent information...In such circumstances, members shall seek to obtain the additional information necessary for a more objective assessment of risk and review the sanitary or phytosanitary measure accordingly within a reasonable period of time*" (Article 5.7).

The EU attempted to use this article to defend its ban on hormone-treated beef. However the WTO's Appellate Body ruled that the precautionary principle cannot be used to override the risk assessment requirements in the SPS Agreement. In other words, there is still a requirement for sound scientific evidence. This is despite the precautionary principle now being widely recognised in international law.

SPS and genetically modified food

The beef-hormones case is being seen as a 'dry-run' for a potential dispute over barriers to trade in genetically modified organisms (GMOs), where the same issues of scientific uncertainty, corporate interest and public taste could resurface. It is clear that the US has no intention of letting other nations introduce barriers to agricultural imports (i.e. GM products) that could be in contravention of WTO rules. Central to this position is the SPS Agreement (see Country Positions below).

Box 10: Beef, consumer concerns and animal health

One of the reasons that the EU imposed the import ban on hormone-treated beef is a fear that they may cause health problems. Specifically the EU cited health issues surrounding breast and colon cancer. The ban has, however, proved controversial because of differing opinions on whether the banned products are safe for human consumption (hence the EU invoked the 'precautionary principle'). But an equally important reason for the ban is that consumers in the EU, according to officials, have expressed a strong preference to eat hormone free meat regardless of its safety (these concerns come hard on the heels of many health scares in food production, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy - BSE - more commonly known as mad cow disease). There is also the additional argument for a ban on animal health/husbandry grounds (i.e. pushing animals to grow faster than they would naturally).

Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement (TBT)

The Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement covers any procedures or standards that might be deemed to interfere with international trade. This includes packaging, marking and labelling standards, and thus eco-labels. The Confederation of British Industry has urged WTO members to establish that TBT rules apply to eco-labelling and to clarify the extent to which private eco-labelling rules should be covered by the Agreement (which would bring well-established initiatives such as the Forest Stewardship Council scheme under the remit of the WTO).³⁷ Similarly, in the run up to the 4th WTO Ministerial (in line with their position at Seattle), the International Chamber of Commerce has called for clarification that the TBT Agreement applies to eco-labels in view of the fact that they potentially create barriers to trade.³⁸ The TBT is up for review, whether or not there is a new round bringing new issues into the WTO.

Box 11: Codex

Codex Alimentarius Commission is the main body of the United Nations dealing with food standards. It is comprised of the Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Health Organisation and is recognised by the WTO for the establishment of international food standards. Codex has been criticised for being heavily influenced by representatives of food and chemical corporations, and the standards it sets are sometimes 'least common denominators' that are lower than standards in place in many nations.

What overall impact did the Uruguay Round have on food, people and the environment?

The Uruguay Round and the AOA have allowed the developed world to maintain high levels of domestic support for agriculture by subsidising their own farmers, whilst continuing to restrict access to its own markets. Large farms (which often employ fewer people per hectare) and agri-business (which would not have developed to anything like its present scale without public subsidies) are favoured in both the North and the South. The AOA therefore has significant impacts on rural communities and on the environment. Large farms tend to be more intensive and highly mechanised. They benefit from new and more powerful agro-chemicals, further damaging the environment. Because production subsidies in the North have not been significantly reduced, so production levels have remained high. Consequently, global prices have declined (this has been compounded by relatively weak demand as a result of economic slowdowns in Russia, Asia and Latin America). Many farmers - particularly small-scale, family farmers - are being driven out of business in both the North and South.

In the FAO's assessment of the Uruguay Round's AOA on 16 developing countries, the principal finding was that whilst *"trade liberalisation had led to an almost instantaneous surge in food imports, these countries were not able to raise their exports. Significant supply side constraints prevented them from taking advantage of increased global market access"*. According to the FAO, under the overall economic impact of the AOA: *"A common reported concern was with a general trend towards the concentration of farms, in a wide cross section of countries. While this led to increased productivity and competitiveness with positive results, in the virtual absence of social safety-nets, the process also marginalised small producers and added to unemployment and poverty"*.³⁹

Where food safety is concerned, the SPS Agreement has been used to rule in favour of free trade. WTO dispute rulings also favour free trade over development and social issues. For example, the European Union's preferential import regime for Caribbean banana farmers - aimed at supporting small scale growers where costs are high because of steep terrain, poor soils and climatic hazards - was deemed incompatible with WTO rules.

The AOA also prohibits the developing world from implementing effective domestic agricultural support policies themselves and has done very little to curb the 'dumping' of cheap subsidised northern agricultural products on the South and countries in eastern Europe and Russia (which destabilises local markets and production) (see Box 4).

The AOA places no obligation on least developed countries (LDCs) except to bind tariffs (in other words, not to increase import tariffs). However, LDCs have probably been hit hardest by the AOA, with serious implications for food security. At the signing of the Uruguay Round in Marrakech, member governments agreed that 'compensation' should be afforded to LDCs and net food importing developing countries (NFIDCs) in recognition of the problems they would face due to the implementation of the AOA. These include the prediction of higher food import bills, price instabilities and reduced availability of food aid. However, compensation mechanisms have never been implemented.

In 1995, the Food and Agriculture Organisation calculated that the food import bill for low-income food deficit countries would be \$9.8 billion higher in 2000 than it was 12 years previously (an increase of 55%). Of this increase, \$3.6 billion would be as a direct result of the Uruguay Round.⁴⁰ More recent studies have confirmed the deteriorating position for NFIDCs. Between 1993/4 and 1997/98, the cost of cereal imports increased by 47% (it should be mentioned that the results of these studies depend heavily on when they were conducted because of wildly fluctuating global cereal prices during the 1990s which reached a low in 1993, a high in 1996 but fell thereafter).⁴¹ Globally, about 820 million people are now malnourished.⁴²

Trade liberalisation and the emphasis on export-led development for cash crops and minerals has been accompanied with growing land alienation, declining food security, increasing hunger, impacts on the environment and the concentration of business within larger producers. Small scale producers or farmers - particularly women - have become marginalised or displaced from their land (see Box 12).

Box 12: Export-led development, women and Ghana

Export-led development is exacerbating the problems of small farmers in the South. Dora Biney, a 37 year-old farmer from Bodwireagya-Anikoko in Ghana, is one of many millions to have experienced the downside of free trade. Until recently Dora farmed her land, but now she has been moved off it against her wishes, to make way for gold mines. Dora and her family have been resettled several miles away in a smaller house made of 'sandcrete' blocks and cement with what she describes as 'woefully inadequate facilities'. Dora's changed circumstances mean she can't even pay medical bills or her children's school fees (pressure for economic reform from governments in the developed world means that people in Ghana are obliged to pay for health and education). Worst of all, she's had to take her children out of school.

TNCs - such as Monsanto, Cargill, Syngenta, Nestlé and Wal-Mart - are increasingly exerting their control over the food system. To compete in the global market place, they are seeking to reduce costs even further and capture greater market share. Thus the increasing trend is for corporations to merge operations - the process of globalisation is concentrating

trade rather than opening-up markets. This has important implications for food security (non-food cash crops are grown on land that could be used for growing food).^{43,44,45,46,47,48}

- In 1998, the top ten agro-chemical companies controlled about 80% of a \$32 billion global market. The largest now are Syngenta, Monsanto, Aventis (recently purchased by Bayer) and DuPont.
- Some 80% of world grain is distributed by just two companies, Cargill and Archer Daniel Midland.
- Five corporations control about 75% of the banana trade; Chiquita, Dole Food, Del Monte, Fyffes and Noboa.
- Three corporations control 83% of the cocoa trade.
- Three corporations control 85% of the tea trade.
- Five corporations are responsible for 70% of tobacco production.

In 1988, the value of mergers and acquisitions in the biotechnology sector was \$9.3 billion. By 1998, mergers and acquisitions reached \$172 billion. There have been a number of recent mergers between agro-chemical companies and between agro-chemical and seed companies. The most notable examples are between ArgEvo and Rhone-Poulenc to form Aventis; Novartis and AstraZeneca to create Syngenta; and between DuPont and Pioneer Hi-Breed.

What's being proposed at the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference?

Agriculture and food proved to be some of the most contentious issues of the Uruguay Round. They are already part of the WTO's 'built-in' agenda, which means they will be negotiated at and after the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference, whether there is a new round or not.

There is little doubt that agriculture and food will once again be at the heart of discussions at the 4th WTO Ministerial. The EU is pushing hard for a limited negotiating position on agriculture in an attempt to protect its farming sector. To this end, it believes that the mandate contained in Article 20 of the AOA (i.e. a restricted trade liberalisation agenda that should also include non-trade issues) provides an adequate basis for ongoing agricultural negotiations. Supporters of this position are Japan, South Korea, Norway and Switzerland. However, the pro-liberalisation camp - particularly the Cairns Group - argue that Article 20 needs to be broadened so as to achieve more substantial reductions in subsidies and vastly improved market access.

Thus, the two main opposing camps - the Cairns Group on the one hand and the EU plus supporters on the other (with the US somewhere in the middle) - remain polarised. A further issue is that the EU continues to push for a comprehensive round of negotiations (to play off concessions in agriculture against services, investment, procurement or competition etc) whilst many developing countries will not countenance such a round unless implementation issues are prioritised. As Seattle demonstrated, these positions may prove to be intractable.

The Cairns Group, in fact, is slowly moving in favour of a new round because this would provide a timetable for negotiations - including agriculture - to be completed. Currently the on-going negotiations for agriculture in the built-in agenda do not have a timetable and thus would be of potential benefit to members who could delay negotiations if they were not satisfied with the way that the talks were proceeding.

Country Positions

The US

The US wants to eliminate export subsidies, simplify the rules covering domestic support and establish a ceiling on trade-distorting subsidies, and lower tariffs for market access.

Contrary to Seattle, it is noticeable that the US has been remarkably silent on the issues of biotechnology and GMOs in the run up to the 4th Ministerial (no formal positions on the issue have been published). However, the US is on record as believing that the WTO should address biotechnology more directly. Also, together with Canada (a Cairns Group member), the US opposes the labelling of GM foods, arguing that they are substantially equivalent to traditional foodstuffs (in other words the US considers GM food and non-GM food to be like products). US food makers for

example oppose the use of mandatory labelling, claiming that this would mislead customers into believing that GM food is less safe. The US Food and Drug Administration has long believed that GM foods are “‘*substantially equivalent*’ to conventional foods, implying that no special safety testing or review is required before they enter the market.”⁴⁹

However, the EU, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries all have GM labelling requirements. But the Centre for International Environment Law has argued that labelling of GM foods would be compatible with WTO rules since GM and non-GM foods are in fact dissimilar (the traditional WTO test for 'like products' include consumer tastes and habits, physical characteristics and the products' properties, nature and qualities.)⁵⁰ This could be one of the reasons why the issue has not been targeted more directly by the US and other large GM exporting nations. Another reason is that the US and the EU probably do not want to provoke any major disagreements prior to the 4th WTO Ministerial Conference in light of the fiasco that surrounded negotiations at Seattle. This is despite the fact that the European Commission has recently announced a more comprehensive European GM labelling scheme which has infuriated the US (who believe that the proposals are not compatible with the WTO and may ultimately lead to a trade dispute).

Some believe that the US may attempt to get biotechnology into the renegotiation of the AOA. They could stay silent on the issue until close to the Ministerial and then ‘ambush’ the negotiations as they did with the proposal for a biotechnology working group in the run up to Seattle.

The US has also stated previously that they require full SPS compliance and that they are keen not to open up the SPS Agreement. In this way they hope to preserve the ‘science-based’ focus of the Agreement and limit further application of the precautionary principle (precisely the opposite of the EU’s position, as outlined below). However, FOE and other non-governmental organisations interpret Article 5.7 in the SPS Agreement differently. They have been advised that there is a good, clear legal basis for a moratorium on the trade in certain GM seeds under this Article of the SPS Agreement.

The European Union

Under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the EU has one of the most heavily protected markets and subsidised production systems in the world. The EU’s negotiating position at the WTO on agriculture will be determined by ongoing reforms of the CAP. The EU has tabled a number of proposals to the renegotiation of the AOA which would, in effect, maintain a restricted trade liberalisation agenda. The EU proposes a reduction in price support (but retain the Blue Box) and increased market access for all members. The EU is more reluctant to discuss export subsidies unless other aspects are covered, such as export credits, food aid and state trading enterprises. Overall, the EU believes that the mandate contained in Article 20 of the AOA (that trade negotiations should also include non-trade issues) provides an adequate basis for ongoing agricultural negotiations (see also the introduction to this section).⁵¹

The EU has not revealed any formal negotiating position on biotechnology. Again, it would argue for the concept of multi-functionality of agriculture which justifies domestic government support on environmental and social grounds and for non-trade reasons (to address such issues as animal welfare, food safety, food quality and consumer concerns, for example). The EU believes these issues should be considered in the appropriate agreements, notably the SPS and TBT. However, it wants clarification and if necessary strengthening of the SPS, so that the precautionary principle can be used for food safety. To this end, the EU has also proposed the inclusion of environmental issues in the WTO that should embrace the precautionary principle to justify trade bans on health grounds.

Friends of Multifunctionality - Japan, South Korea, Norway and Switzerland

These countries roughly support the same position as the EU. Again, they have heavily protected agricultural markets and wish to maintain the Blue and Green Boxes. Although in principle they are not opposed to further trade liberalisation, they each support the concept of multi-functionality of agriculture.

For Japan and South Korea, they are keen to protect their small rice farmers. They suggest that domestic agriculture plays an important role in assuring food security and that greater emphasis should be placed by countries on their own food policies rather than dependent on exporting countries and large corporations.

The Cairns Group

The Group is a collection of developed and developing agricultural exporting countries that favour further trade liberalisation. They are Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Fiji, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Paraguay, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay.

In response to the EU's position, the Cairns Group argues that Article 20 needs to be broadened "*with a view to achieving free and fair trade in agricultural products*".⁵² In particular, they call for the elimination of all trade distorting subsidies and target the EU's support system. They also call for vastly improved market access opportunities for agricultural products for all WTO members. The Group has also made overtures regarding more meaningful provisions under special and differential treatment to address developing countries' food security concerns.

Other developing countries (particularly LDCs and NFIDCs)

It is difficult to generalise from such a diverse group of countries but in the main they support:

- 2 the elimination or the substantial reduction of trade distorting subsidies (both domestic and export);
- 2 the importance of food security and the need to address non-trade concerns;
- 2 the need to address the issue of rural livelihoods (which is not covered by the AOA);
- 2 the need to recognise the differences in agricultural practices in developed and developing nations (again which is not taken into account by the AOA);
- 2 the 'Development Box'.

For example, many developing countries - as demonstrated by the joint proposals made by Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Kenya, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Zimbabwe - have called for the total elimination of all forms of export subsidies and a prohibition on dumping.

In addition, the concept of a 'Development Box' (i.e. along the same lines as the Green and Blue Boxes) has been proposed and supported by Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Haiti, Nicaragua, Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe. This would be designed to assist developing countries achieve objectives related to food security, rural development and poverty alleviation.⁵³

Overall, developing countries have argued that they have witnessed few if any benefits from trade liberalisation and have therefore called for the 'built-in agenda' to review and focus on the implementation of existing agreements before any more substantive talks in a new round.

Corporate positions

Most of the corporate influence appears to be emanating from the US. In the past, this has been particularly true in relation to biotechnology although they have been noticeably quieter in the run up to 4th WTO Ministerial Conference. EU companies probably feel that the best opportunities for advancing biotechnology and GM foods in the global trade system lie with the backing, influence and momentum of the US government.

In the US, the private sector plays a pivotal role in trade negotiations through the mechanism of advisory committees. At one level is the Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations (ACTPN), appointed by the President. The committee has about 35 members mostly from representative elements of the US economy with international trade interests. Its mandate is to provide overall policy guidance on trade issues. This committee has the ear of the President and the former chief executive of Monsanto, Bob Shapiro (now non-executive chair of Monsanto's parent company, Pharmacia), sits on this committee.⁵⁴ Not that the new US President requires input from ACTPN regarding the importance of agriculture and biotechnology to the US economy. At least four of his top advisors and cabinet ministers have previous ties to these sectors, from Monsanto to Dole Foods.⁵⁵

At the next level are the policy advisory committees to the USTR in specific areas, of which agriculture is one. All these committees advise the highest positions in the USTR including Robert Zoellick, the US Trade Representative. The position of the US Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA) is indicative of the many corporate groupings that are

attempting to influence government policy. The GMA is the world's largest association of food product companies with annual US sales of more than \$450 billion. It includes companies like Chiquita, Nestlé, Monsanto, Philip Morris and Unilever. The GMA's primary objective is to significantly improve market access through further reductions in tariffs. The GMA has adopted a familiar stance (that first appeared at Seattle) to ensure that the integrity of the science-based SPS Agreement is left untouched. The Agreement should not be reopened or renegotiated "*to ensure that SPS measures are not used as disguised trade barriers.*"⁵⁶ The US biotechnology industry has also previously argued the same case - to ensure that rules facilitate trade in biotechnology products, and that the US guards against weakening of 'scientific provisions' in favour of regulations based on consumer concerns.⁵⁷

What impact will further negotiations have on food, people and the environment?

Agriculture has many aspects unrelated to trade including food sovereignty, food security, food safety, employment, the environment and culture. Yet, by bringing agriculture into the World Trade Organisation during the Uruguay Round, governments have allowed trade concerns to prevail over these other key aspects of agriculture.

WTO negotiated agreements and rules pertaining to farming and food have a wide variety of negative impacts. The principal culprits are the Agreements on Agriculture, TRIPs, TBT and SPS. Together, these Agreements favour agribusiness, large farms and the developed world in general. They have a negative impact on food production in developing countries (particularly net food importers and least developed countries), the environment, consumers, the poor, small-scale farmers and those employed in the sector, notably women. A number of issues are worth stressing here.

Food security

Further negotiations under the Agreement on Agriculture are already underway. One of the main focal points will be the use of both production and export subsidies to support agriculture. Such negotiations are likely to have a direct bearing on food security in Southern countries, where small-scale farmers are often unable to compete with cheap imported food from the North that is dumped in their markets. However, it can also be predicted with confidence that any further liberalisation will also and again be regressive between and within countries, with the gains accruing to the more wealthy. Reductions of EU and other OECD subsidies will potentially benefit large agricultural exporters within middle-income developing countries (such as Brazil, Thailand and Argentina).⁵⁸ The losers are still likely to be subsistence farmers, small farms and the mainly low-income food importing developing countries.

It is also possible that some countries - notably the US - will again attempt to extend the TRIPs Agreement to cover full life-form patenting. This would have serious consequences for food security and farming world-wide. Developing countries, aware of the potential impacts of such a move, argue that life-form patenting should be removed from the TRIPs Agreement.

Food safety

Europe has been beset by a number of high profile food safety concerns and European consumers are insisting that a precautionary approach be adopted. However, food safety issues and concerns are being marginalised by the WTO in the interest of free trade. In particular, the WTO's ruling against the European ban on imports of hormone-treated beef severely limits the application of the precautionary principle under the SPS Agreement. It therefore seems reasonable to expect governments participating in WTO negotiations to find themselves under considerable pressure to move further in this direction.

The environment and rural communities

The current trade system promotes fossil fuel- and chemical-dependent farming. Friends of the Earth International believes that further WTO negotiations on agriculture are highly likely to undermine rural communities further, creating serious social problems and exerting additional pressure on the environment.

Conclusions and recommendations

Friends of the Earth International (FOEI) is particularly concerned that any intergovernmental negotiations or agreements relating to agriculture need to promote food sovereignty, sustainable agricultural practices and sustainable livelihoods and contribute to improving the quality of life in rural communities. Furthermore, small producers have a right to resources and to control the means of sustenance and all people have a right to safe and sufficient supplies of food and water. Given the range of concerns outlined above, FOEI is therefore calling on governments meeting at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference, and elsewhere, to remove food and agriculture from the WTO through the dismantling of the AOA and the removal or amendment of relevant clauses in other agreements (TRIPS, SPS, TBT, GATS and SCM) so as to ensure the full exclusion of food and agriculture. Instead of focusing primarily on trade, an alternative and enforceable framework for multilateral rules should be based on peoples' food sovereignty, food security and food safety. In order to institute these changes - and these changes are outlined in more detail in the accompanying briefing *Peoples' Food Sovereignty: Part 2 - a New Multilateral Framework for Food and Agriculture* - governments should (these changes are listed in chronological order):

- Eliminate all export subsidies immediately (subsidies, credits, guarantees etc) from developed countries and stop the dumping of developed country agricultural products into other markets, particularly developing countries.
- Permit developing countries to suspend the implementation of their market access commitments under the Agreement on Agriculture.
- Agree not to use the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism to challenge national regulatory measures intended to enhance food security and promote domestic food production and agricultural development.
- Halt on-going agriculture trade liberalisation negotiations within the Agreement on Agriculture.
- Set up in the United Nations, as early as possible, but before the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002, a UN Commission on Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security (UNCSAFS). One of the roles of the Commission would be to establish the modalities of a legally binding treaty on the sustainable production of and trade in agriculture and food. The Commission would include both governmental and NGO stakeholders.
- Agree that the UNCSAFS, once established, should immediately undertake a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the implementation of the Agreement on Agriculture, other WTO agreements such as TRIPs and GATS, as well as all other international agreements and institutions that promote agricultural trade 'liberalisation' (i.e. NAFTA, the World Bank and IMF, bilateral agricultural trade agreements).
- Provide a 'sunset' clause or expiration date for the Agreement on Agriculture to coincide with the start of the effectivity of the proposed new treaty for food and agriculture below, and removing or amending the relevant clauses in other WTO agreements so as to ensure the full exclusion of food and agriculture.
- Mandate UNCSAFS to initiate new negotiations, starting in the upcoming WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002, to establish a new and enforceable multilateral treaty for food and agriculture, intended to bring about food sovereignty, security, safety, and sustainability, under the auspices of a reformed and strengthened United Nations that will take into consideration the results of the assessment referred to above.
- Conclude the negotiations for such a treaty, and the treaty made effective, by 2006. Once effective, this new treaty should provide the framework for regulating global trade in food and agriculture in lieu of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.

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Published by Friends of the Earth International
 PO Box 19199, 1000 GD Amsterdam,
 The Netherlands
 E-mail: foei@foei.org
 Website: www.foei.org
 November 2001



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the Earth
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