

Panel discussion at WTO conference focuses on non-tariff trade barriers for fruit and vegetables

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) organised a three-day [conference on Aid for Trade](#) last week in Geneva. One of the panels discussed the effective implementation of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures to facilitate trade. Border authorities responsible for SPS requirements and some international standards setting bodies have expressed concerns that the [WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement](#) (yet to enter into force) could erode their ability to protect animal, plant and human health from risks arising from pests and diseases associated with the importation of food and plant products.

Panellists insisted that trade and plant and animal health are not in conflict but complement each other. However, international SPS standards must be ratified and applied by all governments to enable better trade of agricultural products. This means in particular that rules must focus on risk and be based on science.

Speakers highlighted several important components which can facilitate trade. Firstly, the implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreements should lead governments to streamline their border procedures, for example by introducing Single National Windows which allow traders to lodge all the trade-related information through a single website. The EU is currently [putting this in place](#) and 95 other countries have already established Single National Windows. Secondly, speakers highlighted that WTO members should combine regular border controls with phytosanitary border inspections to speed up and facilitate trade. The [electronic database](#) currently developed by the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) should be a great help in this regard. The transport company Maersk also used the opportunity of the conference to call for [faster electronic customs procedures](#) for perishable products.

Beside the discussion on SPS measures, many other panels took place during the WTO's Aid for Trade conference. The list of panel discussions can be found [here](#), and many of them have published the audio recordings of the discussion.

At the occasion of the conference, several videos and reports were published, including the following:

- A short film of the WTO's Standards and Trade Development Facility called [Safe Trade Solutions](#) which focuses on fruit & vegetable trade
- A [business survey](#) by the International Trade Center on non-tariff measures for small and medium-sized companies in different developing countries which notes that 58% of all non-tariff measures are found at home
- A report by WTO and OECD called [Aid for Trade at a Glance 2015](#) which resumes the trade situation today