



## CONCEPT NOTE

### Background and rationale

The transformation of agricultural markets as a result of political and economic transition in the post-Soviet countries was accompanied by the process of globalization and deepening trade integration both within the region and with external trade partners. The countries are often engaged in multiple trade negotiation processes at the same time, each with their own challenges and benefits. Many in the European and Central Asian countries joined the WTO which helped enhance their participation in global agricultural trade, and the region plays an increasingly important role as a supplier of agricultural commodities to international markets.

However, in general, the capacities of in Europe and Central Asia to engage effectively in trade negotiation processes and to implement trade agreements are constrained. The region's governments have limited capacity to address the concerns that arise during the implementation of trade agreements, determine the implications of national trade policy reforms for agricultural support programs, establish an effective inter-governmental coordination mechanism for the implementation and engage the private sector in the process of trade policy reform. Poor understanding of international trade rules and of the relationship between trade policy and agricultural development issues prevents the countries from maximizing the gains from expanding trade. The countries often lack the resources and institutional capacities to undertake the reforms needed to fulfil their trade obligations and implement measures that would allow the agricultural sector taking greater advantage of trade opportunities.

Continuous training of officials and other stakeholders in international rules and procedures for agricultural trade and assistance in improving regulatory frameworks in areas that affect trade (sanitary and phytosanitary standards; trade facilitation; market information etc.) are needed, together with follow-up support, in order for the countries to comply with their international commitments and to allow them to use effectively the available mechanisms to defend their countries' trade interests. This requires strengthening capacities of national experts and institutions, in particular for training and advisory services on trade-related issues to agricultural sector stakeholders.

The Agricultural Trade Expert Network in Europe and Central Asia is intended to bring together experts who conduct research, carry out training programs and advise governments and private sector on issues related to agricultural trade and trade policy, including regional and multilateral trade agreements. The core business of the network will be to facilitate generation and exchange of knowledge and to ensure that appropriate capacity development solutions on issues related to agricultural trade in the CIS region are identified and applied.

## **Objectives**

- Provide a neutral and independent platform for knowledge and experience exchange on agricultural trade issues affecting European and Central Asian countries;
- Enhance the quality and relevance of agricultural trade research and strengthen collaboration among experts for analysis, capacity development and other initiatives in the European and Central Asian region;
- Strengthen the capacities to provide technical advice and policy recommendations to governments and the private sector.
- Improve communication and information sharing on trade policy issues with the wider community

## **Activities**

- Organization of the online and on-site workshops, training seminars and discussions on agricultural trade policies
- Preparation and dissemination of relevant publications and data
- Technical assistance to trainers in preparing curriculums, adapting or developing training programmes including Training of Trainers guidelines for them to engage in adapting/delivering training
- Facilitation of exchanges and study tours among researchers and analysts from different European and Central Asian countries
- Organization of annual meetings/conferences of the network
- Facilitation of public-private dialogue on agricultural trade policy issues in European and Central Asian countries

## **Participants and main functions**

Main participants:

- *Academia and independent experts:* Research centers, universities and other research and teaching institutions and independent experts

Activities: Research, knowledge dissemination and advisory services

Other participants:

- *Government*: Ministries of agriculture, economy, trade, among others and regional bodies

Activities: Validate demand for knowledge/training/advisory services, policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and financial support to the network

- *Private sector*: Agri-food companies, producer associations, trading companies, investment companies, banks, law and consulting firms

Activities: Validate demand for knowledge/training/ advisory services, knowledge sharing and financial support to the network

- *Civil society*: NGOs involved in agricultural development and trade

Activities: Dialogue, technical assistance, knowledge dissemination

## Potential partners

- WTO Secretariat
- International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)
- **International Agricultural Trade Research Consortium (IATRC)**
- FAO-supported networks such as Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) and EastAgri
- Leibniz Institute of Agricultural Development in Transition Economies (IAMO)
- Other UN agencies such as UNCTAD and UNDP

## Outcomes

- A consolidated expert community actively involved in addressing the challenges associated with promotion of agricultural trade in the European and Central Asian countries.
- Improved quality of agricultural trade policy research and advisory services to governments on trade agreements and agricultural trade policy
- Private sector and civil society more informed about the implications of trade policy changes on agriculture and engaged more effectively in dialogue with governments on agricultural trade issues

## The approach to network creation

As part of its Regional Initiative on Agri-Food Trade and Regional Integration, FAO will establish a neutral platform for the dialogue among network participants, acting as a facilitator and providing organizational support to carrying out the core activities of the network. FAO's Trade and Markets Division, jointly with the Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, will act as a catalyst for the creation and promotion of the network, serving as a Secretariat for the network in the initial stages of its development. It will also provide targeted technical assistance needed for the delivery of the network's work program and assist with resource mobilization. This initiative will build upon the ongoing FAO work in the area of capacity development for trade in the region.

As the first step, FAO will conduct a selection process for the Network members using criteria such as:

- job profile and experience
- existing program of work related to capacity development or providing expert advice in the area of agricultural trade and
- availability and readiness to develop, apply and transfer new knowledge and skills.

The process will involve identification of the target audience, collecting information about the candidates from the target audience using a Participant Application Form and interviewing the short-listed candidates via Skype or phone. This procedure will also serve to nominate the board of ATnet trustees.

At the expert network's first meeting, economists and legal experts from Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia discussed their activities and drafted a collective work plan for 2015-2016. Discussions focused on identifying the existing difficulties in development and dissemination of relevant analytical materials on such key topics as WTO accession commitments and their implications for agriculture, as well as possible solutions and ideas for collaboration at the regional level. In addition, during the event was established the Coordinating Committee of the Expert Network.

### **FAO's role in trade**

FAO supports countries' effective engagement in the formulation of trade agreements that are conducive to improved food security by strengthening evidence on the implications of changes in trade policies, providing capacity development in the use of this evidence, and facilitating neutral dialogue away from the negotiating table. FAO also supports countries in the design and implementation of trade policies supportive to enhanced food security and agricultural development.

The FAO ***Regional Initiative on Agri-Food Trade and Regional Integration*** (<http://www.fao.org/europe/ri2/en/>) focuses on strengthening national and regional capacities in Europe and Central Asia to deal effectively with the challenges posed by greater trade integration. It does this by developing better evidence on trade implications, improving the capacity of the countries to use this evidence, facilitating neutral forums and dialogues on trade agreements, and supporting design and implementation of appropriate trade policy at country level. As part of the Initiative, FAO conducted two rounds of the e-learning course “WTO accession and its implications for the agricultural sector in CIS countries. Over 200 experts from the region participated in the course.

## **Contacts**

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## **Online resources:**

FAO Trade:

<http://www.fao.org/trade/en>

FAO Trade and Markets Division:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est>

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia:

<http://www.fao.org/europe/en>

FAO-UNITAR online training course “WTO Accession and Implications for Agriculture in CIS Countries”

<http://www.unitar.org/unfao/>

FAO Regional Training Workshop for CIS countries: WTO accession and agricultural policy, 12 – 13 November 2013, Kiev, Ukraine

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-events-new/cis/en/>

FAO Training Workshop: WTO commitments and support to Russian agriculture: issues and possible solutions, Kazan, 30-31 January 2013:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-events-new/wtomeeting/en/>

FAO Training Workshop: Support to Russian agriculture in the context of WTO membership: Issues and possible solutions, 20 Nov 2013 - 21 Nov 2013, Belgorod, Russia:

<http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-events-new/wto-nov2013/en>

Brink, L. 2014. Countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States – Agricultural Policy Issues in the Context of the World Trade Organization. FAO, Rome.

<http://www.fao.org/3/a-i3883e.pdf>