

Second International Conference on Nutrition
Statement of WTO Deputy Director-General David Shark
Rome, Nov 19 -21

I am happy to be here today on behalf of the World Trade Organization as the members of the WTO take the issue of nutrition very seriously. Malnutrition in its various forms, including hunger and obesity, is a tremendous challenge that affects us all. So at the outset let me commend the adoption of the Rome Declaration and Framework for Action by this Conference.

I should start by acknowledging that, at least in the abstract, trade cannot be assumed to be good or bad for nutrition. Food that is traded can be nutritious or not so nutritious. Much the same can be said for domestically produced food. However, it is clear that trade rules and policies can play a positive role in addressing nutrition objectives, as you have recognized in the Framework for Action.

Countries that have more open trade are associated with faster economic growth and higher incomes, and open trade is an important contributor to development. The opportunities that come with freer trade and rising incomes help in the fight against poverty and the many curses that come with poverty, including hunger and malnutrition.

In agriculture, more open markets means that food can be produced where it takes the least resources. This allows food to flow from areas in surplus to those in deficit and can reduce the cost of food – a point of particular importance to those whose nutrition problems stem from poverty. WTO disciplines in agriculture aim to promote trade with fewer distortions and to restrain government intervention and subsidies that

have negative spill-overs which can be particularly harmful to the poor. Increased specialization and trade also mean that more diverse foods, and the diversity of nutrients that they can offer, are available.

But what about policies aimed at public health problems arising from unhealthy food? My message here is a simple one. The WTO's trade rules provide substantial policy space for governments to ensure that food is safe and meets nutrition policy objectives. Or put another way trade does not trump health. The caveat is that government intervention should avoid unnecessary discrimination and should not be unnecessarily trade-restrictive.

WTO rules also promote the use of international standards as a basis for regulation - when appropriate and effective. These same rules also promote better standard-development practices, including more transparency, openness and inclusiveness. This helps to ensure that policy makers have the information they need to deal with the complex choices that they face. Transparency also allows regulators, consumers, producers and other interested parties to engage. It promotes cooperation between countries and helps avoid unnecessary friction.

Malnutrition is a complex issue and trade policy is clearly a complement rather than a substitute for sound nutrition policies. Better implementation of WTO rules will help world food markets function better. WTO Members are working to improve these rules, though the road is not always an easy one.

Let me conclude here by emphasizing the critical importance of multilateral cooperation on nutrition. We need to make progress as coherently and efficiently as possible in order to produce a better set of

rules nationally, regionally and internationally. This is why this international conference is of such great importance.

I congratulate you again for the work that you are doing here, and for the two outcome documents of ICN2. The WTO remains more than ever fully committed to participate in and to contribute to this multilateral cooperation.

Thank you.
