



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Baucus Meets with WTO Agriculture Chairman Stuart Harbinson *Senator Works to Open Doors for Increased Agricultural Trade Opportunities*

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus today met with Stuart Harbinson, Chairman of the Agriculture Committee of the World Trade Organization (WTO), to emphasize the importance of greater opportunities for U.S. farmers and ranchers.

The meeting was part of a preparatory visit to Washington by Chairman Harbinson, in anticipation of the upcoming WTO Ministerial, to be held in Cancun, Mexico from September 10-14, 2003.

"America's farmers and ranchers are among the most efficient and productive in the world," Baucus told Mr. Harbinson today. "Yet, too often they are locked out of markets because of unfair trading practices in other countries. Other producers - particularly those in Europe - enjoy subsidies and supports several times higher than those in America.

"We cannot allow these unfair advantages to remain in place. The next WTO agreement must bring expand opportunities for our agriculture producers. It is crucial for the Doha round to eliminate the disparities in domestic support and market protection that exist among different countries, so that agriculture producers around the world can compete on a level playing field."

Reform of global agriculture markets is a top priority of the current round of WTO negotiations, known as the Doha Development Agenda. Members were scheduled to agree on a modalities text no later than March 31, 2003. However, due to deep divisions -- between, on one hand, the United States and other large agriculture exporting countries and, on the other hand, highly protected markets like the European Union (EU) and Japan -- negotiators missed that deadline, and have so far been unable to reach agreement even on this initial text.

In an effort to spark progress, Chairman Harbinson submitted a proposal that attempts to address the wide variety of concerns among the members. However, many members, including both the United States and the European Union, have criticized his proposal. U.S. negotiators argue the Harbinson draft does not go far enough to bring down the relatively high subsidies and tariffs that exist in other countries, particularly in Europe. European negotiators say his proposal goes too far.

In September, Senator Baucus will travel to Cancun to attend the WTO Ministerial meeting, and will continue to push for strengthened prospects for U.S. farmers and ranchers.

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