



Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

**SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY DECLARATION WORK PROGRAMME:
RESPONDING TO MODERN SPS CHALLENGES**

**REPORT ON THE MC12 SPS DECLARATION WORK PROGRAMME
ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON 26 JUNE 2024**

1. The Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee) undertook a work programme to examine challenges in the implementation of the SPS Agreement and the mechanisms available to address them, and the impacts of emerging challenges on the application of the SPS Agreement, as instructed by Ministers in the SPS Declaration adopted at the Twelfth Ministerial Conference ([WT/MIN\(22\)/27](#)).¹ In doing so, the SPS Committee explored the following topics:

- How to facilitate global food security and more sustainable food systems, including through sustainable growth and innovation in agricultural production and international trade, and through the use of international standards, guidelines, and recommendations developed by the Codex Alimentarius Commission (Codex), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) as the basis of harmonized SPS measures to protect human, animal or plant life or health.
- How to support basing SPS measures on scientific evidence and principles, including where international standards, guidelines, or recommendations do not exist or are not appropriate; and how to promote the use by Members of principles employed by the international standard setting bodies for considering scientific uncertainty in risk analysis.
- How to enhance the safe international trade in food, animals and plants and products thereof through the adaptation of SPS measures to regional conditions, including pest- or disease-free areas and areas of low pest or disease prevalence which can strengthen Members' ability to protect plant and animal life or health through efforts to limit the spread of pests such as the Mediterranean fruit fly, diseases such as African swine fever, disease-carrying organisms, or disease-causing organisms.
- How to encourage cooperation with observer organizations that support the work of the SPS Committee and the international standard setting bodies through technical exchanges and assistance in the context of this work programme.
- How to increase participation of and support for the special needs of developing and least developed country Members in the development and application of SPS measures; and in particular, to increase awareness of and sensitivity to the impacts of SPS measures on the export possibilities of such Members.

2. The Committee consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including the international standard setting bodies, other SPS Committee observer organizations, Members' competent authorities, agricultural producers, food manufacturers and traders, and the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), amongst others. The process benefitted from Members' positive engagement in a constructive dialogue with these stakeholders and with each other. The discussions covered new opportunities and emerging challenges for international trade in food, animals and plants, including but not limited to expanding global populations; increased pace of innovation in tools and technologies; climate change and increasing environmental challenges; growing importance of sustainable agricultural practices and production systems, including their contribution to addressing climate change and biodiversity conservation; shifting pressures due to the spread of pests and diseases, increasing threat of antimicrobial resistance, as well as emerging infectious diseases linked

¹ A factual summary of the Work Programme is contained in document [G/SPS/GEN/2134/Rev.3](#).

with the human-animal-environment interface; and continued application of SPS measures that would constitute a disguised restriction on international trade.

3. Based on its discussions, the Committee presents the following findings:

- a. The SPS Agreement continues to support safe international trade in food, animal and plant products. Aligning SPS measures and procedures with the SPS Agreement, in particular with provisions on the use of international standards, scientific principles and risk assessment as the basis for SPS measures, remains of fundamental importance, including when dealing with emerging challenges and opportunities.
- b. Noting the importance of sustainable and resilient food systems, the Committee acknowledges the particular relevance of science, research and innovation as a means to address SPS issues and sustainably increase production to feed a growing world population, while securing the livelihood of farmers and addressing emerging challenges, including those in paragraph 2. In this regard, the Committee recognizes that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to improving the sustainability of food and agricultural systems across WTO Members, taking into account the differences in local and regional conditions and the different views of Members pertaining to sustainable and resilient food systems.
- c. The Committee recognizes that scientific principles, scientific evidence and risk assessment are the basis of SPS measures. In cases where scientific uncertainty exists, Members shall comply with the provisions of the SPS Agreement. Codex, WOH and IPPC guidance can support Members in addressing scientific uncertainty in risk analysis, including the recommendation that the approach and method taken by Members to address uncertainty be clearly documented and communicated in a transparent manner.
- d. Adaptation of SPS measures to regional conditions, including recognition of pest- or disease-free areas and areas of low pest or disease prevalence, based on WOH and IPPC guidance and Committee guidelines in [G/SPS/48](#), are an important means by which to facilitate safe trade and can help avoid unnecessary trade restrictions. Capacity building can assist in bringing domestic regulatory frameworks in line with relevant international guidance.
- e. The Committee values its exchanges with the international standard setting bodies Codex, WOH and IPPC in the SPS Committee, and invites them to continue providing regular updates on their work, in particular on updated and forthcoming standards, guidelines and recommendations relating to emerging challenges and opportunities.
- f. The Committee also values the work of all other SPS Committee observer organizations and invites the Secretariat and Members to engage with these organizations to foster enhanced cooperation, strengthen the connection between their work and that of the SPS Committee, and improve practices for information exchange.
- g. Engagement with developing and least developed country Members, including through technical assistance, capacity building and South-South cooperation, is of fundamental importance, both to support implementation of the SPS Agreement and to create, maintain and expand export market opportunities by complying with and establishing SPS import requirements based on international standards, scientific principles and risk assessment. The STDF plays a key role in providing and coordinating assistance in this regard. Ensuring adequate resources for its activities will enable the STDF to continue addressing the growing number of requests for assistance by developing and least developed country Members, including when dealing with emerging challenges and opportunities. Developing and least developed country Members should be actively involved in the design of these technical assistance and cooperation programmes to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.

4. The SPS Committee recommends continuing its targeted discussions and reflections on the implementation of the SPS Agreement in light of emerging challenges and opportunities beyond the finalization of the MC12 SPS Declaration Work Programme, including in the context of the upcoming Sixth Review of the Operation and Implementation of the SPS Agreement and in specific thematic sessions and events, as appropriate, while reaffirming the existing rights and obligations of Members established by the SPS Agreement.

5. The SPS Committee recommends that Ministers accept this report and endorse these findings and recommendations.
