

*Ensuring safe trading without
unnecessary restrictions*

SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES



Did you know?

Agricultural products worth over US\$ 1,765 billion were traded in 2013. WTO rules help to ensure that these products are traded safely and that health protection measures are not used as an excuse for protecting domestic producers.



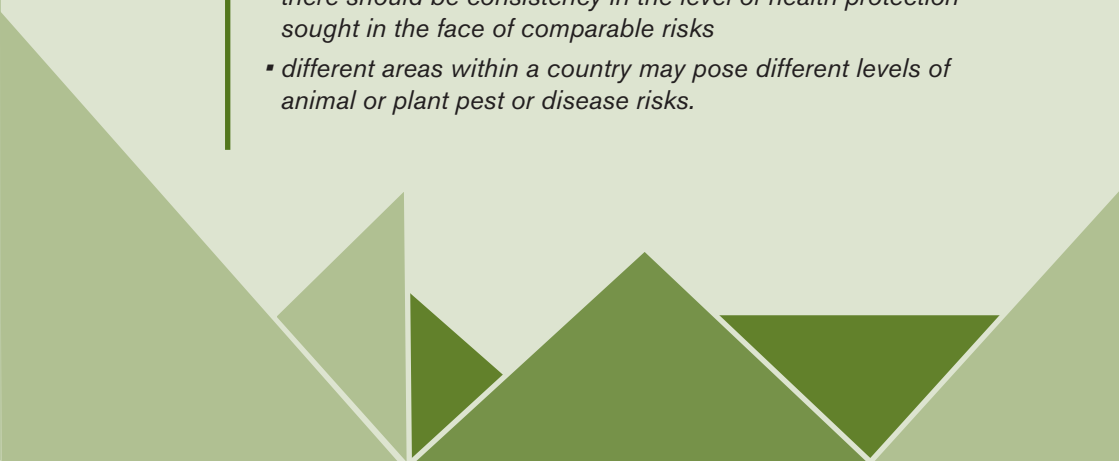
The WTO's Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement

Making sure that food is traded safely and that animal and plant pests or diseases are not spread through trade means that import restrictions are sometimes required. The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) seeks to strike a balance between the right of WTO members to protect health and the need to allow the smooth flow of goods across international borders. The Agreement recognizes the right of WTO members to adopt legitimate measures to protect food safety and animal and plant health while ensuring these measures are not applied in an unnecessary manner for protectionist purposes.

The SPS Agreement encourages WTO members to base their regulations on the health and safety standards developed by the three relevant international expert bodies, namely the Codex Alimentarius Commission (for food safety), the International Plant Protection Convention (for plant health) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (for animal health and animal diseases transmittable to humans). WTO members who want to impose more stringent requirements must be able to justify these measures based on a scientific assessment of health risks.

Other key provisions

The SPS Agreement recognises that:

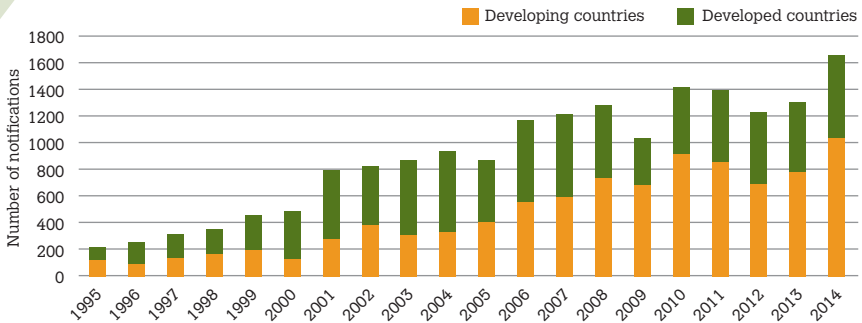
- *different processes or means of production may result in equally safe products*
 - *the least trade-restrictive measures should be used to achieve the desired level of health protection*
 - *there should be consistency in the level of health protection sought in the face of comparable risks*
 - *different areas within a country may pose different levels of animal or plant pest or disease risks.*
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Transparency

To sell a product, the producers and traders must know the health requirements of the market. The SPS Agreement requires WTO members to notify the WTO Secretariat whenever they intend to impose any new or changed requirements that may affect trade. These notifications give trading partners the opportunity to comment on the planned regulations before they are adopted and allow producers to adapt to the new requirements.

Greater transparency in government procedures, including providing the reasons for food safety, animal or plant health measures, means that more information is now available to producers, traders and consumers. By eliminating unnecessary trade barriers, governments allow consumers to benefit from a greater choice of safe foods and from international competition among producers.

Chart 1: SPS notifications by WTO members



18,000

Over the past 20 years, WTO members have submitted nearly 18,000 notifications to the SPS Committee. The share of notifications from developing countries has increased significantly over the years.

SPS Committee

The SPS Committee provides a forum for WTO members to exchange information on all aspects of the implementation of the SPS Agreement. The Committee reviews how countries are complying with the Agreement, discusses issues that may have an impact on trade and works closely with relevant technical organizations. The Committee also allows members to request the assistance of the Chair to help resolve specific trade concerns (STCs) raised by WTO members.

Chart 2: STCs raised in the SPS Committee, 1995-2014

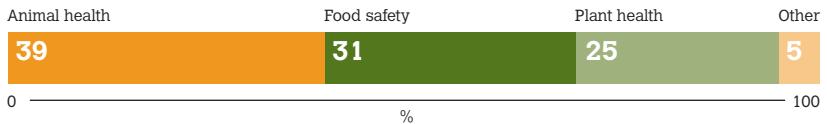
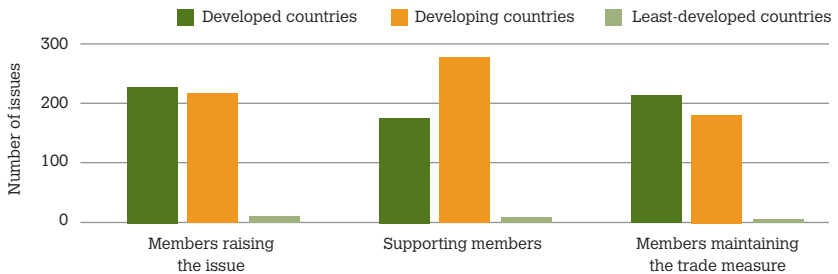


Chart 3: STCs raised by WTO members, 1995-2014



382

Over the past 20 years, WTO members have raised 382 specific trade concerns in the SPS Committee. More than 45 per cent of these were subsequently reported as resolved or partially resolved.

Case study

Resolving a trade concern: Cinnamon exports from Sri Lanka

In 2005 and early 2006, Sri Lanka raised a specific trade concern in the SPS Committee about the European Union's import restrictions on cinnamon exports from Sri Lanka.

The issue related to Sri Lanka's traditional practice of burning sulphur as a way of protecting cinnamon from possible fungi and insects. While this practice does not require direct application of sulphur on the cinnamon, it does leave some residue.

The EU's directive setting maximum residue levels for sulphur dioxide (SO₂) prevented Sri Lanka's cinnamon exports from entering the EU market. In raising the trade concern, Sri Lanka said that there was no international standard for sulphur

levels in cinnamon. Codex Alimentarius Commission was at that time in the process of considering the use of SO₂ as an additive but had not developed maximum permitted residue levels for SO₂ in cinnamon.

Following discussion in the SPS Committee, the Chair drew the matter to the attention of the Codex Commission, which subsequently adopted a standard establishing a maximum residue level for SO₂ in cinnamon. As a result, the EU decided to base its requirements on the Codex standard and by the end of 2006, Sri Lanka reported to the SPS Committee that this issue had been satisfactorily resolved.



Training activities

Over the past 20 years, the WTO Secretariat has organized over 300 training activities to increase WTO members' awareness of their rights and obligations under the SPS Agreement, as well as its implications for national policymaking. This training is provided through national and regional workshops as well as activities held at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva. The WTO has also introduced online training.

To meet the demand for more advanced training, a three-week Advanced Course on the SPS Agreement has been offered since 2005. This provides in-depth training, involving participants developing an "action plan" to address particular SPS needs in their countries. Implementation of the action plans is monitored once the course is over, and participants return to Geneva about eight months later to report on what has been achieved.

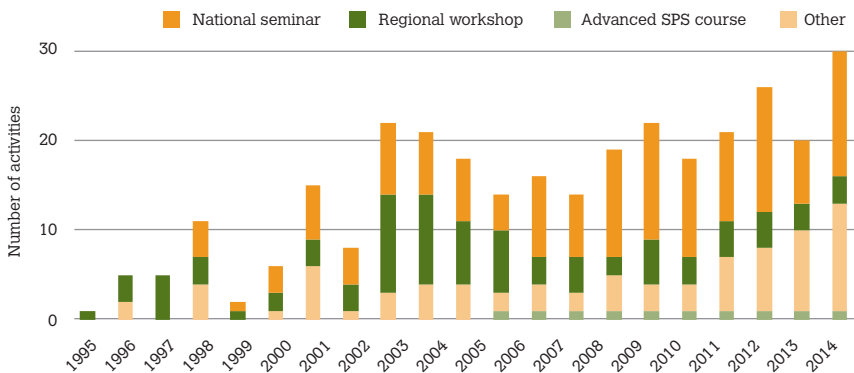
Standards and Trade Development Facility

The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) is a global partnership that supports developing countries in building their capacity to implement international SPS standards, guidelines and recommendations. It provides funding for the development and implementation of projects that promote compliance with international SPS requirements. The STDF was founded by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the World Health Organization, the World Bank and the WTO, which houses the STDF Secretariat and manages the STDF trust fund.

STDF website:

www.standardsfacility.org

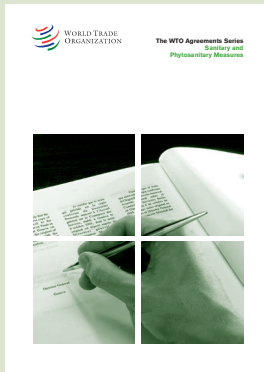
Chart 4: SPS training activities, 1994-2014



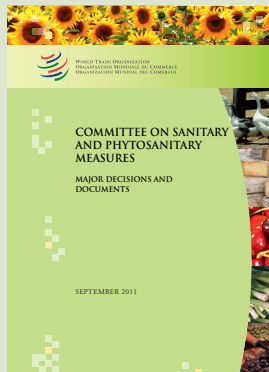
Summary

The SPS Agreement aims to achieve a balance between the right of WTO members to implement legitimate health protection policies and the goal of allowing the smooth flow of goods across international borders without unnecessary restrictions. The SPS Committee provides a forum for the exchange of information and gives WTO members the opportunity to resolve specific trade concerns. Nearly half of the concerns raised in the Committee have subsequently been completely or partially resolved among the members concerned.

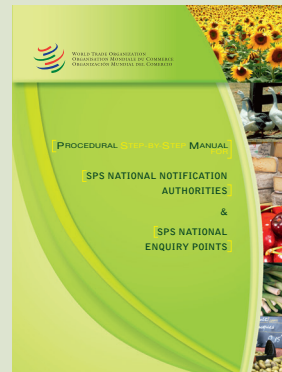
Further information on SPS measures



WTO Agreement Series:
Sanitary & Phytosanitary
measures – 2nd edition



Committee on Sanitary
and Phytosanitary
Measures: Major
Decisions and Documents



Procedural step-by-step
manual for SPS national
notification authorities
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