



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Chairman

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON -- Sen. Max Baucus, chairman of the Committee on Finance, and Sen. Chuck Grassley, ranking member, sent the following letter to Ambassador Zoellick, regarding the WTO Agriculture Negotiations.

September 30, 2002

Honorable Robert Zoellick
United States Trade Representative
Office of the United States Trade Representative
600 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20508

Dear Ambassador Zoellick:

We are writing to express our very strong concern with the European Union's recent announcement at the World Trade Organization agricultural negotiations in Geneva that, unlike the United States and other major trading partners, it has no immediate plans to submit a detailed negotiating proposal, and that progress on "non-trade concerns," such as animal welfare, geographical indications, labeling, and the precautionary principle, must come ahead of other trade concessions and reduction commitments.

We are deeply concerned with this development for two reasons.

First, it signals an indifferent level of engagement in the negotiation process at just the time when WTO members should be vigorously engaged in making the strongest possible effort to bridge our differences and move the talks forward.

Second, most of the "non-trade concerns" advocated by the European Union have been extensively reviewed for at least two years, and have failed to win broad support. For example, the European proposal on animal welfare and trade in agriculture, which was unveiled at the WTO's Special Session of the Committee on Agriculture in June 2000 in Geneva, was barely noted at that meeting, while the United States proposal for comprehensive agricultural trade reform, which was discussed at the same meeting, captured broad notice and support.

Given these facts, and the looming March 31, 2003 interim deadline for establishing agricultural targets and timetables for countries' reduction commitments, the European Union's insistence that "non-trade concerns" must precede reduction commitments undermines our collective ability to achieve meaningful agricultural trade reform in the WTO.

We hope that you will continue to work to keep these negotiations on track. We need to meet the March 31 interim deadline, and successfully conclude the talks on time. We must encourage the most vigorous, positive engagement on the part of our negotiating partners. We urge you to reject any preconditions to negotiating reduction commitments, and any effort to expand the current agenda.

Sincerely,

Max Baucus
Charles Grassley