

WTO: A battle is won... but not the war

The World Trade Organization's negotiations sprint in Geneva at the end of July allowed Canada to preserve, for the moment, its supply management system. The 147 WTO-member countries ratified, in the 11th hour, a framework agreement that provides Canada with some room to maneuver to save its supply management productions.

"But we must not let our guard down, because nothing has been gained yet" said Laurent Pellerin, the spokesman for GO5, Coalition for a Fair Agricultural Model: Supply Management. The next round of negotiations that begins this fall will spell out the details of the framework agreement that has just been reached.

The outcome of the Geneva negotiations is in line with the efforts undertaken by the Coalition. The actions it has conducted over the last few months have undoubtedly spurred the Quebec and Canadian governments' commitment in favour of supply management. Quebec Agriculture Minister, Françoise Gauthier, and the new federal Agriculture Minister, Andrew Mitchell, who were both in attendance in Geneva, were actively involved throughout the negotiations. But the challenge remains formidable, and the federal and provincial governments, as well as the Coalition, will have plenty to do between now and the end of the negotiations.

With the accelerated pace of the agriculture negotiations at the WTO and in the context of the federal election campaign, the Coalition has been intensifying its activities since last March to make the public and political leaders aware of the advantages of supply management and the threats that the negotiations pose for the future of our agricultural model.

From Rimouski to Gatineau, from Granby to Rouyn, personalities lend their support to the GO5

Eight media activities were held in March and April in Granby, Sherbrooke, Trois-Rivières, Rimouski, Joliette, Gatineau, Rouyn and Saguenay. The objective? To inform the public and the media about the benefits of supply management and let them know about the eventual impact of the WTO negotiations on Quebec agriculture.

At these public sessions, opinion leaders such as Roger D., Landry (former president and publisher of La Presse), Janvier Cliche (president of the CSN-Estrie), Jean Tremblay (mayor of Saguenay), Mario Lebeau (Director General of the Corporation de développement économique de Gatineau), Guy Chevrette (president of the Joliette CLD and former cabinet minister and deputy), Bruno Jean (professor at the Université du Québec à Rimouski) and Monseigneur Gérard Drainville (bishop for Amos) declared their support for supply management and enabled the GO5 Coalition to consolidate its positions.

Pierre Marc Johnson, Coalition advisor

The Coalition is now able to lean on the expertise of a former Quebec premier. Pierre Marc Johnson has agreed to serve as the Coalition advisor. A legal-counsel in trade negotiations and environmental law, Mr. Johnson is putting his widespread credibility and his extensive knowledge of international trade and its regulatory aspects at the disposal of the Coalition.

In Mr. Johnson's view, "agriculture is a nerve sector that must not be subjected to the uncertainties linked to a pure and simple market liberalization. Canada does not need to dismantle a fair system that has been proven over the last 30 years, while other countries blithely support their agriculture by paying out substantial subsidies to their farmers."

The Coalition... headlong into the election campaign

On June 7, as the electoral campaign was in full swing, the Coalition conducted a media blitz that brought it from Montreal to Québec and through Yamachiche. The aim was to put questions to the political parties to get them to make a commitment to defend supply management and ensure that it would be intact once the WTO negotiations are over.

"What is unfolding on the world scene could have a direct impact on the future of our agriculture and on our ability to ensure the country's food security. The political parties must, therefore, support a fair agricultural model and make very clear commitments in this regard," declared Laurent Pellerin, while inviting the party leaders and candidates to sign the Declaration of support for maintaining supply management.

In Quebec, Agriculture Minister Françoise Gauthier stated that the Coalition "enables us to defend our interests with the WTO, and it does so for the welfare of our agriculture industry." She added: "It is imperative that the federal government vigorously defend supply management."

On this day, Mr. Pellerin and Mr. Johnson were accompanied by a number of partners, Coalition members and the presidents of the five production sectors under supply management.

Federal party leaders get involved

The leaders of the four major political parties seeking office during the federal election campaign signed the Declaration of support for maintaining supply management, a fair agricultural model. The Coalition was elated by the success of this support

campaign, which made supply management an election issue by prompting the parties to publicly express a commitment. According to the document that they signed, Paul Martin, Gilles Duceppe, Stephen Harper and Jack Layton have pledged that they will personally get involved so that, at the end of the WTO negotiations, producers under supply management can continue to meet the needs of Canadian consumers and obtain all their revenue from the marketplace, based on their costs of production, including a fair return on their labour and capital. Nearly 130 candidates throughout Canada, including 67 in Quebec, also signed the Declaration of support.

Unanimous support from the National Assembly

On June 8, Quebec's National Assembly unanimously adopted a motion of support for supply management. Tabled by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Françoise Gauthier, the motion states that "the National Assembly supports the objectives pursued by the Coalition (...), notably the protection of rural economies and the enduring of Quebec farms."

Join the Coalition on line: it's simple, fast and practical

The GO5 Coalition, which had assembled 10,000 members by last March, currently has more than 16,000 members. That's great, but we need to do better! Each of the Coalition's current members is kindly invited to recruit at least two new members over the next few months.

Signing up is so easy! Refer potential members to the Coalition's web site. They'll be able to register instantly by e-mail at GO5 Coalition for a Fair Agricultural model: Supply Management. Here's the web site: <http://www.go5quebec.ca>.



From left to right: UPA president Laurent Pellerin; Quebec milk producers president Marcel Groleau; Pierre Marc Johnson; Quebec table eggs producers president Serge Lefebvre; Daniel Lamy; Jocelyne Lamy; Quebec poultry producers president Yves Baril; Martin Lamy; Quebec hatching eggs union president Gyslain Loyer; and Roger D. Landry, on the Lamy's farm in Yamachiche, during an "electoral blitz".