

Thailand to work with agricultural fair-trade body ‘The Cairns’

Thailand has vowed to collaborate with 19 of the world's largest agricultural exporters in taking concrete steps towards agricultural reform to secure and sustain global food security, said Thai ambassador and permanent representative to the World Trade Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation, Pimchanok Pitfield.



The commitment appeared in the statement issued by the 43rd Cairns Group Ministerial Meeting, which took place on Sunday in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.

Known as “The Cairns”, the group consists of 20 agricultural fair-trade nations, namely Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Uruguay, Vietnam, and Ukraine.

Together, The Cairns' agricultural exports account for nearly 30% of global agricultural exports.

Pimchanok emphasised that Thailand has committed to working with Cairns members to lead negotiations on short- and long-term agricultural trade issues, with the goal of liberalising global agriculture trade in a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system while bolstering global food security.

The country also expressed its willingness to address the food crisis and support sustainable development initiatives.

The 43rd Cairns statement was presented to the 13th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on Monday, urging nation members worldwide to establish clear guidelines for reforming agricultural trade in the three main practices under WTO principles.

These are: opening the free-trade market, which allows for a gradual reduction in tariffs between member countries; reducing trade-distorting agricultural subsidies; and requiring members to strictly comply with the resolution to cancel export subsidies.

Furthermore, the statement called for concrete action to be taken to prohibit or limit the export of agricultural products in a transparent manner in order to create food security in many countries.

The Cairns statement is consistent with the WTO's commitment to continue gradually implementing trade regulations reviews, particularly in fishing, agriculture, and electronic commerce.

During the WTO's last ministerial meeting, held at its Geneva headquarters in June 2022, trade ministers reached a historic agreement banning harmful fisheries subsidies and agreed to a temporary patent waiver for Covid-19 vaccines.

The recent WTO General Council took place against the backdrop of several economic and political headwinds, including the war in Ukraine, attacks in the Red Sea, inflation, rising food prices, and economic difficulties in Europe and China.

WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala admitted that the meeting was very challenging due to various uncertainties and tensions, making it difficult to draft final agreements, particularly on agriculture.

Recently appointed as vice chairman of The Cairns, Pimchanok pledged to use her one-year term to demonstrate Thailand's role in promoting free and fair international agricultural trade while building alliances with other members and international organisations such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation (OECD) and Development, and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP).

She also intends to promote networking among various external groups, such as farmers, the private sector, and academia.

Founded in August 1986, the Cairns Group's mission is to advocate for genuine free and fair trade in the global agricultural goods market, which will provide real and long-term benefits to developing countries.

In 2023, the group's agricultural exports totaled US\$587.6 billion, accounting for 27% of global market exports. Brazil is the group's top agricultural exporter, worth US\$134.6 billion, followed by Canada (\$66.17 billion), Indonesia (\$51.2 billion), Argentina (\$46.49 billion), and Australia (\$45.31 billion). Thailand is the group's sixth largest exporter, with a total export value of \$41.20 billion.

Source: The Nation Thailand on 26 February 2024

<https://www.nationthailand.com/thailand/general/40035904>