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## France

### Agricultural Situation

## French Reaction to WTO Meeting in Cancùn, Mexico 2003

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**Report Highlights:**

Although France "deeply regrets" the failure of the WTO negotiations in Cancùn, the largest farm organizations commented that no agreement is better than a bad agreement. The first reaction of the French economic press was a fear that the failure would lead to the end of multilateralism and the start of unchecked bilateral and regional agreements. One French daily reported that the failure favored the United States, as no WTO agreement means no reform of the US Farm Bill.

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The French delegation attending the WTO Ministerial conference in Cancun issued a statement on September 14, 2003, that "France deeply regrets" that WTO members could not reach an agreement, but does not believe its failure will jeopardize the Doha Round launched in November 2001. The French delegation said that Europe spoke in one voice during the Cancun conference, supporting African countries asking for concessions on cotton supports and proposing trade concessions for the poorest countries from developed countries and the largest emerging countries. Finally, the French minister for trade François Loos and French Minister of Agriculture Hervé Gaymard said that the proposals made by the President of France in his "initiative for Africa" during the French presidency of the G8 remained valid after Cancun.

In a joint statement, French farm organizations (including farmers unions (FNSEA and JA), French cooperatives (CFCA, CNMCCA and FFCAT), the Chambers of Agriculture (APCA), and the beef, milk, sheep, poultry, wheat, corn, oilseed, sugarbeet growers federations (FNB, FNPLait, FNO, CFA, AGPB, FOP and CGB), all attended the Ministerial in Cancun) said that "no agreement is better than a bad agreement." They added that the conference showed how difficult it was to meet the wide variety of expectations and sensitivities of the 146 member countries in a loosely structured multilateral organization such as the WTO.

Several French daily newspapers saw the failure as calling into question the whole system of multilateral trade negotiations itself. In an article entitled "the twilight of multilateralism," French daily "Le Figaro" characterized the WTO as a "sinking ship," and said that the United States only uses the WTO when it is useful to them, while favoring bilateral agreements. In addition, "Le Figaro" ran a story suggesting that the absence of agreement in Cancun favors the United States, as "they will not have to reform the U.S. Farm Bill." The newspaper also suggested that the sudden decision taken by (US NAFTA partner) Mexico to stop negotiating early, a "lack of [American] public interest in the negotiations" and the early departure of US Congressmen demonstrated that the US was not fully engaged in the negotiations.

The French economic daily, "Les Echos," entitled its editorial "Cancun or the multilateral regression." The editorialist suggested that the countries with the most to gain were the ones who blocked the negotiations, and have now opened the gate "to unchecked bilateral and regional trade agreements." The other French economic daily "La Tribune" compared the failure in Cancun to a sporting event where the teams shoot the referee. According to "La Tribune," having no referee is worse than having a bad referee. The newspaper concluded that protectionism is the final winner of the Cancun failure.