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Nutrition crisis cannot be solved by the WTO

Speech by Hansjörg Walter, SFU President

The coming negotiation days are critical for agriculture. So that we understand each other: As farmers, we believe in multilateralism and we want to achieve a conclusion to the WTO negotiations. But what we do not want is that some powerful agricultural exporters dictate the rules. Clear and just trade rules are needed that do not make our domestic production of food products impossible. Our farmers' unions are fighting the demise of family farms!

Today, we must face the global nutrition crisis and enormous economic and social challenges. More than 850 million people worldwide are starving. Today's nutrition crisis shows clearly: The resources and commodities of this world are limited! It is also evident that food production differs from other types of production. Food is essential for everyone to survive. Even the WTO must take these changes into account.

We all agree that export subsidies distort the prices on the agricultural commodities markets. This was one of the most important reasons why the agricultural dossier was included in the Uruguay Round. At the Conference of Ministers in Hong Kong in December 2005 it was agreed that all types of export subsidies should be abolished, which was supported by us as well.

However, we firmly protest against the current negotiation proposal in the area of market access. The difference in customs structure and the different sensibilities of individual countries are not sufficiently taken into account. The SFU opposes the radical reduction of border protection and the "capping" which calls for a disproportional contribution by the net importers of food products. We demand that sensitive products be treated as such. In the current proposal, exceptions for sensitive products are purchased expensively by extending the customs quota.

Every country is entitled to its own agriculture and the production of food products for its own population. The future of agriculture and its multifunctionality must not be challenged! It is for this reason that the modalities of the WTO must be formulated such that the different agricultural systems in the various countries are taken into consideration. In order to make this evident around the world, the protection of the designation of origin must be extended to additional products apart from wine and liquor.

WTO regulations should contribute to strengthening family farming enterprises the world over. As farmers, we have shown in recent years that we take these challenges seriously, and we have carried out profound reforms. It is high time that our demands are incorporated into the negotiations in order to achieve a balanced result.