EU trade policy digest January–March 2025

Published by AGRINFO on 04 Apr 2025

Recent developments in EU trade policy

European Commission: Negotiations and agreements

Update

AGRINFO summary of progress in EU trade negotiations with low- and middle-income countries, and other policy developments that may impact on trade in agri-food products.

For detail see the AGRINFO Quarterly Trade Digest: EU Trade Policy January–March 2025.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

EU negotiations with low- and middle-income countries

Eastern and Southern African states: The European Commission reported further progress in talks on a new Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union (EU) and Eastern and Southern Africa (Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zimbabwe), with the conclusion of negotiations on various chapters including trade and sustainable development. The intention is to conclude negotiations at the following (16th) round of negotiations (date not yet specified).

India: The European Commission reported difficulties in advancing negotiations of agricultural goods tariffs and simplification of India's complex rules of origin. Progress has been made in certain areas of negotiation, but there are doubts that talks can be completed without EU concessions (greater flexibility for India) in relation to sustainability-related measures such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

Malaysia: The EU and Malaysia have agreed to relaunch negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement.

Philippines: Negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement are reported to be very constructive, with further talks foreseen in Brussels in June 2025.

Thailand: The EU and Thailand are due to meet in April for a fifth round of trade talks, following good progress on a wide range of issues at the previous round of talks, including positive discussions on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) rules and sustainable food systems. Thailand

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would like to conclude talks in 2025.

Trade policy

EU prepares response to US tariffs: In March, the EU discussed appropriate retaliation measures to import tariffs introduced by the USA on steel and aluminium products, and other announced tariffs, leading to potential rises in tariffs on US agri-food products. Retaliation was delayed in anticipation of the announcement of further US tariffs on a wide range of products in April.

EU–India cooperation leads to market access improvements for food: The EU and India report respective improvements to market access, with India approving several EU-authorised pesticides; and the EU approving a number of Indian aquaculture establishments, and addressing recognition of the equivalence of Indian organic production.

EU seeks stronger alignment of imported products with EU rules: In the context of the publication of its *Vision for the Future of Agriculture*, the EU will aim for "stronger alignment" of imported products with EU rules, in particular in relation to pesticides and animal welfare. This will include a reconsideration of certain pesticide maximum residue levels (MRLs) and the implications of the EU's export of pesticides banned in Europe. The EU also intends to strengthen import controls. This approach is supported by European farmers, but is criticised by other stakeholders.

Growing EU debate on food stockpiling: In the light of rising geopolitical tensions, there is a growing debate on ensuring that the EU is prepared for potential crises. This includes discussions on the role played by stockpiling of critical goods, potentially including food. The European Commission plans to put forward a Stockpiling Strategy in 2025.

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