

Mitigating the impact on global food trade

When acting to protect the health and well-being of their citizens, countries should ensure that any trade-related measures do not disrupt the food supply chain, says QU Dongyu, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Roberto Azevedo, Directors-General of FAO, WHO and WTO. Such disruptions including hampering the movement of agricultural and food industry workers and extending border delays for food containers, result in the spoilage of perishables and increasing food waste.

Food trade restrictions could also be linked to unjustified concerns on food safety. If such a scenario were to materialise, it would disrupt the food supply chain, with particularly pronounced consequences for the most vulnerable and food-insecure populations.



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Uncertainty about food availability can spark a wave of export restrictions, creating a shortage on the global market. Such reactions can alter the balance between food supply and demand, resulting in price spikes and increased price volatility. We learned from previous crises that such measures are particularly damaging for low-income, food-deficit countries and to the efforts of humanitarian organisations to procure food for those in desperate need.

"We must prevent the repeat of such damaging measures. It is at times like this that more, not less, international cooperation becomes vital. In the midst of the COVID-19 lockdowns, every effort must be made to ensure that trade flows as freely as possible, especially to avoid food shortage.

"Similarly, it is also critical that food producers and food workers at processing and retail level are protected to minimise the spread of the disease within this sector and maintain food supply chains. Consumers, in particular the most vulnerable, must continue to be able to access food within their communities under strict safety requirements," said members.

"We must also ensure that information on food-related trade measures, levels of food production, consumption and stocks, as well as on food prices, is available to all in real-time."

This reduces uncertainty and allows producers, consumers and traders to make informed decisions. Above all, it helps contain 'panic buying' and the hoarding of food and other essential items.

Now is the time to show solidarity, act responsibly and adhere to our common goal of enhancing food security, food safety and nutrition and improving the general welfare of people around the world. "We must ensure that our response to Covid-19 does not unintentionally create unwarranted shortages of essential items and exacerbate hunger and malnutrition," members concluded.

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