

## **Public Concerns, Environmental Standards and Agricultural Trade**

**Edited by F. Brouwer and D.E. Ervin, 2002**

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### **Synopsis**

There is great concern among the public in general, and consumers in particular, about the quality of the environment in relation to agriculture. Such concerns focus on issues such as pollution from agriculture, the quality of landscapes, animal welfare and food safety. As a result, many countries have developed a range of standards, codes of good practice and other policy measures. This book reviews these issues and relates them to agricultural trade and competition. Features include chapters on world trade and trade liberalisation as well as individual chapters on the situation in the European Union, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and developing countries.

### **Review**

*Public Concerns, Environmental Standards and Agricultural Trade* is a successful attempt to compare the key environmental issues arising from agricultural policies and practices globally and to consider the implications these have for agricultural trade on the world market. In this instance the term *environment* has its broadest definition encompassing human health and animal welfare as well as ecological and environmental quality issues. The book states three primary aims and divides its chapters into three parts covering topics relevant to each aim.

The first objective and part I of the book, covered by chapters two and three, is to compare the main environmental issues arising from agricultural practices in the developed world giving particular attention to Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the USA. In part II this concept is taken a stage further within chapters four to nine, where farm level standards are compared whilst looking also at the key measures that are affecting the agricultural sectors in the developing world exporting to the world market. The final objective of the book is to examine the implications of such standards and policies for agricultural trade with reference to competitiveness, impacts on developing countries and the importance of public concerns. This is covered by part III, chapters ten to twelve.

The first chapter, provided by the editors, summarises the contents and objectives of the book. The goal being to debate the challenge facing policy makers on how to devise and implement trade and environment policies which work in harmony rather than conflict.

Within part 1, the second chapter seeks to examine global agricultural policies in the context of trade liberalisation and considers the process of agricultural policy reform. The authors compare the varied approaches taken by Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It concludes that the policy reforms achieved to date have had mixed results and that the further reforms under way or being considered present a major challenge in order to reconcile domestic and international interests whilst seeking sustainability for the sector.

The third chapter reviews international trade issues and concern for environmental protection in the context of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) - the main body regulating world trade. It discusses the main areas of contention including the WTO's inability to distinguish products based upon their production methods and potential life-cycle impact on the environment. The author concludes that the primary challenge for international policy development in the future will be to satisfy the needs of developing countries, allowing them to improve their market access, whilst not compromising the public demands of the developed world for environment protection.

Part I provides a broad yet clear and concise account of approaches within the developed world. It is supported by informative, well-presented data and it deserves to be read by a much larger and broader audience than the book is likely to attract.

Part II is in many ways the core of the book looking at world trade and covering the topic in reasonable depth. Chapter four considers the topic from the European perspective. It discusses the major products and their European markets shares. It also looks at the impact and influence capital-intensive and geographically specialised farming methods has had on the structure of the countryside. The following chapters discuss much the same issues but with respect to other major countries in the developed world, namely USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Each of the chapters in part II also look at environmental and human-health legislation, national standards and their impact on world trade. The final

chapter in part II investigate environmental and human-health standards and their influence on competitiveness in more depth.

Part III considers environmental standards in developing countries. Chapter 10 provides a comprehensive overview of the political and legal debate on standards for the World Trade Organisation's perspective. There have been major concerns that where standards differ between countries they have the potential for hindering trade and that the differing costs of compliance could also have major impacts on competitiveness. However, the chapter concludes that these fears appear unjustified and that eco-labelling schemes, which are already in place in many developed countries, could offer farmers in the developing world considerable opportunities for trade and not hinder trade as previously thought.

Chapter 11 addresses public concerns and consumer behaviour in Japan. It states in its conclusions that public health issues have a more significant role in the decisions taken by Japanese consumers to buy products rather than environment and animal welfare issues that are high on the public agenda in Europe, USA and Canada. Consequently, in Japan a product's freshness, appearance and place of origin have a considerable influence on Japanese trade, industry and commercial opportunities.

Overall *Public Concerns, Environmental Standards and Agricultural Trade* is a very readable book. It is also very well referenced – something sadly neglected by many recently published reference books. There are a lot of useful trade data embedded in the chapters and if I have any criticism it is that some of the chapters might have benefited by more figures and tables. Readers looking for a specific detailed debate on animal welfare may well be disappointed. The issues are not neglected, part II of the book does cover animal intensification, legislation and animal health and welfare issues for each of the countries discussed. However, 'environment' as defined within this publication is very broad and consequently all the subject areas tackled are done so with out a great deal of depth being possible. The book however, does provide a good overview and I can thoroughly recommend it.