

# Farm trade talks "getting places", WTO chair says

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GENEVA -- Fresh ideas are circulating in renewed World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks on farming tariffs and subsidies, two of the biggest roadblocks to a new accord on boosting global trade flows, the talks chairman said on Friday.

New Zealand Ambassador Crawford Falconer, who chairs the WTO's agriculture negotiations, said he was satisfied with the current pace and tone of negotiations that restarted in Geneva last week after a month-long break.

"I think we are getting places," he told journalists at the trade body's Geneva headquarters.

Falconer told WTO members that the farm talks were moving ahead but needed to speed up.

"There's been some tangible progress -- not enough to warrant me to bring the champagne out of the cellar, but enough for me to check whether there is champagne in the cellar," he told a meeting of WTO delegates, according to a participant.

While stressing new proposals had been discussed in a variety of informal groups, Falconer told reporters the talks needed to start delivering in the coming weeks for the WTO's Doha accord to be wrapped up in a timely way.

"It's time to party. It's not going to be any better later," Falconer said. "I think you would need to see tangible signs of movement by the end of October to have the confidence that you can go on and finish the job."

The Doha round, named after the Qatari capital where it was launched in late 2001, has struggled to overcome countries' reticence to cutting politically-sensitive farming subsidies and tariffs on agricultural and industrial goods.

## U.S. ELECTION

WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy has repeatedly urged countries to wrap up the talks by the end of this year to avoid having them run into the U.S. presidential election year, when Washington is expected to have little flexibility to negotiate.

He told Reuters in an interview in Peru on Thursday that it should be possible to reach "the essential skeleton" of a Doha deal by the end of the year.

Talks on industrial goods, another hotly contested area of the Doha talks, are due to resume in part next week, though the most contentious topics will be tackled in October, according to a letter to negotiators from Canada's ambassador to the WTO, Don Stephenson, who chairs those talks.

Stephenson and Falconer circulated negotiating papers before the European summer break to help ease deadlock in the farming and industrial goods talks. Both chairmen are expected to revise those texts in coming months in a bid to encourage the WTO's 151 member states toward consensus in the Doha deal.

Diplomats have said agreement is relatively closer on agriculture, which is why talks resumed in that area first in the hope of clinching a deal and gaining some momentum in the broader talks.

Falconer said he would decide at the end of next week when to issue a revised draft on agriculture, reflecting the discussions he has had, but the earliest would be the end of the month. (Additional reporting by Jonathan Lynn)