QUNO

Food & Sustainability

Navigating the relationship between food security and trade rules

QUNO has been developing an online tool to help explain the complex relationship between food security measures and the World Trade Organization's (WTO) trade rules. Susan Bragdon, our Food & Sustainability Representative, talks through her vision of the tool and how she believes it could benefit small-scale farmers, trade negotiators and food security.

Can you briefly describe this interactive policy tool?

The tool is a web-based program that explains and analyzes over 60 important food security policy measures. It defines each food security measure, why the measure is important, the circumstances in which its use might be needed, its relationship to other policy measures, and its relation to global trade rules. Eventually the tool will have a special area for moderated interaction, allowing users to share their own experience and information. In this way, it could act as an evolving resource for stakeholders to easily find clear, reliable information.

Why was the tool developed?

Small-scale farmers are critical to global food security. What they can do, are encouraged to do or are constrained from doing is often affected by national policy. Similarly, national policy is increasingly limited by international law. One area where experience and evidence-based discussion is proving difficult is the relationship between trade rules and various food security policy measures.

The conversation has become quite polarized, the rules complex and the terms and language used in each context very different. Policy-makers and small-scale farmers are often stuck in the middle, finding it hard to navigate options and possibilities. The tool is designed to help with this navigation.

These sound like challenging issues to address. How did you approach getting started?

We brought together representatives of small scale farmers, trade-negotiators and researchers for a series of consultations to identify food security policy measures that the group felt should not be constrained by international rules. We thought what might be needed is a context specific tool that describes the conditions under which the measure is likely to be useful. And, because policies do not exist in a vacuum, we wanted to show what policies are likely needed to complement the identified measure. For instance, a policy measure that raises the price for a farmer might require complementary measures to ensure food affordability for the urban poor.

Who will use the tool?

The tool is designed for use by those wanting to influence policy at the national or international level to ensure that food security measures are not in conflict with trade rules and enable sufficient flexibility.

With the addition of a space for moderated interaction in the tool, small-scale farmers will be able to keep up to date on trade rules and potential challenges to desired food policy measures. They will also be able to share their experience with other users of the tool. Trade delegations from developing countries are often comprised of only one person, who can be overwhelmed by having to attend multiple meetings which are more easily managed by larger delegations. This tool will allow these trade negotiators to quickly see analysis of food security measures to global trade rules, and understand possible conflicts.

What is the potential impact?

The tool will hopefully increase effective advocacy for desired food security measures by small-scale farmers, national decision-makers and trade negotiators at both the national and international level. Ultimately, we hope the tool can be part of ensuring more coherent policy, specifically that trade rules are supportive of, and do not run counter to, the objectives of food security.
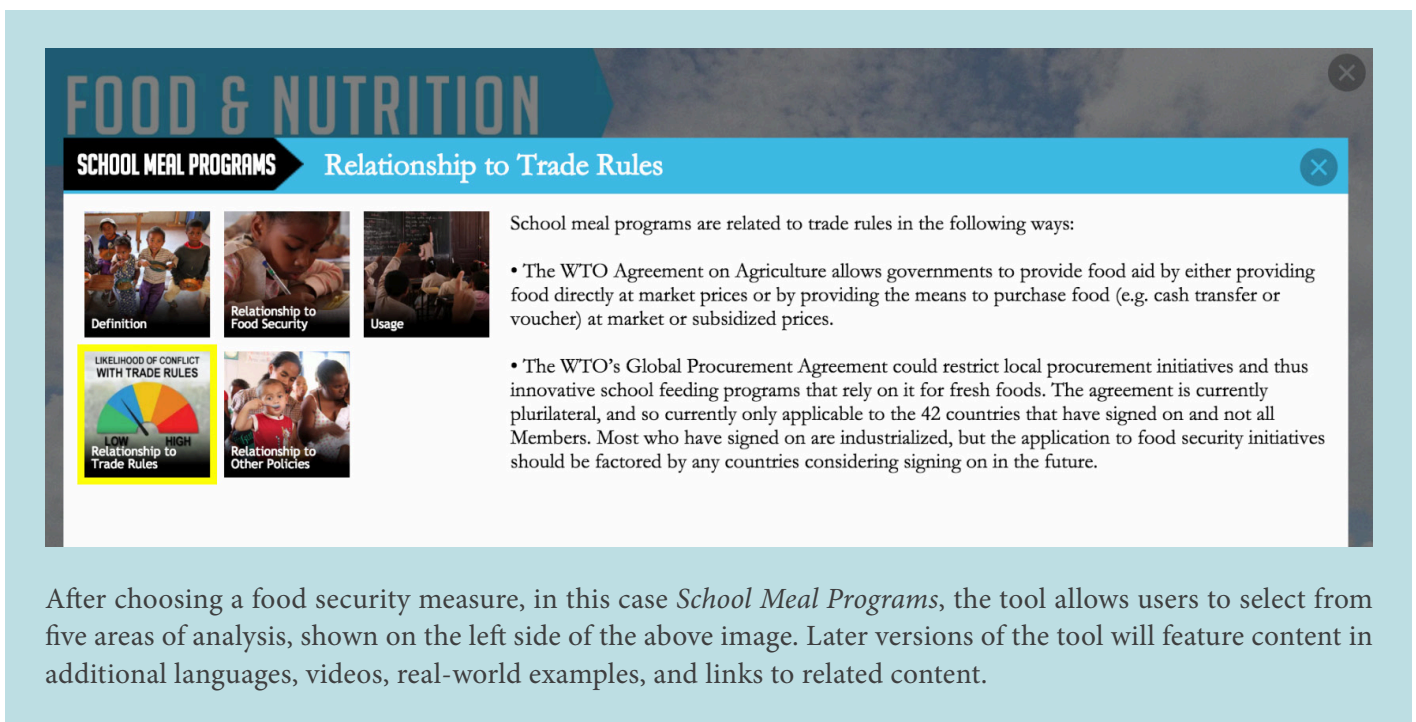

The tool organizes food policy measures into categories, such as the *Food & Nutrition,* shown above. Clicking a measure reveals its definition and provides the user with more detailed analysis.

Have you received feedback and what are the next steps?

We have shared the tool at different stages of development at a limited number of consultations. Now that we have a prototype, we are seeking wider feedback on the content and on the user experience. We introduced the tool at the World Trade Organization's Public Forum, at a peer review event hosted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and at the World Committee on Food Security in October 2015.

Based on the feedback, we are continuing to revise the tool. The next phase will be to pilot the tool through case studies in developing countries.

After choosing a food security measure, in this case *School Meal Programs*, the tool allows users to select from five areas of analysis, shown on the left side of the above image. Later versions of the tool will feature content in additional languages, videos, real-world examples, and links to related content.