

## A special approach to international agreements

*By David Salmonsén*

The recent climate summit in Copenhagen brought vividly to mind a guiding force in international relations today: the impact of the growing economic competition between developed and developing countries on the ability to reach multilateral agreements and address world issues.

In both the climate discussions, operated by the United Nations, and the Doha Round of international trade talks, overseen by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the approach to these international challenges is strikingly similar: special treatment for the entire developing world. The developed countries, led by the United States, seek participation from developing countries, especially China, India and Brazil. These developing countries, following the “special treatment” approach, resist making any commitments while demanding greater support from the developed world.

In the Doha Round of trade negotiations, WTO members are attempting to reduce barriers to trade while remaining committed to the “development” goals of the trade round’s mandate. The conflicts between the U.S. and the “advanced developing” countries (China, India and Brazil) are highlighted by the contention over the amount of market access and protection afforded for their agricultural products.

While the U.S. is willing to make reductions to trade-distorting domestic support spending, key developing countries are unwilling to make concessions for increased agricultural product imports. The “special and differential treatment” approach ensures that these nations, all of them major agricultural producers, remain focused on protecting their own markets rather than expanding trade liberalization.

In the climate change negotiations, developed nations are seeking binding actions by all nations, including those in the developed world. The operation approach to developing nations here is one of “common but differentiated responsibilities,” where developed nations commit to take stronger actions than the developing world, while the developing countries should commit to some specific actions.

Advanced developing nations, such as China—the world’s largest emitter of greenhouse gases—strenuously and successfully objected in the Copenhagen talks to developing countries accepting binding commitments to combat climate change. Instead, they favor the idea of an international development fund to help them in their efforts to deal with climate change.

The divide among the world’s nations—what used to be called the North-South divide and is now referred to as developed-developing—has been given an operational status in the ongoing trade and climate talks. While we don’t know if this approach will prove ultimately fatal

to international negotiations, this “special approach” has been a huge obstacle to reaching multilateral agreements.

*David Salmonsens is senior director of congressional relations, dealing with multilateral trade issues, for the American Farm Bureau Federation.*