

N A F T A

I n s t i t u t i o n s

The NAFTA Commission

The Free Trade Commission, which consists of cabinet-level representatives from the three member countries, is the central institution of the NAFTA. The Commission supervises the implementation and further elaboration of the Agreement and helps to resolve disputes arising from its interpretation. It also oversees the work of the NAFTA's Committees, Working Groups and other subsidiary bodies. The Commission last met on April 29, 1998. Ministers have agreed that the Commission's next meeting will take place in Canada in the spring of 1999, in the context of the fifth anniversary of the NAFTA.

Working Groups and Committees

The NAFTA envisages further work towards fulfilling the objectives of the free trade agreement. Under the auspices of the NAFTA, over 30 Working Groups, Committees and other subsidiary bodies have now been established to facilitate trade and investment and to ensure the effective implementation and administration of the NAFTA (a list of the Working Groups and Committees follows). Key areas where this work is being undertaken include trade in goods, rules of origin, customs, agricultural trade and subsidies, standards, government procurement, investment and services, cross-border movement of business people, and alternative dispute resolution.

The NAFTA Working Groups and Committees also help to smooth the implementation of the Agreement and provide forums for exploring ways of further liberalizing trade between members, for example the two rounds of accelerated tariff removals completed under the auspices of the Committee on Trade in Goods. The NAFTA Working Groups and Committees also provide an apolitical arena for the discussion of issues and, through early dialogue on contentious points, the possible avoidance of disputes. In recent months, the Advisory Committee on Private International Disputes regarding Agricultural Goods has made considerable progress in developing an innovative, private sector-based mechanism for resolving disputes on trade in perishable fruits and vegetables.

Canada has made a priority of strengthening the NAFTA work program to enhance the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of the NAFTA Working Groups and Committees. At the NAFTA Commission's