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WEST AFRICA VERSUS THE U.S. ON COTTON SUBSIDIES: WHY, HOW AND WHAT NEXT?

Elinor Lynn Heinisch

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This study examines the convergence of events, internationally and domestically, in the last decade that led to Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali challenging U.S. cotton subsidies. It outlines the political and economic context in which West African and American cotton farmers compete. It explores how the West Africans have confronted U.S. policy, why their cause has generated sympathy and interest, whether they are likely to be successful, and the implications of their campaign. The paper draws from analyses of the financial impact of U.S. cotton subsidies, documents filed with the World Trade Organization (WTO), public statements, media coverage, materials from nongovernmental organizations, and interviews with involved parties. It identifies four actors driving this initiative: the cotton farmers, the producers' unions, the states and the international financial institutions, and their tactics: using the WTO, having many spokespeople with common messages, having powerful allies and using the media.

Keywords: U.S. cotton subsidies; West African; WTO