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Policies

China to deepen reform in agricultural sector

[Xinhua, 05-02-2017] China will deepen supply-side structural reform in agriculture to develop the sector, according to a policy document released Sunday, 5th February.

The major problems facing China's agricultural sector are structural ones, mainly on the supply side, according to the document by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council.

The document calls for improving structures in the industry, promoting "green" production, extending the sector's industrial and value chain, boosting innovation, consolidating shared rural development and enhancing rural reforms.

When carrying forward supply-side structural reform for the sector, national grain security must be guaranteed, according to the document.

It also said that supply-side structural reform in the agricultural sector would be a long and challenging process, demanding the relationship between government and market be well handled and in the interests of all stakeholders.

China started structural reforms in its agricultural sector a few years ago. Partly due to structural adjustment, China's grain output dropped slightly in 2016, ending a 12-year rising streak. The yield stood at about 616 million tonnes, down by about 5.2 million tonnes or 0.8 percent year on year.

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China targets green, branded food products as part of farm reform

[Reuters, 06-02-2017] China will promote high-quality, branded farm products as it reforms its agricultural sector to meet demand from a growing middle class and boost rural incomes, the government's first policy statement, known as the "number one document", of the year shows.

It reiterated earlier plans to modify the crop structure, encouraging farmers to grow less grain corn and more soybeans, as well as more corn silage and alfalfa for livestock.

Meanwhile it will promote local and specialty products and geographical indications as well as organic products, with favourable taxes for start-ups in rural areas and innovation centres to support high quality produce.

It will also encourage exports, and support companies to set up overseas production bases, particularly in countries that are part of its Silk Road initiative.

Beijing will also make use of anti-dumping and other measures to protect its producers, said the document.

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Fresh drive sought for rural sector

[China Daily, 06-02-2017] Government's first policy document of 2017 focuses on improving agriculture

The development of new industries and new types of operations is to be encouraged to bring fresh momentum to China's agricultural sector, according to the government's first policy document of 2017.

China will seek to expand the industrial and value chains of the agricultural sector and enable science, technology and innovation to be the driving forces in the development of modern agriculture, according to the document.

It also called for improvements in the output from arable land, labor productivity and utilization of resources for the sector.

China's grain output dropped 0.8 percent year-on-year in 2016, ending a 12-year rising streak. However, the country still has a huge combined grain reserve, estimated to be the largest in the world.

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Latest policy reinforces backing for agriculture

[China Daily, 13-02-2017] China will deepen supply-side structural reform in agriculture to develop the sector, according to a recent policy document.

The major problems facing China's agricultural sector are structural ones, mainly on the supply side, according to the document by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council.

The document calls for improving the structures of the industry, promoting "green" production, extending the sector's industrial and value chain, boosting innovation, consolidating shared rural development and enhancing rural reforms.

China started structural reforms in its agricultural sector a few years ago. Partly due to structural adjustment, China's grain output dropped slightly in 2016, ending a 12-year rising streak. The country will maintain its zero increase in the use of pesticides and fertilizers and vigorously control water usage in the sector.

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China to promote agricultural products' quality

[Gov.CN, 10-02-2017] The quality of agricultural products will be enhanced through developing high-standard farmland and cutting the use of pesticides, according to a State Council executive meeting on Feb 8.

The supply of high-end, green and healthy agricultural products is lagging behind consumers' growing demand, Xinhua News Agency said. High-quality products need to be imported, while domestic products have a surplus in inventory.

A significant part of the quality problem is low-quality farmland, said Xinhua. The State Council urged enhancing farmland quality through promoting intensive plowing, agricultural mechanization and efficient irrigation.

In addition, fighting soil contamination — cutting the use of farm chemicals in particular — is also important to improve agricultural products.

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National plan will protect land, waters

[China daily, 10-02-2017] China has issued its first national plan treating environmental, development and resources issues in a comprehensive but targeted way, according to the individual needs of different regions.

The National Territorial Plan (2016-30) will guide all activities related to development, protection and treatment in the 16 regions it divides the nation into.

To safeguard land and marine resources as each region develops, the plan lists 11 targets, some of which are binding. Comprehensive measures taken by Beijing include adoption of a new protective structure. The nation's 16 regions have been categorized according to five protection themes: environment quality, human ecology, natural ecology, water and farmland resources.

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China plans 50 billion yuan of investment in rural methane projects

[Xinhua, 11-02-2017] China will spend 50 billion yuan (about 7.3 billion U.S. dollars) on building methane projects in rural areas as the government seeks to increase the use of clean energy. China will build 172 new biogas projects and 3,150 large-scale methane projects. The plan aims to increase the country's methane producing capacity by 4.9 billion cubic meters, replace the equivalent of 3.49 million tonnes of standard coal with cleaner energy and cut carbon emissions by 17.62 million tonnes.

China's fast-growing economy has seen rural energy consumption surge and the rapid expansion of the livestock breeding and agro-industries. These rural businesses create billions of tons of biomass waste annually, which can potentially be used to produce energy.

According to official estimates, China generates 1.4 billion tonnes of rural waste materials annually that could be used for methane production. This amount of waste could produce 73.6 billion cubic meters of biogas and replace 87.6 million tonnes of standard coal.

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China to spend 1.7 trillion yuan on land consolidation

[Xinhua, 15-02-2015] China will spend about 1.7 trillion yuan (247 billion U.S. dollars) to increase the quality of arable land and to promote urbanization.

The country will divide its land into nine zones for land consolidation over the 13th Five-year Plan period (2016-2020), according to a plan released Wednesday 15th February.

Land consolidation refers to the rational use of land. In the case of farming, parcels of land are consolidated to provide larger holdings.

The target refers to large-scale, contiguous plots of land with fertile soil and modern farming facilities. This type of farmland can maintain stable and high yields and has sound ecological condition and strong capacity to resist natural disasters.

At least 400 million mu (about 26.7 million hectares) of high-yield farmland will be added by 2020. The country has created the same amount of farmland meeting those standards from 2011 to 2015.

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Science, Technology and Environment

How Chinese science could lead to a tastier tomato

[WSJ, 27-01-2017] Progress in the long-running battle to improve the flavor of the supermarket tomato has been achieved with help from an unlikely-seeming source: Chinese geneticists.

In a paper to be published in the upcoming edition of the journal Science, a team of researchers describe a “genetic roadmap” to help commercial growers reverse a decades-long trend toward big, robust tomatoes that taste like nothing. The study discovered genes for chemicals that had previously been shown to improve tomato flavor—a critical finding for breeding more flavorful tomatoes.

The research project was led by University of Florida horticulturalist Harry Klee, one of the world's foremost tomato experts, along with Sanwen Huang, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences who ranks as one China's most distinguished plant geneticists.

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'Tuberculosis-resistant' cattle developed in China

[BBC, 01-02-2017] Scientists in China say they have produced cloned cattle with increased resistance to bovine tuberculosis. Twenty calves were born, of which 11 survived for more than three months.

Researchers in China used a genome editing tool to change the genetic code of cattle. They say the technology could have widespread uses in agriculture.

A team from the College of Veterinary Medicine, Northwest A&F University in Shaanxi, China, altered a gene involved in fighting infection.

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Resistance to 'last-resort' antibiotic spreads from farms in China

[FT, 08-02-2017] Bacteria resistant to colistin, the so-called last resort antibiotic, are probably being transferred to humans from poultry farms in China, say researchers, adding to fears that time to develop new types of medicine is running out.

Since the discovery in animals on farms where colistin was widely used as a growth enhancer, bacteria with mcr-1 have been identified in more than 30 countries including the US, Germany, Spain, Thailand and Vietnam. A patient in the US was found to have been infected with e-Coli carrying the gene last year.

E-Coli bacteria with the mcr-1 gene were found among patients at Chinese hospitals in two large cities, according to a study in the Lancet last month.

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China takes a step closer to green agriculture

[Xinhua, 28-02-2017] Chinese farmers apply 70 percent more chemicals on crops than the world average, but the country is taking a step closer to green agriculture by encouraging farmers to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers.

China's Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) released an action plan earlier this month to pilot a fertilizer-replacement program in 100 counties and districts this year.

The plan will include vegetables produced in northern China's greenhouses, apples grown in northwest China's Loess Plateau and Bohai Bay area, and key growing areas for oranges, tangerines and tea.

However, making the change is difficult as chemical fertilizers are much cheaper than organic alternatives and easier to transport.

To provide the same amount of nutrients, organic fertilizers cost around four times that of chemical fertilizer, we still have a long way to go to promote the use of organic fertilizers, a senior local officer said.

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China's farmers go green

[Xinhua, 08-02-2017] China has been promoting sustainable farming to reform the agriculture industry in recent years. A document issued earlier this month called for an output increase in high-quality products based on green and innovative production. It also said the country would maintain a zero increase in the usage of pesticides and fertilizers.

Long-time reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides to boost production has resulted in severe problems, such as pollution and soil degradation.

Statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture show about one-third of the world's chemical pesticides, or 1.4 million tonnes, are used in China every year. The use of pesticides in China is 2.5 times the amount in developed countries.

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China to build monitoring network for ecological security

[Xinhua, 20-02-2017] China will build a comprehensive monitoring system by 2020 to implement its ecological "red line" strategy and supervise activities inside the nature reserves, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) said Monday.

This will include a space-ground ecological observation system and an ecological security monitoring system linked up to big data and the Internet, according to the ministry.

From this year, authorities will conduct remote sensing monitoring on all national-level nature reserves twice a year, the ministry said, adding that it will build a space-ground observation system with satellite remote sensing technology to monitor ecological changes.

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Farmland and chemicals under spotlight to boost supply

[China daily, 14-02-2017] The quality of agricultural goods will be improved by increasing the acreage of well-facilitated farmland, with irrigation facilities and adequate harvest equipment, and strictly limiting the use of chemicals.

A State Council executive meeting decided to strictly manage the use of farm chemicals, amid safety concerns, as well as promote well-facilitated farmland.

The State Council targeted improving farmland quality through promoting intensive plowing, as well as adopting more agricultural machinery and efficient irrigation, a statement released after the meeting said.

In addition, a draft amended regulation to control the use of farm chemicals was approved at the meeting to fight soil contamination by cutting their use.

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China expands trials of crop rotation, fallow systems

[Xinhua, 28-02-2017] China will expand its trials of crop rotation and fallow systems this year as part of efforts to facilitate the green development of agriculture.

Arable land covered under crop rotation measures will increase to 10 million mu (1 ha = 15 mu), mainly in northeastern and northern areas where corn, soybeans and oil crops are grown, according to a press conference of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The fallow system will cover 2 million mu of farmland affected by environmental problems, including heavy metal pollution and desertification, in north China's Hebei Province, central China's Hunan Province, and some western regions.

China aims to complete primary crop rotation and fallow systems in the next three to five years.

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Big-Data technology takes root in china's farms

[Caixin, 23-02-2017] From selecting seed varieties, determining planting density, to pest and disease control, effective fertilizer use, harvesting, and storage, farmers make 40 to 50 major decisions each year.

These decisions, thanks to a growing interest in big data, are increasingly being based on algorithms rather than human experience.

This change is driven by a combination of top-down reforms, increasingly well-educated young farmers, and agriculture companies sensing a gap in the market.

Expectations are high for how big-data analytics can change China's agriculture sector. But the technology, and the companies that offer it, are still in their infancy.

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Beijing boosts agricultural development

[Xinhua, 09-10-2017] Beijing continues to strengthen agricultural research and innovation as the country calls for deepening structural reform in the agricultural sector.

A team at the Beijing Academy of Agriculture and Forestry Sciences, has been improving a method to reduce use of pesticides and fertilizers by releasing natural enemies of insects.

The academy has also cultivated a high-yield wheat. The new variety adapts to various climate and soil conditions, and has been promoted in other areas such as Hebei, Tianjin, Shanxi, Shandong and even Pakistan.

Beijing is also building a "smart agriculture" network, which includes a multi-media database of 10,000 courses for farmers, covering livestock breeding, product processing and aquaculture.

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Poultry market tests spark flu advisory

[China Daily, 11-02-2017] Consumers in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, are being urged to avoid contact with live poultry after tests found that more than 30 percent of live poultry markets in the city were contaminated with the H7N9 avian flu virus, according to Guangzhou's disease control authority.

The Guangzhou government had decided to suspend live poultry trade in all markets from Jan 16 to 18, Feb 16 to 18 and March 16 to 18 as a preventive measure to curb bird flu virus.

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Beijing joins list of mainland cities reporting bird flu cases in humans

[SCMP, 13-02-2017] Beijing authorities have reported the city's first human case of H7N9 bird flu infection as the mainland tries to contain pockets of outbreaks across the nation.

Several provinces have announced suspension of the live poultry trade, with Guangzhou officials warning nearly a third of its markets engaged in the business were contaminated with the virus.

Authorities in cities prone to outbreaks recently started sending out mobile phone alerts urging people to remain vigilant.

The H7N9 strain was first reported to have infected humans in China in March 2013. It is most likely to strike in winter and spring, when cooler temperatures allow it to survive.

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Coordinated efforts planned to prevent H7N9

[Gov.CN, 25-02-2017] The State Council executive meeting on Feb 22 asked local governments to coordinate in preventing the H7N9 avian bird flu, publishing information in a timely manner, and strengthening monitoring and early warnings.

Since January, H7N9 infections have been reported in 16 provinces, and data indicated the deadly disease had spread earlier this year compared with previous years, and infections also increased.

It is crucial to take curbing measures in places where the virus might transmit, and the State Council executive meeting stressed that efforts should be made to monitor poultry farms and markets, and cull infected poultry.

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Trade and Business

China to reduce corn planting area

[Xinhua, 04-02-2017] China will reduce its corn planting area by around 670,000 hectares and switch to other crops, agriculture minister Han Changfu said at a teleconference.

China has a substantial corn stockpile after years of support for corn growing. The area under cultivation hit 37 million hectares in 2015, up from 23 million hectares in 2001.

Due to the reduced planting area, China's corn output is forecast to fall by 4 percent year on year to 215 million tonnes in 2017.

Corn imports are expected to plunge by around 70 percent to 1 million tonnes this year, according to the Ministry of Agriculture.

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China gets ready to go veggie

[Xinhua, 10-02-2017] Chinese people are used to sumptuous meat-filled dinners on Chinese New Year's Eve. Traditionally, fish and meat dishes take center stage for the reunion dinner, as they represent prosperity. During the years when meat was not part of the everyday meal, families would save to buy meat on important occasions like the new year in hope of an abundant year.

However, there is a growing counter trend, and more Chinese are turning to vegetarian food for their new year celebrations.

The number of vegetarians in China was estimated to exceed 50 million in 2014, whereas the number in the United States was around 30 or 40 million that year.

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China's online sales of farm produce grow in 2016

[Xinhua, 15-02-2017] Online produce sales are estimated at over 220 billion yuan (32 billion U.S. dollars) last year, the Ministry of Commerce (MOC) said in a statement.

Agricultural e-commerce has been developing fast with structural reform in the agricultural sector. Online produce sales reached 150 billion yuan in 2015, more than triple that of 2013.

The government started a pilot program in 2014 to digitize agriculture and aims for Internet access in almost all villages by 2020.

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Cross-border e-commerce and online food sales grow over 80% in China

[Internet Retailer, 20-02-2017] Online sales of food and imported goods are booming in China. An annual growth rate of 86% and 219.8 billion yuan (\$31.99 billion) in sales makes cross-border e-commerce a strong category in e-retail.

The drivers of cross-border e-commerce in China also include a push by leading online shopping companies which keep streamlining their operations in merchandising, international shipping and payments to make it easier for Chinese consumers to buy from overseas merchants. The number of Chinese consumers who purchased imported products on Tmall Global, an online marketplace for imported goods, more than doubled in 2016, according to Tmall Global operator Alibaba.

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China's grain heartland deepens cooperation with Silk Road countries

[China daily, 09-02-2017] According to China's first policy statement of the year released Sunday 5th February the government will continue to encourage agricultural players to seek opportunities abroad. The government will support agricultural enterprises that want to start business abroad, especially countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, the statement said.

Henan, a major grain producer of China, is also a leader in overseas agriculture investment. By the end of 2016, more than 100 Henan companies had invested \$7.36 billion in grain production, animal farming and farm produce processing businesses abroad. They manage 120,000 hectares of farmland and generate an annual income of over \$13.6 billion.

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China and FAO to boost joint South-South cooperation efforts

[FAO, 24-02-2017] China and FAO agreed on 24th February to strengthen further their joint efforts in South-South Cooperation. The agreements were announced at a bilateral meeting attended by senior representatives from FAO and China's Ministry of Agriculture. China will make available more than \$11 million in funds to support three new components of the Programme.

This includes an arrangement to help developing countries implement the International Plant Protection Convention; a broader campaign to increase capacity in developing countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through the South-South format; an arrangement to bolster the management unit of the FAO-China SSC programme so that it can better respond to the countries' needs.

The \$11 million announced on the day is part of China's longer-term pledge of \$80 million to the South-South Programme.

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Brexit must be seen as opportunity and not challenge: Chinese Ambassador

[CRI, 02-02-2017] At the New Year Reception for the All Party Parliamentary Group on China and the China-Britain Business Council, Ambassador Liu Xiaoming spoke about his attendance at six of the APPG's previous New Year receptions during his time as Ambassador to the UK.

He said that the UK and China need to work closely together and seize opportunities to advance Chinese-UK relations.

He said that China and the UK should strengthen cooperation on science and technology, education creative industries. That China and the UK need closer cooperation in other industries too.

The Ambassador said he would like to see China and the UK stay committed to an open, global economy. That there must be support for free trade and opposition to protectionism. He said that China and the UK must stand for multilateralism and oppose unilateralism.

His closing message was clear that Brexit must be seen as an opportunity and not a challenge.

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Britain, China pledge to promote free trade

[Reuters, 17-02-2017] China and Britain have pledged to promote free trade and cooperate on building an open world economy, fanning efforts to shore up what the two governments have called a "golden era" in their relationship.

China is one of the countries Britain hopes to sign a free trade agreement with once it leaves the European Union, and London and Beijing have been keen to show that Britain's withdrawal from the bloc will not affect ties.

The pledges on trade and cooperation were made during a meeting by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and his British counterpart Boris Johnson on the sidelines of a meeting of the Group of 20 on Thursday 16th February.

Wang said that both nations would promote flagship cooperation on projects such as the Hinkley Point nuclear power station in Britain, and would look to strengthen their partnership on issues such as trade through close high-level exchanges.

Johnson said that Britain will strengthen strategic cooperation with China on international affairs.

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Chinese health food company to create 38 jobs in Swansea

[WalesOnline, 22-02-2017] A Chinese health food company is to set up its European HQ along with a manufacturing and R&D centre in Swansea creating 38 highly skilled jobs.

Acerchem International is based in Shanghai and already has links to Swansea University.

It produces a range of nutritional supplements, functional foods and beverages, beauty care and animal nutrition supplements.

The investment by Acerchem International is backed by £600,000 from the Welsh Government and will create 38 highly skilled, well paid jobs, primarily working in R&D.

The company plans to establish its R&D facility in the Institute of Life Science at Swansea University.

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These little euro piggies went to China's market

[China daily, 17-02-2017] European farmers benefitted from a doubling of pork exports to China in 2016, according to an official industry organization.

The UK's Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board noted that global pork shipments to the world's second-biggest economy reached 1.6 million metric tons.

The board cited the restructuring of the Chinese pig industry as the main reason for the increase in hunger for the product.

The European Union supplied around two-thirds of China's imported pork.

Shipments of pig meat from the UK to China shot up last year, reaching 43,000 tons — a rise of 31 percent compared to 2015.

Offal imports were up 72 percent to 1.3 million tons worldwide, while the EU remained the dominant supplier. Offal shipments from the UK were up 32 percent.

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China-New Zealand joint food science center to open economic opportunities

[China daily, 18-02-2017] A planned joint China-New Zealand food research center will bring scientific and economic benefits to both countries, the head of a New Zealand government research institute said on 17th February.

AgResearch had signed a collaboration arrangement earlier this month in Beijing with the Nutrition and Health Research Institute within the China Oils and Foodstuffs Corporation (COFCO) and with the College of Food Science and Nutritional Engineering of China Agriculture University (CAU).

The arrangement is aimed to initiate activities of mutual benefit in terms of knowledge development, scientific and technological innovation and economic benefit, said AgResearch chief executive Tom Richardson.

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Origin, Arcadia announce China biotechnology collaboration in corn

[Business Wire, 22-02-2017] Origin, an agricultural biotechnology trait and seed provider, and Arcadia, a California-based company that develops and commercializes agricultural productivity traits and nutritional products, announced their collaboration to achieve the first-ever export of a key corn biotechnology product developed in China to the United States for completion of global regulatory trials.

Under the agreement, Arcadia will assist Origin in developing information for submission to regulatory authorities in the U.S., China and other countries for the approval of their traits in corn.

Origin anticipates China commercialization of corn biotechnology at the end of this decade.

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Canada ready to export more food to China: Agriculture minister

[China Daily, 16-02-2017] Canadian Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Lawrence MacAulay wants the farm-to-fork sector to be one of the main courses on the menu of a future bilateral trade pact.

Canola, which was bred from rapeseed in Canada in the early 1970s, is Canada's top agricultural export to China. According to Canadian government figures, canola exports to China amounted to C\$2 billion in 2015, or more than one-third of C\$5.6 billion in Canadian agri-food sold to China.

To further increase sales to China, the minister is promoting Canadian food beyond its world-famous canola. Canada already sells beef to China, with exports totaling C\$255 million in 2015, and that number could significantly rise following a protocol both countries signed last year to expand market access for Canadian frozen bone-in-beef.

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US ambassador to China nominee pledges to promote agricultural exports to China

[China daily, 24-02-2017] Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, US President Donald Trump's pick for Ambassador to China, said that he would work to ensure the continued growth of US agricultural exports to China when he begins his new job, particularly reopening the Chinese market for American beef.

US agricultural exports to China have grown more than 200 percent over the past decade and China was the United States' second-largest international market in 2015.

China has already imported more US soybeans than all the rest of the world combined, and the world's second-largest economy has become a major importer of American pork as well.

In terms of his priorities as US Ambassador to China, Branstad said he hoped China to reopen the market for American beef "soon". China halted beef imports from the United States in 2003 to prevent the spread of mad cow disease.

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