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Policies

China holds high-level meeting to plan rural work for 2016

[Xinhua, 24-12-2015] Chinese leaders held a central rural work conference on Thursday 24th December to review the country's rural and agricultural work in 2015 and to map out plans for 2016 and beyond.

The annual meeting is expected to form strategies to secure supply of major farm produce, transform the development mode of agriculture and expand public culture services and the social security system to cover both urban and rural regions.

China has laid a relatively sound foundation for rural development, but it faces a complicated environment as it enters a crucial stage of agricultural modernization in the coming years, analysts said.

Some farm produce saw price fluctuations this year and farmers were less motivated to grow grains, while land and water resources became more strained.

The government aims to ensure food security, keep stable income growth for farmers, accelerate efforts to modernize infrastructure and improve production capability and quality in 2016.

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China aims to transform agricultural dev't pattern

[CCTV, 24-12-2015] One of China's goals during the period of the thirteenth five-year plan, which will begin next year, is to modernize agriculture.

The Agricultural Ministry says the coming five years will be a transformative period for agriculture, and the transformation is necessary.

Experts point out that along with a continuous increase of China's agricultural output in recent years, problems of quality and safety have also arisen.

The government is aiming for a new pattern of modern agriculture that is planned to take shape by the year 2020, and lays equal stress on quantity, quality and sustainability. But the Agriculture Minister added that it will be a tough process.

"During the 13th five-year plan period, agriculture can only take the path of sustainable development and must make significant adjustments in the areas of development ideas, technology system, policy support and resource allocation. During the period, we will not pursue continuous increase in grain output, but we must consolidate and improve productivity, in order to ensure essential supplies of grain and absolute safety of grain ration," said Han Changfu, Chinese Minister of Agriculture.

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China targets agricultural supply-side reforms

[Xinhua, 25-12-2015] An annual rural work conference concluded on 25 December, agreeing to push forward supply-side reform in agriculture to speed up modernization.

China will ensure abundant and quality farm produce to satisfy market demand, according to the Central Rural Work Conference that mapped out rural work for 2016 and the 13th Five-year Plan period (2016-2020).

Priority should be given to reduction of inventories and production costs and overcoming weaknesses in the sector, according to a statement released after the conference.

China will step up grain processing to cut stock; promote large-scale production, curb overuse of pesticides and fertilizers and introduce social services to slash costs; reinforce rural infrastructure and boost shortly-supplied farm produce to overcome weak links.

After years of good harvests, China has grown out of a food shortage period, but structural problems remain unsolved, including the contradiction of falling prices and rising costs: some produce is over-supplied and some in extreme shortage.

It is estimated that China has accumulated billions of tonnes of grain stock. Corn alone has reached 400 million tonnes: a bottleneck and needs reforms on the supply side.

The meeting agreed that China should follow the concept of innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development in its rural work for the next five years.

"Food security is the bottom line of agricultural structural reform," said the statement, adding that the government will secure the supply of staples, protect farmland and maintain production capacity.

The government will offer preferential policies to large-scale grain farms while making sure that farmers benefit from agricultural development. It will also improve the price formation mechanism and government purchase measures for important farm produces.

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China invests big in modern agriculture

[Xinhua, 01-12-2015] China spent 20.36 billion yuan (3.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 2015 developing modern agriculture, underscoring the country's continued efforts in deepening rural reform, the Ministry of Finance said on Tuesday, 1st December.

The funds were used to support leading industries with local characteristics in rural areas, promote the moderate scale management of land and strengthen adjustment of the agricultural structure, said the ministry.

Under the economic "new normal," agricultural modernization is essential to stabilizing economic growth, adjusting structure and improving people's livelihood.

China unveiled a rural reform plan in early November, stressing that agricultural management and rural collective property rights will both be improved by 2020 to safeguard grain security and raise farmer income.

China has witnessed substantial improvements to rural development over the past few decades with yields of summer grain reaching a record high in 2015 after 11 straight years of increase.

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Land transfers thrive in rural China

[Xinhua, 13-12-2015] Land transfers are flourishing in Jinzhou, some 260 km south of Beijing, catalyzing mushroom growth of specialized cooperatives, authorities have said.

"About one-tenth of farmers have joined market-oriented cooperatives in Jinzhou and more are enlisting as members," said Zhang Jian, deputy head of Jinzhou Supply and Marketing Cooperative.

China began in 2008 to allow farmers to rent out, transfer and merge the land they have contracted, amid a reform to bolster modern farming and reuse abandoned land.

"Most of China's farmland is owned collectively by the people who work on it. Farmers, by leasing farmland or pooling of land or machineries as shares to the cooperatives to form big farms, can increase income and lower farming cost."

Jinzhou is not unique in China. Amid the country's urbanization drive, over 160 million farmers, about 30 percent of all rural laborers, have gone to work in cities as migrant workers. They prompted a land transfer binge by leasing their farmlands to the cooperatives.

As of June 2014, more than 250,000 square km of arable land had been transferred, almost 30 percent of the national total, according to Chen Xiwen, deputy head of the central agricultural work leading team.

China will stabilize rural land policies and push forward orderly circulation of land use right in accordance with law, according to a proposal released last month by the Communist Party of China Central Committee on formulating the nation's 13th Five-year Plan (2016-2020).

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100 million farmers to be urbanites

[Xinhua, 23-12-2015] China plans to turn 100 million farmers into registered urban residents with the hope that this will encourage them to buy city apartments and help alleviate the country's massive housing glut, an official said on Tuesday, 22 December.

China's housing market took a downturn in 2014 due to weak demand and a supply glut. The cooling has continued into 2015, with sales and prices falling, and investment slowing.

Along with cutting overcapacity, tackling debt overhang, destocking has been named a major task for 2016, following the Central Economic Work Conference, a key meeting that maps out next year's economic work. Attendees of the meeting agreed that rural residents relocating to urban areas should be allowed to register as city residents, which would encourage them to buy property in cities.

Nearly 55 percent of the Chinese population lives in cities but less than 40 percent are registered urban residents. The country has around 300 million migrant workers but most of them are denied "hukou" (official residence status), which means they are not entitled to equal employment rights and social security services, and their children are not allowed to be enrolled in city schools. Without official resident status, the migrant workers don't have a sense of belonging in cities and buying urban houses has not been an attractive option.

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China plans internationally competitive agricultural firms

[Xinhua, 01-12-2015] China will aim to establish a number of internationally competitive agricultural firms by 2020, the State Council said on Tuesday, 1st December.

It released a guideline on land reclamation reforms saying, "By restructuring reclamation areas and innovating in the operation mechanisms of farms, China aims to build a number of large-scale agricultural groups that are effectively managed and adaptable to the market economy."

"The reforms on land reclamation are not only important to national food security and the development of modern agriculture, but are also crucial for China to compete with multinationals in the agricultural field," said Han Changfu, Minister of Agriculture.

The guideline also encouraged Chinese reclamation firms to step out of the country through establishing joint ventures with foreign firms or conducting mergers and acquisitions, and

stressed the importance of introducing advanced technology and management mechanisms to domestic firms.

China has spent 20.36 billion yuan (3.2 billion U.S. dollars) in 2015 developing modern agriculture, the Ministry of Finance said.

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State-farms to be converted into market entities

[China Daily, 07-12-2015] China will transform its 1,780 State-farms into agricultural enterprises as it attempts to further modernize its agricultural sector, a government official said on 7th December.

Yang Shaopin, a senior official with the Ministry of Agriculture, told a news conference that the central government will transform State-farms into market entities, and develop them into modern agricultural groups.

"All the State-farms will become modern agricultural groups, even though it will be a slow transitional process," he said.

He made the comments in the wake of a guideline released by the central government on Dec 1 to further push forward the transformation of State-farms before 2020.

The guideline said the reform is intended to develop a number of agricultural production bases for grain, cotton, sugar, milk, seeds and oil. It also aims to further raise the income of workers, and improve the infrastructure and public services available to the workers.

The central government will also enhance the supervision of State-owned assets, as total assets of all State-farms in China have already exceeded 1 trillion yuan (\$156 billion), he said.

The total GDP of the State-farms this year is expected to reach 701 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 8 percent, he said.

Yang said the central government will also roll out new measures to protect farmland under the State-farms

So far, the property rights of only 66.4 percent of land owned by the State-farms have been confirmed, he said.

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China sees 12th straight record grain harvest

[Xinhua, 08-12-2015] China reaped a bumper grain harvest for the 12th consecutive year in 2015, with grain output up 2.4 percent from one year earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Tuesday, 8th December.

The growth followed a 0.9-percent increase in 2014 and 2.1-percent rise registered in 2013.

Grain output totaled 621.44 million tonnes this year. Yields of major grain crops, including rice, wheat and corn, rose 2.7 percent year on year to 572.25 million tonnes, NBS said in a statement.

The government's supportive policies, application of technology and fewer natural disasters this year contributed to the output rise, Hou Rui, a senior NBS statistician, said.

It was also a result of increasing acreage for grain crops this year amid measures to re-adjust crop types, Hou said. Some regions, for example, have cut cotton farming so that more land became available for grain crops.

The total size of arable land for grain crops stood at 113.3 million hectares, up 0.5 percent from one year earlier.

Heilongjiang, Henan and Shandong provinces remained the country's top three grain producers this year.

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China to adopt credit ratings for food, drug producers

[Xinhua, 15-12-2015] China Food and Drug Administration announced on Tuesday that a credit rating system will be introduced into the food and drug industries.

The authorities plan to collect information about credit standing of food and drug producers and sellers to prepare a data bank by the end of 2016, according to a guideline released by the administration.

The database which contains safety credit ratings of food and drug producers and sellers will be worked out by the end of 2020, the document said.

All enterprises in the food and drug industries will be rated as A, B, C or D, respectively, in accordance with a national standard. The rating of C refers to lack of credit worthiness while D means an acute shortage of credit worthiness.

According to the guideline, food and drug businesses with bad credit ratings will be harshly punished and such information about their credit standing will be made public in time.

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Science, Technology and Environment

Experts call for global action to cut antibiotic use in agriculture

[Xinhua, 08-12-2015] Bold global action needs to be taken to substantially reduce the use of antibiotics in agriculture and the quantities being dispersed into the environment, according to a report published Tuesday 8th December by a group of experts.

The report is completed by a group called Review on Antimicrobial Resistance, the work of which is supported by the British government.

Due to poor surveillance and data collection in many countries, estimates of total annual global antibiotic consumption in agriculture vary considerably, ranging from around 63,000 tons to over 240,000 tons, according to the report.

Figures cited in the report show that global consumption of antibiotics in this sector is predicted to increase by 67 percent from 2010 to 2030. Consumption among BRICS nations of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa will increase by 99 percent in the same period.

The proportion of antibiotics used in livestock compared with humans is also very surprising to many not well versed in this issue, the authors of the report said.

More than 70 percent of the antibiotics deemed medically important for human health by the FDA (U.S. Food and Drug Administration) sold in the United States, and over 50 percent in most countries in the world are used in livestock, according to figures cited in the report.

These antibiotics are used for different purposes, some to protect or improve the health of the animals, and others to stimulate quicker growth and maximize profits.

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New app boosts modern agriculture in Jiangsu

[China daily, 14-12-2015] Jiangsu has reached a milestone in its efforts to boost agricultural tourism, according to industry experts.

The conclusion is linked to the inauguration of a countryside tour guide app called Lvzhang on Dec 11. The platform is the first of its kind to stimulate modern agriculture and the integration of leisure agriculture in the province.

Seeking to become a professional Internet platform for countryside tourism, the app provides complete information on farmhouse recreation, fruit pick-up, route guides and fresh produce.

"The gap between rural and urban areas frustrates most people. Farmers want a wider market to sell their agricultural products while urban consumers do not have enough channels for comprehensive knowledge of the countryside. That's why we want to develop a special app to narrow this gap," said by Zhang Mingfeng, head of Lvzhang's development team and an associate professor at Jiangsu Polytechnic College of Agriculture and Forestry.

Last year, a total of 86 million tourists contributed 26.5 billion yuan (\$4.1 billion) to 5,100 tourist destinations related to agriculture, including the sites for farmhouse recreation. The huge demand encouraged Zhang and his team members to develop an app to improve tourism services in Jiangsu.

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China witnesses rural e-commerce boom: AliResearch report

[Chinadaily, 30-12-2015] China has witnessed a boom of rural e-commerce with 780 villages each having online shopping transactions exceeding 10 million yuan (\$1.5 million) in 2015, according to a report released by Alibaba.

AliResearch, the research arm of the Alibaba Group, issued the report on Tuesday 30th December saying that this was a surge of 268 percent year on year.

E-commerce prosperous villages are called "Taobao villages," as business is mainly conducted via Alibaba's trading platform Taobao. In addition to the transaction volume, a Taobao village should have more than 100 businesses, or at least 10 percent of households involved in e-commerce, according to AliResearch.

The 780 Taobao villages are located in 17 Chinese provinces and regions with Zhejiang, Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces having the most.

AliResearch found that rural e-commerce business clusters are taking shape in these coastal regions, where Taobao villages are modernizing thanks to encouragement from their local governments.

This year also saw the emergence of rural e-commerce in the northeastern, mid- and western provinces and regions of Hunan, Yunnan, Jilin, Liaoning and Ningxia, where Taobao villages appeared for the first time. Among them, 176 Taobao villages are in impoverished regions.

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Agriculture and food sectors to benefit from online platform

[China Daily, 01-12-2015] China has launched an online trade information platform on agricultural and food products to further enhance trade with countries along the Belt and Road Initiative.

The Agricultural Products and Food Information Exchange Platform is aimed to further promote trade in the agricultural and food sectors among the countries along the route, said

Xie Yuan, vice-president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, one of the initiators of the platform.

Other initiators include the Asian Peace and Reconciliation Council, a non-governmental organization launched by distinguished former national leaders and ministers, and the China Public Diplomacy Association.

Qu Dongyu, vice-minister of agriculture, said the platform will also push forward the development of a common agricultural and food market for countries along the road

The platform will incorporate trade information on agricultural and food products in countries along the route, and enable the international trade of such products, he said.

The platform will also establish a mechanism on the supply and demand information of products, and a mechanism on supervision.

Countries along the Belt and Road Initiative make full use of the platform to speed up their agricultural development, he said.

The platform will include functions including enterprise entry, product launching and agricultural and food information sharing. It will also include functions of online trade of products and product tracing, and the launch of an application for smartphone devices by March next year.

The online platform will also be available in Russian and English as well as Chinese.

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China vows more support for rural industry

[Xinhua, 23-12-2015] China will deepen structural reform of rural industries and upgrade the integrative development of agricultural, industrial and service sectors in rural regions.

The measures are key to promoting the modernization and urbanization of rural areas, enhancing the efficiency of agricultural investment, as well as improving farmers' income and rural prosperity, according to a statement released Wednesday after a State Council executive meeting presided over by Premier Li Keqiang.

Various types of industrial cooperation will be supported, including farm products processing, products storage and logistics, the statement said.

Emerging sectors which integrate agriculture with the Internet, tourism and health care will be promoted, such as rural e-commerce.

College graduates will be encouraged to return to the countryside to start family farms.

Leading enterprises will be supported to invest in or participate in operating rural businesses, and farmers should share the earnings with enterprises, the statement said.

Financial support from the central government will focus more on projects which integrate various rural industries, and more favorable policies will be provided to rural businesses.

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China intensifies crackdown on invasive species

[China Daily, 23-12-2015] The country's quarantine authority is stepping up efforts to detect harmful non-native species, as strengthened global interactions have brought more insects and viruses that may pose severe threats to the country.

More than 22,000 packages of plant seeds and sprouts amounting to 80 metric tons were intercepted at China's entry ports in an eight-month campaign that cracked down on illegally

bringing and mailing seeds and sprouts into the country since March, and nearly 14,200 of them were found to contain harmful species.

The number of seeds and sprouts illegally carried and mailed into China has increased rapidly as the country's global interaction grows through travel and trade, and as shopping from overseas e-commerce platforms matures, said Chen Maosheng, deputy director of the department of supervision on animal and plant quarantine under the General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine. The means of carrying such contraband also is becoming subtler, Chen added.

He said the two main categories intercepted in the campaign were live creatures, such as spiders and tortoises, and succulent plants, which have become popular among amateur plant collectors in recent years.

As a defense system, China currently has a list of foreign plant and animal quarantine pests, and the number of harmful species is more than 400. Live animals, meat and dairy products, fresh fruits and vegetables, seeds and soil that may contain the harmful species are prohibited

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China working age population 'to fall 10% by 2040'

[FT, 09-12-2015] China's working age population will fall more than 10 per cent by 2040 in spite of a recent relaxation of its one child policy, the World Bank warned on Wednesday, heightening the risk of the world's most populous country "getting old before getting rich".

The number of potential workers in China, a cohort defined as people between the ages of 15 and 64, fell in 2012 for the first time in decades — a tipping point that has profound consequences for everything from the cost of labour to government and corporate pension burdens.

A further decline of 10 per cent would equate to a net loss of 90m Chinese workers, a number greater than the population of Germany, and is consistent with demographic pressures across East Asia. The working populations of South Korea, Thailand and Japan are also expected to fall by 10 per cent or more over the next 25 years, according to a new report released by the World Bank in Beijing.

"East Asia has undergone the most dramatic demographic transition we have ever seen," said Axel van Trotsenburg, regional vice-president. "All developing countries in the region risk getting old before getting rich."

As of 2010, almost 40 per cent of all people on the planet aged 65 or older — some 211m individuals — lived in East Asia.

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Trade and Business

COFCO to buy agricultural arm of top Asian trader Noble for \$750m

[GT, 23-12-2015] China's largest food company COFCO is to buy 100 percent of the agricultural arm of embattled trader Noble Group, the two companies said Wednesday, in the latest move by China to expand its global reach.

COFCO, which said it supplies grain and oil to one-quarter of the world's population, bought 51 percent of Hong Kong-based Noble's agricultural subsidiary in April 2014.

COFCO will now spend \$750 million to buy the remaining 49 percent of Noble Agri, which trades grain, sugar, cotton and coffee in around 30 countries and regions from South America to the Middle East.

The purchase will also expand COFCO's global footprint in agricultural markets, rivaling the "ABCD" quartet - Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Cargill and Louis Dreyfus.

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Alibaba stepping up rural presence

[China daily, 24-12-2015] E-commerce giant Alibaba Group Holding Ltd said on Wednesday that it would continue to make more investments to boost its presence in rural areas.

The company, which announced a 10 billion yuan (\$1.54 billion) rural investment plan, is considering more steps to improve the living conditions of farmers.

Alibaba launched its first "Stocking for China's Lunar New Year Festival" program at an e-commerce summit in Yan'an on Wednesday 23 Decembr. The program enables farmers to sell their agriculture products in cities through the Alibaba platforms.

The program is aimed at tapping the entrepreneurial potential of the about 1 million rural migrant workers who return from the cities to their home villages to start their own businesses.

This is not the first time that Alibaba is attaching such importance to agriculture and rural networks. In October 2014, the company said it would spend 10 billion yuan in the next three to five years on 1,000 "operational centers" in counties and up to 100,000 "service outlets" in villages.

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China implementing feed import system

[World Grain, 10-12-2015] China is in the process of implementing a revised regulatory and registration system for imported feed and feed additives.

Under this system, companies need to complete the following three steps before they can export feed ingredients or additives to China:

- Obtain an import registration license from the China's Ministry of Agriculture.
- Apply for market access with the General Administration for Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ).
- Have their manufacturing facility be registered by AQSIQ.

This process can include an audit, which must be paid for by the exporter. Products considered to be "traditionally traded" by AQSIQ can continue to be exported to China while they complete steps two and three. China's Ministry of Agriculture registration process typically takes several months, while the market access and registration with process AQSIQ can take two or more years.

The Department of Animal Husbandry and National Feed Management Office under China's Ministry of Agriculture and the Department for Supervision of Animal and Plant Quarantine under AQSIQ are charged with regulating the importation and marketing of feed and feed additives in China.

China's Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for managing catalogs of feed materials, feed additives and medical feed additives. Only those substances included in the catalogs are permitted to be used in animal feed production. China's Ministry of Agriculture is also responsible for issuing import registration licenses for feed ingredients and additives.

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Official report shows Chinese vineyard plantings

[Decanter, 18-12-2015] China's main sources of wine grapes are currently Xinjiang, Shandong and Hebei, and Cabernet Sauvignon is one of the key varieties being planted across China's young wine regions, shows one of the first official reports on the subject.

Nine areas are identified in the government report as key winemaking regions in China, and these are:

- North East China
- Changli (Hebei)
- Jiaodong Peninsula (Shandong)
- Huai Zhuo Basin (Hebei)
- The Loess Plateau
- Xinjiang
- The Gansu Corridor
- Ningxia Helan Mountain East
- Southwest China

But, China's key wine production regions, and the most suitable grape varieties for them, are still a work in progress.

In a report released in April this year, the Paris-based International Organisation for Vine and Wine (OIV) said that China has 799,000 ha of land under vine, indicating China has more vines than France.

However, China Alcoholic Drinks Association (CADA) corrected the report saying that out of the 13,000,000mu (867,000 hectares) under vine in China, only 10% are planted with wine grapes. The rest is made up by table grapes, stressed officials.

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China's 13th five-year plan offers new chances for cooperation with Britain

[Xinhua, 15-12-2015] China's 13th Five-Year Plan for 2016-2020 lays out a new "blueprint" for the country and also offers new opportunities for China-Britain cooperation in at least six areas, Chinese Ambassador to Britain Liu Xiaoming said on Tuesday, 15th December.

The six areas are trade and investment, finance, innovation, regional integration and urbanization, green economy, public service and social security, Liu said at the launching ceremony of China Chamber of Commerce in the UK.

According to the proposed 13th Five-Year Plan, Liu said, the Chinese market would be more open, quality products and services from Britain will be more popular in China. Meanwhile, more Chinese companies will invest and set up businesses in Britain.

"The plan clearly lists innovation as the number one driving force for growth. China will encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, including scientific, cultural and business innovation," said Liu.

"Britain is known for its people's outstanding spirit of innovation. China and Britain can build a strong partnership for innovation," he added.

China and Britain can also find new cooperation opportunities in green economy, which is one of the priorities in the 13th Five-Year Plan.

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M&S puts stamp on Beijing

[China Daily, 19-12-2015] Marks & Spencer Plc, the British clothing and food retailer, opened its first flagship store in Beijing on Friday as part of its strategy to increase its presence in large cities in China.

The 131-year-old high street retailer has 10 outlets in China.

The new 1,500 square meter store located at The Place, in the heart of Beijing's shopping district, has features of a premium boutique shopping environment, including womenswear, menswear, lingerie and kidswear and a food hall. The food hall stocks more than 1,200 types of imported food and wines.

Decorated with bright lights, festival trees and a large mirror, the store also has a more vibrant hue than its counterparts in Shanghai and other cities. The various sections or zones are divided on the basis of themes and colors, making it easy for customers to shop. The store has an in-store bakery which sells freshly baked breads and pastries including sesame seed bagels, cranberry and pecan batons, wholemeal farmhouse loaves and Bakewell tarts. The coffee-to-go station will offer a wide range of tea and coffee served by specially trained baristas.

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Sirius's Yorkshire mine plan gets boost as it secures Huaken deal

[FT, 24-12-2015] Sirius Minerals has secured a supply deal with a Chinese fertiliser importer, underpinning the UK mining explorer's plan to open a potash mine underneath a national park in Yorkshire.

On Thursday 24 December, Sirius announced a seven year "take or pay" deal with Huaken International that will run for seven years and involve the miner supplying up to 500,000 tonnes of polyhalite annually in the final year of that term.

News of the deal caps a year in which Sirius won a lengthy battle to secure planning permission to build its York Potash project near Whitby, under the North York Moors.

Sirius' deal with Huaken is the latest in a string of supply deals that the Aim-quoted developer has announced as it has tried to build the investor case for the mine.

In announcing the deal with Huaken, Sirius said polyhalite would be used as a soil conditioner in China. "It can assist in helping countries like China restore agricultural productivity and maintain food security for future generations," explained Chris Fraser, chief executive of Sirius.

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China says more Western countries will follow Britain to improve ties

[Reuters, 22-12-15] More Western countries will follow Britain in improving ties with China, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was quoted as saying on Tuesday, 22 December, describing relations with London over the past year as a "bright spot" in China's diplomacy.

The British government has moved forcefully to strengthen financial and diplomatic ties with Beijing, with Chinese President Xi Jinping paying a state visit to Britain in October to seal what both call a "golden time" in relations.

Earlier this year, Britain broke ranks with the United States, its close ally, by signing up as a founding member of China's new infrastructure investment bank.

"Sino-British relations have been a bright spot this year," Wang told Chinese media while on a trip to Cyprus, according to a statement released by China's Foreign Ministry.

"Xi Jinping's 'super state visit' to Britain was enormously successful, and Sino-British relations have entered a 'golden time'," Wang added.

Britain has said it wants to be China's strongest supporter and best friend, he said.

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More agricultural firms invest in central Asia

[Xinhua, 17-12-2015] Ten Chinese firms are close to reaching final investment deals with an agricultural cooperation zone in Kyrgyzstan, following the entry of another six Chinese firms last year.

The new investors are agricultural enterprises from Beijing and central provinces of Hubei and Henan. They plan to invest more than one billion yuan (155 million U.S. dollars) in the zone.

Besides infrastructure and energy, agriculture is one of the hot sectors in central Asia, attracting huge Chinese investment. The investment is boosted by the Belt and Road initiative proposed by China.

On Tuesday 15th December in Zhengzhou, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang told a meeting of prime ministers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states that China is willing to work with other SCO countries to actively expand agricultural cooperation to guarantee food security.

A joint communique of the SCO meeting also stressed the necessity for more active interaction in agriculture via bilateral and multilateral projects in animal husbandry, plant cultivation, production and processing of agricultural goods and land reclamation.

At the SCO meeting in Zhengzhou, Premier Li Keqiang proposed considering the establishment of an SCO development bank at a proper time.

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World's largest pork producer brings the bacon back to China

[WSJ, 22-12-2015] The world's largest pork producer, WH Group, is now opening the doors of new factories that will produce American-style sausage, ham and, yes, bacon in China, the company said in a recent statement. WH, which runs Shuanghui International Holdings and the U.S. pork producer Smithfield Foods, has been hustling over the last few months to import raw materials from Smithfield back in the U.S. to feed demand in China.

The bet is that China, like many other places, will go hog wild, buying up packages of bacon, sausage and cold cuts the way that American shoppers do. China, home to 20% of the world's people, is already the largest pork consumer on the planet, according to the U.S. National Pork Board.

Companies like WH, Hormel Foods Corp. and Tyson Foods Inc. are trying to build out their refrigerated, packaged offerings in grocery chains across the country.

China agreed in October to lift import restrictions for 14 U.S. pork plants and warehouses, opening up opportunities for companies like Smithfield. Regulators implemented the ban, in some instances more than a year ago, after finding traces of the muscle-enhancing drug ractopamine in U.S. meat.

Bringing the bacon back to China was part of Shuanghui's push to acquire Smithfield back in 2013. Shuanghui wanted to snap up slaughtering and packaging technology. It also wanted safe sources of meat to bring back home.

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Chinese medicinal herbs provide niche market for US farmers

[AP, 27-12-2015] Expanding interest in traditional Chinese medicine in the United States is fostering a potentially lucrative new niche market for farmers who plant the varieties of herbs, flowers and trees sought by practitioners.

While almost all practitioners still rely on imports from China, dwindling wild stands there, as well as quality and safety concerns, could drive up demand for herbs grown in the U.S. Several states have set up "growing groups" to help farmers establish trial stands of the most popular plants.

Traditional Chinese medicine is gaining mainstream acceptance in the U.S. There are 30,000 licensed practitioners across the country - 46 states issue licenses, often requiring a master's degree and continuing education credits.

More than 300 plants are commonly used in traditional Chinese medicine. They include Angelica dahurica, a flowering perennial whose root is used to relieve pain and inflammation; Aster tataricus, a relative of garden asters said to have anti-bacterial properties; Mentha haplocalyx, a mint used for stomach ailments; and Salvia miltiorrhiza, a type of sage whose roots are used for treatment of cardiovascular diseases.

The National Institutes of Health says traditional Chinese medical techniques - which included practices such as acupuncture and Tai Chi - are primarily used as a complement to mainstream medicine. The agency cautions that some medicinal herbs can have serious side effects, and there isn't enough rigorous scientific evidence to know whether traditional Chinese medicine works for the conditions it treats. Clinical trials are difficult because treatments involve combinations of plants customized for each patient.

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New Zealand's kiwifruit heading home to China

[Reuters, 03-12-2015] More than a century after the kiwifruit arrived in New Zealand, the fuzzy-skinned food is heading back to its roots in Asia.

The world's largest kiwifruit exporter, New Zealand's Zespri International Ltd, already sells around 20 percent of its output to China and is now preparing the ground to start producing there, looking to cut costs at a time when it expects its overall exports to hit record highs.

Starting commercial production in China would mark the first such step from New Zealand's kiwifruit sector, a key part of a fruit industry which overall churns out the country's sixth most valuable export. Although Zespri is cautious about moving too fast as it wants to ensure the varieties of kiwifruit it has developed are not leaked to other growers in China.

Zespri in November signed a memorandum of understanding with the local government in the central Chinese province of Shaanxi to assess local kiwifruit varieties. It plans to hold growing trials there in early 2016.

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Nestle beefs up Chinese dairy farms with training

[China Daily, 08-12-2015] Nestle hopes to help boost China's dairy industry by training people in dairy farming and farm management, said Lu Ming, technical head of dairy and nutrition at Nestle (China) Ltd.

The Swiss food giant's dairy farming institute in Shuangcheng district in Harbin, the capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, has trained more than 800 people since it was started in October 2014.

Lu said the institute imparts professional expertise, including how to prevent and control diseases, increase milk production of each herd, improve milk quality and save feed.

Lu said training at the institute would benefit not only farmers but also Nestle. Nestle can provide its customers with safer and better milk-related products if basic conditions of dairy farming are improved, he added.

Insiders said the Chinese government is encouraging the establishment and development of large and standardized dairy farms to promote sustainable and healthy development of the country's dairy industry.

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Xi announces 10 major programs to boost China-Africa cooperation in coming 3 years

[China Daily, 04-12-2015] Chinese President Xi Jinping announced Friday 4th December that his country will roll out 10 major plans to boost cooperation with Africa in the coming three years.

The big package covers the areas of industrialization, agricultural modernization, infrastructure, financial services, green development, trade and investment facilitation, poverty reduction and public welfare, public health, people-to-people exchanges, and peace and security.

To ensure smooth implementation of the initiatives, Xi announced, China will offer 60 billion US dollars of funding support.

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Compiled by Yuelai Lu, SAIN Secretariat (UK).

If you have any further enquiries, please contact Yuelai Lu at: y.lu@uea.ac.uk; for more information about SAIN, please visit: www.sainonline.org/English.html