

Title: Summary of research on several important questions about food safety in China in the medium and long term

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Abstract:

1. Food safety objectives. To sum up the opinions of various researchers, food safety in China should focus on the following main objectives: first, the protection of arable land resources must be considered essential; second, we must view food safety in terms of the quantity and quality of food, and ecological safety; third, there must be a safety objective for a global volume of food staples while preserving specific crops.

2. Food safety norms. One of the safety standards set by the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) stipulates that a country should have food reserves to cover 15 to 19% of the current year's consumption (12% of which should be cycle stocks and 3 to 7% of which should be reserve stocks) in order to ensure a level of world food stocks that could satisfy more than two months of consumption. Food security norms in China should include: a stock safety level of 20% to 25%, stocks after harvest amounting to between 100 to 125 billion tonnes; a food production fluctuation level of about 2%, an average year's production amounting to about 485 billion tons; and a level of dependence on imports of about 5%.

3. Assessment of food safety in China. There are three main schools of thought: the pessimistic school, of the optimistic one, and one situated halfway between the two. There is no doubt that the question of food safety in China has been, and will continue to be, an important part of national economic safety. The authors believe that the "halfway" school of thought is the closest to the current trend because it takes into account the fact that a reduction of food resources in the short term is less important (since the government closely and firmly controls and adjusts this factor) than the reduction of these resources in the long-term (since it is more difficult for the government to adjust or control this situation).

4. Important factors that influence medium and long-term food safety in China.

(1) The process of urbanisation is the factor that has the greatest impact on food production. It results in both the reduction of arable land resources and water shortages. Urbanisation has not only deeply modified the production structure between China's northern and southern regions, but has also monopolised arable land and water resources and increased crop-contaminating pollution. Additionally, the policy of protecting large parcels of arable, cultivated land and the "balancing" policy of "requisition-compensation" (if construction projects are located on cultivated land) implemented under the urbanisation framework are policies that have had a positive effect on the protection of resources. To a certain extent, the rural exodus contributes to widespread agricultural development and production. The configuration of this production in the future will depend on the combined effects of many factors. (2) Food consumption: Predictions for the global volume of food consumption in the future vary greatly according to the specialists or research institutes, ranging from 550 to 640 million tons. (3) Food distribution: Experts in food distribution generally favour the principles of free trade and prices being set by market mechanisms. In China, there are regional "blockades" and conflicts between production zones and distribution zones. A unified wholesale food production market has yet to be established. Regional markets, inter-regional markets and futures market therefore need to be developed, adequate subsidies for the main productive regions

need to be distributed and the construction of distribution infrastructures needs to be reinforced in order to adapt to the requirements of future urbanisation. (4) Importing and exporting food products: it is unlikely that China's future food safety depends on a massive increase in imports when we take into account world production and the international market situation. Maintaining the 95% self-sufficiency rate would be more appropriate. The authors remain cautious as to "food enclaves" abroad that seek to make use of food producing land, since they believe that this solution could lead to several thorny problems, such as emigration, the rights of foreign companies to control production and the "theory of the Chinese threat". (5) Food reserves: China's food reserves can be divided up into three categories: Government stocks, commercial stocks and stocks in farms, the importance of which should not be underestimated. (6) Financial investment in food safety: The financial cost of guaranteeing food safety is phenomenal in China due to high requisition prices and storage fees.

5. Several important questions have yet to be studied. (1) Urbanisation trends over the middle and long-term, predictions about the impact this will have on arable land and water resources as well as on the large-scale farming of arable land and productivity. (2) An empirical analysis must be carried out as well as middle and long-term predictions about the influence of food distribution on food safety. (3) An evaluation of the probability of China being able to procure food resources on the world market, the important factors of instability China will need to deal with and the influence that this will have on national development over the middle and long-term. (4) Factors that influence the demand for food products over the middle and long-term including the influence of urbanisation and the agricultural demand for energy. (5) The underlying medium and long-term changes in the behaviour of farmers towards their own stocks and their influence on Government stocks and food safety. (6) Cost analysis of food safety at the national level.

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