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China's Agriculture: A small farm or a big ranch? (Summary)

China's agricultural policy and food security issue is receiving and should be receiving increasing attention from the people.

Even for the world's most developed country the United States, although agricultural production is not an issue, its quality is. The public expenditure on health care and medicine have risen to a large extent as compared to the previous century. Despite a significant drop in the investment in food, this is exchanged at the expense of public health. Another phenomenon to be wary of is that American drug companies are planning to promote their weight-loss medication to the obese in China.

A healthy body requires healthy food. Currently, factory farming - which uses large amounts of fertilisers, pesticides, additives, herbicides, plastic sheeting, transgene technology and other new technologies - not only threatens the agro-ecosystem, but also puts a burden on the people's health. Several international agricultural monopolies such as fertiliser companies, feed companies, transgenic companies and additive companies continue to sell their products all over the world especially in developing countries. China's agriculture could possibly be battered by the "invasion" of these companies, because the nature of our agricultural industry is different from that of the United States, namely in the following aspects:

First, the United States has ample land and few farmers. China has little land and many farmers.

Second, in the US, arable land belongs to the farmers and are suitable for large-scale mechanised farming. China's land ownership and the right to use the land are separate and are mainly used for small family businesses.

Third, the US government gives great support to the farmers and there is evident awareness of profession safeguarding. China does not possess these advantages.

The above-mentioned features have determined that China's agriculture does not possess the qualities to follow the US' footsteps. Unfortunately, by giving up our natural advantages and by bringing in the ranch model used in developed countries, China's unique genetic diversity is under threat. At the same time new foreign varieties are brought in, domestic top-quality products are disappearing. Transgenic cereals and fast-growing livestock are replacing the rich germplasm resources which China's farmers have cultivated over centuries. It is time to take action in preserving native breeds.

Small-scale family farming is currently facing all kinds of challenges but the cultural edge of this model is also obvious. This is the high-value added agricultural product which is suitable for development with a large population and a long history of agriculture, also known as organic product (or ecological food, strictly speaking). Only by doing so can China's agricultural products compete with cheap agricultural imports. Unfortunately, because this issue has not been thoroughly evaluated, it has resulted in an embarrassing situation: cheap genetically modified soybeans from the US has hit the Chinese market severely, the prices of China's soybeans cannot compare to that of transgenic soybeans, and sky-high priced Japanese rice and American pork have entered the Chinese market. And this is a great insult to China's traditional agriculture.

To the 900 million agricultural population in China, food security is the nation's primary problem. High-input agriculture which swallows up small farming households and are led by the development of enterprises will not lead China on a sustainable path. Is China's agriculture like a small farm or a big ranch? How can the central preferential agricultural policy and agricultural support funds be implemented more scientifically? This is a big issue that concerns the construction of a new countryside and whether the state can maintain long-term stability.