

Food security law takes effect in China

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China's food security law began taking effect in the last week ensuring the supply of grain and related products.

The law, adopted by the top legislature in December 2023, comprises 11 chapters with provisions covering the whole process of grain supply, from production and reserve to circulation and processing.

In terms of grain processing, the law proposes efforts to promote and guide the development of the industry and guarantee the supply and security of grain processing products. It also states that grain processing operators must adhere to relevant industry standards and be held accountable for the quality and security of their products.

Despite having only 9 per cent of the world's arable land, China's responsibility to feed over 1.4 billion people has led to the prioritisation of food security. The law also includes provisions for the protection of arable land. Food security is a top national priority for China due to the uncertain situation in the world's food market, complex geopolitical conditions, and the risk of climate change. China is taking various measures to increase food production and self-sufficiency in agriculture.

Recently, China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) issued a guideline aiming to increase China's annual food production capacity by more than 50 million metric tonnes by 2030, with a focus on corn and soybeans. China produces more than 650 million tonnes of grain a year and is almost self-sufficient in staple crops such as rice and wheat, but it is still heavily reliant on soybeans from Brazil and the United States despite recent efforts to bolster local supplies.

According to Xinhua news agency, the guideline, which was drafted by the commission with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, was recently approved by the State Council, China's Cabinet, and issued to relevant authorities.

The commission aims to discourage the nonagricultural use of farmland and stabilise food-growing areas across the nation at around 116.7 million hectares by 2030, around the current level. Grain productivity is expected to exceed 6.3 tonnes a hectare by then, up from 5.8 tonnes last year.

The guideline suggests prioritising the production of different crops, such as improving the quality of rice and wheat by optimising variety structures, increasing corn productivity, and expanding soybean growing areas.

Corn and soybeans are important raw materials for making animal feed. In recent years authorities launched a campaign to bolster productivity in 200 corn-growing counties and 100 soybean-growing counties through methods ranging from promoting varieties that can be planted more densely to stepping up crop management efforts to prevent diseases and damage from pests. A mix of crop rotation and intercropping methods has been employed to expand the growing area for soybeans, which is also used to make cooking oil.

The commission has designated 720 counties across the nation as "key zones" for advancing the yield-boosting project over the next six years. They are expected to see the ramping up of efforts to build irrigation facilities and high-standard farmland suitable for large mechanical farming and more resilient to climate change, which some experts believe could also drive investment and help the economy recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives will also be launched to bolster the quality and supply of crop seeds.

The guideline is part of China's move to build itself into an agricultural powerhouse through efforts such as preserving growing areas, promoting mechanical farming, and popularising higher-yield varieties.

Official figures show that China's annual grain yield has remained above 650 million tonnes for nine consecutive years, and the per capita food stockpile was 493 kilograms last year, well above the international food security threshold of 400 kg. On multiple occasions, officials have reassured the public that China's food supply is stable and secure while stressing the need to further raise productivity and output in the face of growing demand for animal proteins and pointing out the vulnerabilities in global supply chains.

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