



# FOOD SECURITY

## Development and prospect of China's international cooperation on food security in the past 40 years of reform and opening-up

by Dr Wu Wenbin, Henan University of Technology, China

**I**nternational cooperation in food security is growing. Since the reform and opening up 40 years ago, China's international cooperation in food security has gone through a process from being initially closed and semi-closed to conditional trade exchanges and, gradually, to trade liberalisation, from receiving assistance to foreign aid, from in-kind assistance to technical assistance, and from humble introductions to going global.

### International trade in food is increasing

Before the reform and opening up, affected by various factors, China's grain import and export trade was very small, and most years were net imports. After the reform and opening up, economic development has driven the development of grain trade, and the scale of import and export has also been expanding.

Especially after China's accession to the WTO in 2001, grain imports increased rapidly, with the average annual growth rate from 2001 to 2017 reaching 1.13 percent. In 2017, grain imports hit a nearly 40-year high of 13,062 million tonnes, up nearly 14-fold from 8.83 million tonnes in 1978.

### International food cooperation goes from receiving aid to foreign aid

After the reform and opening up, China's international cooperation policy has also undergone a substantial adjustment, receiving large-scale international assistance. According to the ministry of commerce, China received more than US \$7 billion in international grant assistance in 2011, which not only solved the shortage of funds for domestic economic construction, but also brought advanced technology and management experience.

In terms of international food aid, the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) has played an important role in helping China eliminate hunger and reduce poverty. Over time, the number of poor people in China has been decreasing. By the

end of 2005, the number of people living in absolute poverty in rural areas had dropped from 400 million to 23.65 million, and the problem of food and clothing for the vast majority of the population had been largely solved.

Since 2006, China has been transformed from a food aid recipient to a donor. China has provided a lot of aid to the third world countries. By the end of 2009, China's foreign aid totaled 256.29 billion yuan.

### Foreign investment in international food cooperation grew rapidly

Since the reform and opening up 40 years ago, China's foreign investment in agriculture has grown from a slow increase to a rapid growth in recent years. Foreign investment in agriculture has become an important way for China to increase its participation in the world economy, expand its influence in the world and enhance its economic status in the world.

In 2014, China's outward foreign direct investment flow reached \$116 billion, making it a net capital exporter for the first time. The stock of foreign direct investment in agriculture increased rapidly from \$1.21 billion in 2008 to \$14.885 billion in 2016.

The investment field has developed from the initial production to processing, warehousing, logistics, trade and other aspects, involving planting, aquaculture, aquaculture, rural energy and other industries.

### Food international cooperation technology export to teach people to fish

Since the reform and opening up 40 years ago, as China's comprehensive national strength has been continuously enhanced, international cooperation in food security has been gradually introduced from abroad.

In addition to the emergency food aid, China has also increased technical assistance to China's food security. Through the

assistance of agricultural technology demonstration centres, they can send agricultural expert advice and technical cooperation, agricultural technical and management personnel training to help other developing countries to improve agricultural production capacity and to respond effectively to the food security problem.

At present, each year China aims to organise the implementation of aid projects for more than 120 countries and regions, throughout Asia, Africa, Oceania and Latin America. They have sent more than 30,000 agricultural experts and technical personnel to help set up agricultural technology within agricultural technology demonstration centres, as well as experiment stations and extending stations. At the same time, this helps the host countries and has trained a large number of agricultural technical personnel throughout the world.

### **Problems and challenges facing China's international cooperation in food security**

The international food security situation remains grim. Global trade protectionism and populism are on the rise, posing great challenges to international cooperation on world food security. Food security involves resources, environment, climate change and biodiversity, and is an important part of building a community of a shared future for mankind.

As a responsible major developing country, China needs to make its voice heard in world food security cooperation and play a leading role in world food security.

### **The structural shortage of grain in China is still serious**

China is a major agricultural producer and consumer of agricultural products. Grain output has been above 600 billion kilograms for five consecutive years. But, at the same time, grain



structural deficiency phenomenon is serious, especially soybean, feed and grain. At present, China's three major grain net imports have been normalised.

### **Enterprise quality and ability still need to be improved and strengthened**

International cooperation on food security is a macro task, but specific tasks still need to be implemented by specific enterprises. But at present, the quality and ability of Chinese food and agriculture enterprises need to be improved.

In addition, China's agricultural going-out is still in its infancy, and enterprises lack knowledge of international rules, host country policies, language and culture and international management experience, when implementing international food security cooperation projects, making follow-up implementation and management difficult.

## The development trend of China's international cooperation in food security

For developed countries and regions, trade will be the main source of diversification. China has become a net importer of food and the vulnerability of food security is increasing. Therefore, in order to reduce the risk of food security, China's food imports must reduce the over-dependence on a single country.

In 2017, China imported 712,400 tonnes of grain from Russia, an increase of 4.5 times, compared with 2014. On February 26, 2018, the general administration of quality supervision, inspection and quarantine of China issued a notice, canceling the quarantine requirements in 2016 and allowing Russia to export 15 million-to-50 million tonnes of wheat from six regions to China. This will further diversify the sources of China's grain imports.

## Developing countries and regions will be given priority to the cooperative development and utilisation of resources

Developing countries generally have relatively abundant and untapped natural resources. In the future, the development and utilisation of overseas resources in China's international cooperation on food security will be mainly distributed in Asia, Russia, Latin America and Africa.

Asia's international cooperation with China's grain security poses geographical advantages, no doubt, especially for those countries rich in natural resources in southeast Asia. China can make full use of the Asian infrastructure investment bank development opportunities and maritime silk road to continuously strengthen cooperation with international food security in the southeast Asian countries, enhancing the level of food security in the region and creating favorable conditions for the stability of the surrounding areas.

## Recommendations for future international cooperation on food security

We should build a community of a shared future for mankind and increase China's voice in international affairs. Food is the most important substance in the world and everyone has the equal right to food. In the world food security affairs, it is necessary to constantly strengthen the planning of relevant international cooperation, and actively promote the Chinese experience, Chinese technology and Chinese methods to countries and regions with food insecurity.

## We should make full use of the platforms of international organisations to strengthen trilateral cooperation

Since reform and opening up, China has become increasingly involved in international affairs. It has joined many international and regional organisations, including nearly 30 economic ones, including the food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations, apec, G20 and the greater Mekong sub region.

With the continuous enhancement of China's comprehensive national strength, China is playing an increasingly important role in these international organisations. Since 2006, China has gradually increased its contributions to the WFP and provided humanitarian food aid and rapid response to the WFP.

In the future, China should make full use of the platform of international organisations, to promote the use of international organisation rules, further strengthen tripartite cooperation, work



together to promote development and realise world food security.

## Support business initiatives to promote civil cooperation

Although many countries in the world hope to rely on China to develop their own economy, they also remain somewhat cautious about China. Recently, the China threat theory has been renewed. The expansion of China's influence has given rise to the "China infiltration theory".

Therefore, in the future, international cooperation on food security is necessary to strengthen the communication and coordination between governments, enhance political mutual trust, and strengthen food security cooperation with traditional friendly countries in Asia and Africa.

On the other hand, for neutral countries, we should actively support enterprises as the main body of international cooperation in food security. China support not only large enterprises with great influence, but also small and medium-sized enterprises with greater flexibility. Sub-regional and sub-standard measures will be taken to strengthen guidance and services for enterprises in international food security cooperation, so as to promote the development of local agriculture and improve the well-being of local farmers.

For countries that are hostile to each other, non-governmental exchanges and communication should be further promoted, and in-depth cooperation should be further promoted through voluntary learning of China's grain production experience and production technology, so as to improve the efficiency and efficiency of international cooperation on food security.