

China is a potential agricultural superpower

by Rosa Tennenbaum

China will not only be able to feed itself, but will become a major exporter of agricultural products by the middle of the next century. This is the essence of "Agriculture and Development," the fifth report prepared by the National Conditions Analysis and Research Group under the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and released in April. To achieve this bold aim, the country will have to increase its efforts to modernize its food production, and this report puts forward a detailed plan of how this has to be done. Because right now, agriculture is the crucial, but weak link that is restricting the growth of the national economy, and will continue to do so for a fairly long time to come, the scientists fear. They recommend that efforts and investments be geared up to change that in a reasonable time span.

In 1988, in its first report on national conditions, this governmental advisory group warned about the grain problems facing the country. Nine years later, its report is much more optimistic, after the country embarked on a course of economic development and growth in connection with the perspective of building the Eurasian Land-Bridge. Again and again, China's political leaders have been stressing that food is a matter of strategic importance, that the nation must not become dependent on food imports or it would risk its independent economic buildup altogether. The problem of feeding the huge population will be the country's top priority in the coming decades.

The Malthusian enemies

It is exactly this attitude that infuriates the neo-Malthusians, as well as the Western food cartels. Lester Brown, the president of the Worldwatch Institute and the world's leading Malthusian and ecologist, has been complaining in numerous doomsday reports that the Chinese will eat up the world's grain reserves. Beijing's development policy is to increase the living standard of the people, who are no longer satisfied with the proverbial bowl of rice (which he apparently thinks is appropriate for them), but who want to "move up the food chain," as he calls it, i.e., they want to eat more and better.

This is a nightmare for Brown et al. More grain is needed to produce meat, milk, and milk products. "Since 1990, most of the growth in grain use in China has been for feed to fuel the unprecedented growth in its livestock and poultry industries.

Between 1990 and 1995, the use of grain expanded by 39 million tons, 31 million of it for feed. It is this enormous appetite for meat that has helped push the growth in demand beyond that of production," he raved, at a press briefing at his institute at the beginning of March. To see how absurd such accusations are, one has to know that the average Chinese consumed 25 kilograms of meat per year in 1990, compared to 114 kg for the average American (see **Table 1**). So, what Brown calls an "enormous appetite for meat," is in reality an enormous deficit, and one that will become ever more visible as the living standard of the population improves.

China has 22% of the world's population, but only 7% of the world's arable land. So, China will have to buy more and more grain on the world market to feed its population, the Malthusians claim. Brown calculated that in the year 2030, China, with "an infinitely larger population working up the food chain faster than ever before," will import up to 300 million tons of grain per year, which would be all the grain available on the world market for export, causing hunger and starvation in the rest of the world. His conclusion is that the world has to stop China's economic upswing and keep the country in poverty. In addition, the world population has to be cut down to "sustainable levels"—another demand that Brown has been making for years.

The cartels, too, argue that China, with its limited land-mass, will have to import heavily, but their idea is to use the growing purchasing power of the Chinese to reap an export bonanza. For them, China has to be forced into the World Trade Organization as fast as possible, which would give the cartels unlimited access to this huge market. Of course, domestic agriculture could not develop under such circumstances, but this is exactly what they want. They make their money by shipping grain, feed grains, and other food stuffs all around the globe. The lower that China's domestic supply is, the better for them.

Promising development

The Chinese see this situation differently. They have made tremendous efforts in recent years to intensify agricultural production and to increase their domestic food supply. Since the implementation of the economic reforms at the beginning of the 1980s, the country geared up grain production by 57%, to 480 million tons last year. Meat production increased fivefold, to 58 million tons; so did production of fish and fish products, to 28 million tons (see **Figure 1**). These are growth rates the rest of the world is not even dreaming of. And, Beijing wants to accelerate this process.

While other nations are bankrupting farmers and driving down production, China has been boosting farm prices, increasing input of fertilizers, and promoting use of better seeds, better techniques of soil management, and so on. These achievements are still concentrated on the areas around the big cities and the free trade zones, while in the more remote countryside, farmers are falling behind. A major reason for

TABLE 1

Per-capita use and consumption of livestock products in the United States and China, 1990
(in kilograms)

Country	Grain use	Livestock product consumption				
		beef	pork	poultry	milk*	eggs
United States	800	42	28	44	271	16
China	300	1	21	3	4	7

Source: FAO, FAO Production Yearbook 1990 (Rome, 1991)
* including milk products

this is the lack of infrastructure: Every second village in these vast areas has no direct access to a road. Nevertheless, the achievements made in modernizing agriculture are mentioned favorably in the report of the Academy of Sciences.

The bumper harvests of the last two years were achieved mainly because a sharp increase in grain prices boosted the enthusiasm of Chinese farmers to increase grain-growing areas. "It has become a very challenging task which requires decades of effort by the government to meet the increasing demand for grain by more than 1 billion people and help hundreds of millions of surplus rural laborers find jobs," the scientists admit. Today, China counts 450 million farmers, many of whom will no longer be needed on the farm, as agriculture is made more productive. At the same time, an expanding industrial base will need a larger and larger labor force. To modernize agriculture is only possible in parallel with an industrialization program.

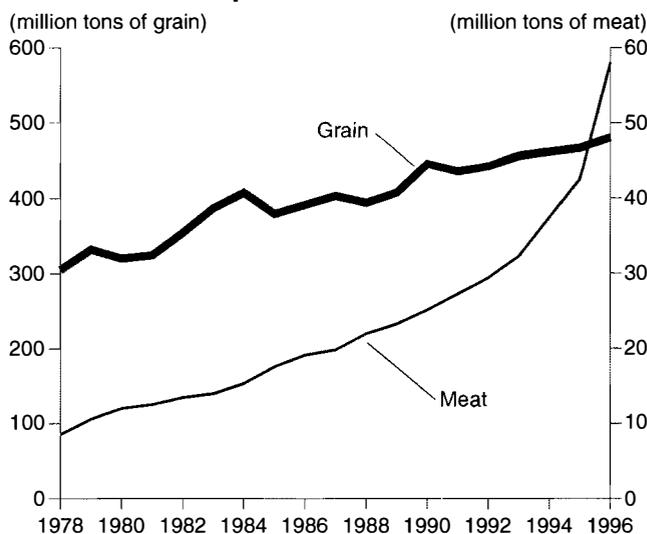
On the international market, China has no advantages over competitors in grain and oil crops, the report continues. But, comparatively speaking, China is more competitive in providing labor-intensive and some technology-intensive agro-products. "China should make the most of its advantage in rich labor forces and natural resources and try profit-making agriculture and intensive farming," the report states. In agriculture, China's status is between that of developed and developing countries. This position allows China to make full use of an abundant labor force that developed countries do not have, and its relatively high technology that is not found in the developing countries. The combination of labor resources and technology is an advantage for China and has great potential, while its weak points are in developing high-technology products and resource-consuming products, the experts state.

An emphasis on bio-engineering

China should pioneer a road toward development that accords with its national conditions, which modernizes its agriculture and promotes a steady growth of food production. The report maintains that bio-engineering projects are the best approach for China's agriculture, and suggests that investment be increased for bio-projects and basic research on gene

FIGURE 1

Grain and meat production in China



Source: Government of China.

technology—especially that which is closely related to grain production. Improved strains of grain have played a special role in agriculture. China should rely on everyday technology to create many new strains in the short term, and use highly advanced technology to make breakthroughs in grain development over the long run. But, the country also shows great promise in producing agro-products other than grain, the scientists stress.

The report suggests that millions of farmers should be trained nationwide in rural vocational schools or other training courses. The government should provide them with small loans so they can soon become the leading force in agricultural production and scientific farming. "China will be fully capable of providing food for its people by the middle of the next century and become one of the world's biggest exporters of agricultural products," the report states.

This report is a slap in the face to people like Lester Brown. China is a sleeping agricultural giant that is about to wake up. It has the potential not only to become self-sufficient in basic foods and other needs, but it could develop into a major food exporter and thereby block the genocidalist plans of the Malthusian lobby that have been dominating agriculture policy of the big food producers like the United States, Europe, and countries belonging to the British Commonwealth, such as Canada and Australia, for the past 25 years. Clearly, if China goes down this path, the use of Henry Kissinger's food-as-a-weapon policy, which is among the most powerful threats in international politics to enforce the interests of the cartels on other countries, will be blunted and, hopefully, will soon be in shambles.