

Rotating use of farmland will bring a harvest of new growth

Planting enriching crops and resting the soil can boost sustainability

By HU YONGQI
huyongqi@chinadaily.com.cn

China announced that the area of farmland designated to cultivate different crops or lay fallow will increase to 2 million hectares this year, 25 percent more than last year, a move that experts said will help promote sustainable agriculture by giving the soil a break to recover from overuse and pollution.

The central government will subsidize 2 million hectares of farmland that will either lie fallow for one year or rotate between corn or soybean, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said on Wednesday.

A new area of 333,333 hectares of rotating land is situated along the Yangtze River Valley and another 66,666 hectares of land will lie fallow for one year in some parts of Heilongjiang province that have overused the ground water, the ministry said.

The announcement was the latest move of a pilot program to rotate or lie fallow some farmland which was started in 2016 by the Ministry of Agriculture, the predecessor of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and other nine State Council departments.

In 2016, the pilot program covered 410,666 hectares of land in nine provinces and autonomous regions, including Liaoning, Yunnan and Gansu. In 2017, the acreage doubled with pilot regions remaining the same. Last year, three more provincial regions, such as Jiangsu and Jiangxi, joined the pilot program while 1.6 million hectares of farmland were rotated or remained idle.

With 7 percent of the world's arable land, China has succeeded in feeding one-fifth of the world's population over the past few decades. To achieve that goal, the country has paid the price as the agricultural sector now faces challenges, such as an overuse of ground water, soil erosion and pollution.

Last year, China harvested 657.9 million metric tons of staple food, said the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs. Meanwhile, the world's second-largest economy imported 20.46 million metric tons of staple food and 88.03 million tons of soybeans, according to the General Administration of Customs. These figures show the structural imbalance of the agricultural sector, meaning the country should adjust where and what to grow nationwide.

Many countries around the world also have fallow land pro-



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Qin Li, farmer in Ninghe, Inner Mongolia autonomous region

grams supported by governmental subsidies, with India ranking the first in 2016 as it designated 14 million hectares of land to lie fallow that year.

In his report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, President Xi Jinping pledged to expand the pilot program of rotating and resting farmland, which demonstrated the CPC Central Committee's determination to promote green development of agriculture and accelerate building an ecological civilization.

Under the program, corn is grown in one season on rotated farmland and soybeans the next, because this crop can help improve land fertility as its roots accumulate fertilizing nitrogens. For fallow land, farmers stop growing any-

thing on their land for one year.

Whatever their choice, farmers can join the program voluntarily and will receive subsidies from the government to ensure income. Subsidies provided by the central government also surged in the past three years, from 1.4 billion yuan (\$208 million) in 2016 to 5 billion yuan in 2018.

This year, Bayannur city in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region started to keep some land idle for the first time. Qin Li, a farmer in his 40s in the county-level city of Ninghe, said many farmers are willing to join the program as they know their land cannot sustain heavy cultivation.

“After years of cultivation, a very small part of my land seems desertified, demonstrated by a sandstorm in winter. Land needs a break to recover its fertility,” Qin said. “In a

simple word, we cannot always take from the land but should also protect it. Otherwise, it cannot last.”

Rotating farmland or keeping it fallow is beneficial to the sustainable use of terra firma and the development for the whole agricultural sector at large, said Qin Fu, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

Policy support and subsidies are indispensable to promoting the pilot program and also ensuring a stable income for farmers, said the researcher. Considering China's national conditions, rotating and keeping land fallow should go in line with long-term development of agriculture by piloting in some regions that are particularly ecologically fragile and have serious problems in losing fertility of land, he said.

Policy digest

Quicker procedures to register properties

China will reduce the time required for property registration to improve the business environment, according to a notice released by the State Council General Office on March 11. According to the notice, more will be done to enable the sharing of information and integration of registration procedures to refine the process for property registration.

Under the notice, the time required for general registration and mortgage registration will be cut to no more than 10 and five working days respectively by the end of this year. Before the end of 2020, both are expected to be reduced to no more than five working days.



The notice also called for greater efforts to promote information sharing and integration among departments. Related departments should provide information on property registration in a timely manner and strengthen coordination with registration institutions to achieve connectivity and sharing before the end of this year.

It also stated that authorities should not require applicants to submit the same materials as long as such materials could be obtained via the government information-sharing systems.

Efforts should be made to make full use of such technologies as the internet, big data, facial recognition and online payment to promote Internet Plus property registration, said the notice. Online application platforms will be established so that applicants can access the registration services 24 hours a day, and services for reservation, inquiry, payment and provision of electronic certificates will also be made available.

The notice also urged local authorities to speed up the integration and improvement of stock data and enable exchanges at levels of cities, counties and townships before the end of 2019. It also called for the integrated process with optimized procedures and streamlined materials. The notice also stressed the need to streamline procedures of property registration and reduce application materials.

Local authorities to listen to enterprises

The State Council has urged local authorities and government departments to better heed advice from enterprises and industry associations before making regulations related to the operations of businesses, according to a notice published on Wednesday.

The move is part of efforts to promote the transformation of government functions and further the reform to streamline administration, enhance compliance oversight and improve government services, said the notice. Authorities should make adequate efforts to solicit opinions from representative enterprises, industrial associations, chambers of commerce and lawyers' associations in the process of making regulations, said the notice.

During the regulation-making process, the authorities should solicit public opinion through various channels, including the internet and media, and heed the advice of businesses, especially private businesses, labor-intensive enterprises and small and micro businesses, said the notice.

Authorities are also required to hold hearings and symposiums to guide businesses and chambers of commerce to hold adequate discussions to voice their opinions, said the notice, adding that the feedback from businesses and associations should be taken in full consideration by authorities.

During the implementation process, the authorities should set up a buffer period to leave enough time for businesses to implement new regulations.

XU WEI

POLICY RESPONSE

Healthcare, education among key topics

By XU WEI
xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

Several ministry level departments, including those for healthcare security, market regulation and education, have responded recently to issues of public concern.

More cancer drugs to be included in insurance list

The National Healthcare Security Administration said on Wednesday that it is considering adding more anti-cancer drugs to its new list of medicines eligible for medical insurance reimbursement this year.

The administration said in a statement that it will expand the list of drugs included in the medical insurance and refine the structure of medicines to reduce the



burden on patients.

Apart from cancer drugs, medicines for rare diseases, chronic illness, children and first-aid treatment are also priorities for the new reimbursement list, according to the statement.

The candidates for inclusion should be drugs that have been launched in markets with the approval of the National Medical Products Administration before the end of last year, according to the document.

Last year, 17 anti-cancer drugs were included in the country's medical insurance reimbursement list, with their prices cut by 56.7 percent on average after a round of price negotiations between the administration and pharmaceutical companies.

The new list of drugs will be published before June, and the authority will also publish a new list of drugs for which their prices are being negotiated between the administration and producers, the statement said.

Quality checks carried out on range of products

The State Administration for Market Regulation released the

result of its random quality check on 30 categories of products carried out at the end of last year on Friday, which also marked World Consumer Rights Day.

The market regulator said in a statement that of the 2,786 batches of checked goods, ranging from pens to building materials, 12.5 percent were found to have failed quality standards. The quality inspection covered more than 2,400 producers.

It said that microwave ovens, food processing machines such as juicers, and printers were of the best quality with no inferior products found. Ten categories including pens, stuffed toys, projectors and copper pipes saw over 90 percent of products reaching quality standards.

Meanwhile, about 20 to 40 percent of treadmills, soybean milk machines and paper shredders were found to have failed quality standards in the inspection.

The market regulator said it would step up follow-up checks on categories with a higher percentage of failing quality standards, adding that producers that failed the checks, in particular those



rejecting checks or having persistent poor records, would face severe punishment.

Ministry to conduct review of school apps

The Ministry of Education said in a policy document released on Thursday that it will conduct a full review of mobile apps used by schools to ensure they are free of harmful content.

The ministry will launch a joint campaign with cyberspace authorities to crack down on illegal mobile apps used within campuses.

It will also come up with a regulation on mobile apps to be used on campuses to establish a long-term mechanism on management of such applications.

The ministry introduced a ban on apps containing inappropriate

information involving pornography, violence, online games or commercial advertisements in December, listing several detailed measures for eradicating such apps.

It also called for stricter review on mobile apps for educational purposes to ensure that they do not increase students' academic burdens or teachers' workloads.

Greater scrutiny of personal information use

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology said on Saturday that it will launch investigations into businesses that allegedly used mobile apps to illegally gather personal information and made unsolicited phone calls to individuals.

The move came after reports by the China Central Television on its gala for the World Consumer Rights Day on Friday that several internet companies are using robots to make nuisance calls to pitch products and services.

The ministry said it has launched an investigation into the four companies suspected of making the nuisance calls and will punish them if their wrongdoings are confirmed.

It has also required app stores to ban mobile applications suspected of gathering information of users.