

# **Report of China's National Dialogue on Food Security and Sustainable Development for the United Nations Food Systems Summit**

## **Summit**

**Key words:** food security, sustainable transformation of food systems, food system resilience, rural revitalization, sustainable agricultural development, eco-friendly, low-carbon, policy support for food systems, new development philosophy, right to development, people-oriented, ensure food security through farmland protection and stewardship and technological advancements.

In response to the United Nations' call for Member State Summit Dialogues, China convened its National Dialogue on Food Security and Sustainable Development in Beijing on 26 April 2021. The Dialogue, which engaged stakeholders in the discussion on food security and sustainable agricultural development, had a full success as expected.

### **I. Major focus**

Under the theme of “Promoting Sustainable Development and Safeguarding National Food Security”, this event brought together various stakeholders to assess food systems from different perspectives. Through dialogues, they discussed the directions, goals, approaches and pathways of China's food system transformation, on the basis of which a national roadmap to sustainable food systems in China by 2030 can be developed.

The Dialogue addressed five topics, namely China's food system transformation and policy support, food production and sustainable development, food loss and shock response, food security and equitable livelihoods for urban and rural residents, and sustainable food consumption.

The Dialogue reviewed China's achievements and international contribution in safeguarding food security, eradicating absolute poverty, and implementing the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Dialogue also discussed the problems and challenges facing China's food systems now and into the future and China's coping strategies. Topics covered are as follows: 1) direction and challenges of China's food system transformation; 2) stakeholder engagement and the government's role in the transformation; 3) ways to ensure universal access to energy-sufficient and nutritionally diverse foods; 4) ways to reduce food loss and waste; 5) ways to improve farmer resilience to natural risks; 6) ways to leverage science and technology in catalyzing food system transformation and sustainable development.

### **II. Participants**

The Dialogue attracted 107 delegates from related UN agencies, international

organizations, central government authorities, subnational governments, research institutes, universities, businesses, financial institutions and media outlets, including:

1. 11 representatives of international organizations

Such as the UN, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations World Food Programme, International Fund for Agricultural Development, United Nations Environment Programme, Centre for Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization, and United Nations Children's Fund.

2. 29 representatives of central government authorities

Such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Natural Resources, Ministry of Ecology and Environment, National Health Commission, National Food and Strategic Reserve Administration, National Forestry and Grassland Administration, and National Administration for Rural Revitalization.

3. 40 representatives of research institutes

Such as the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, State Food and Nutrition Consultant Committee, Research Center for Rural Economy of MARA, Agricultural Trade Promotion Center of MARA, Center of International Cooperation Service of MARA, Institute of Food and Nutrition Development of MARA, China Agricultural University, Peking University, Zhejiang University, Renmin University of China, Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Chinese Academy of Meteorological Sciences, Nanjing University of Finance and Economics, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, Shandong Academy of Agricultural Sciences, and Xinjiang Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

4. 11 representatives of foundations, businesses and financial institutions

Namely Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Industrial Development Fund for Impoverished Areas, Syngenta Beijing Innovation Center, Jiangxi Xinbang Biochemistry Co., Ltd., Agricultural Development Bank of China, and Meituan Youxuan Development Cooperation Center.

5. 4 local representatives

From Heilongjiang Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, People's Government of Qing'an County, Heilongjiang Province, Henan Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, and Xintiandi Crop Production Cooperative of Xingyang City, Henan Province.

6. 12 representatives of media outlets

Such as Xinhua News Agency, People's Daily, China Media Group, Economic Daily, China Food Newspaper, China Agriculture Film and Television Center, and Farmers' Daily.

### **III. Outcomes**

The Dialogue recalled how the Chinese people, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, has realized self-sufficiency in food supply and contributed to easing global food shortages since 1949. As it regards the rights to subsistence and development as basic human rights of paramount importance, China has been trying to ensure food security through farmland protection and stewardship, as well as technological advances. China implements the strictest farmland preservation strategy to maintain at least 120 million hectares of farmland. Thanks to such efforts, China has managed to feed 20 percent of the world's population with only 7 percent of the world's farmland, achieved repeated record highs in food production, markedly improved the people's health and nutritional status, and mainstreamed green development in its agricultural sector.

It is a marvel in mankind's history of poverty alleviation that China, home to one fifth of the world's population, has won the fight against poverty on schedule. By eradicating extreme poverty, China delivered on the poverty reduction goal of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ahead of schedule, and thus made an important contribution to the cause of global poverty alleviation and the progress of humankind.

At a new stage of high-quality development, China has started transforming and upgrading its food and agriculture sector. Despite resource constraints, climate change, food supply pressure and other challenges, China stays committed to food self-sufficiency by resolutely advancing food security strategies. Besides, it has been improving agricultural support policies to establish more sustainable agricultural policies and systems, strengthening the integration of basic research, commercial application and entrepreneurship to raise the capacity of innovation in agricultural science and technology, and upholding opening-up and cooperation by leveraging both international and domestic resources and markets to facilitate global governance reform for food and agriculture.

UN representatives were invited to the meeting, including Agnes Kalibata, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to the 2021 Food Systems Summit, Carlos Watson, FAO representative to China, Maha Ahmed, Deputy Country Director of WFP China, and Matteo Marchisio, IFAD Representative in China. Dr. Kalibata acknowledged China's constructive role in the UN Food Systems Summit and expressed her hope for China to continue to share its ideas and experience, work with other countries to build resilient and sustainable food systems, and further contribute to global food security and sustainable agricultural development. Maha Ahmed said that, China, vastly experienced in this regard, is a model for other developing countries. In recent years, by working with WFP on actions to reduce post-harvest loss and food waste, China has been sharing its experience and practices with all the developing countries to help them achieve "Zero Hunger" by 2030. At the same time, WFP is a willing partner of China to explore innovative modalities in food storage and production cooperation to support China's food security policies.

## **TOPIC 1: Transformation of China's food systems and policy support**

The discussions were conducted mainly on two aspects: (1) emerging trends in China's food security and new policy orientation, (2) reforms and policies on promoting the transformation of China's food systems.

The participants identified three emerging trends in China's food security: **(1) shift in consumer demands.** Since the basic living needs of the Chinese people have been met, their demands for food products have evolved, resulting in the shift of the country's focus in food supply to satisfying food consumption preferences. **(2) new challenges in production.** Since the growth of agricultural production in China is constrained by high labor cost and small production scale, it is thus essential for China to lower costs and expand production scale. **(3) future policies should aim to boost agricultural productivity.** China should take stronger actions to improve soil fertility, develop high-quality farmland and improve irrigation facilities, and grant critical policy support to technology innovation and extension in such fields as varieties, infrastructure, mechanization, digitization, food preservation, storage and processing.

With its commitment to safeguarding grain security unchanged, China is transforming its food systems to increase value addition, achieve sustainable agricultural development, and promote the transfer of excessive rural labor force to non-agricultural sectors. The fundamental drivers for such transformation include institutional innovation, technological advances, market reform and agricultural investment. The participants agree that future policies should focus on the following aspects. (1) institutional innovation. A new leading group should be set up to better coordinate policies and investments of various departments, advance reforms in rural land system and other relevant fields, and support the development of competitive farmers' cooperatives. (2) innovation in policies. China should adopt strong and innovative measures to ensure food security through technological advances and deepen market and supply-side structural reform. It should also further develop agricultural insurance and its social security system, and support the efforts to improve food systems with digital technologies. (3) innovation in investment. China should apply new approaches for farmland protection and stewardship to increase grain production and invest more in technology and human capital.

Food systems across the globe are rather fragile due to unbalanced development, natural disasters and shocks of COVID-19. Therefore, countries should step up international cooperation, particularly multilateral cooperation and south-south cooperation, to jointly tackle changes in global food systems and make them sustainable, healthy and resilient.

## **TOPIC 2: Food production and sustainable development**

The session on Topic 2 focused on food production and sustainable development as well as recommendations for promoting green and sustainable agricultural

development.

Participants agreed that China has implemented a wide range of measures and achieved tangible outcomes in green agricultural and rural development, including integrated approaches for agricultural resource utilization and conservation, improved environmental protection in agricultural production, continuous restoration of agricultural ecosystems, and development of green production systems. The Chinese government has made agricultural and rural development a top priority in its work and launched full-ledged efforts to advance rural revitalization, thus offering historic opportunity for green development in agriculture. Besides, scientific and technological innovation has also been fueling green development in agriculture. The participants identified that waste recycling is the key to green and low-carbon development in agriculture, and recognized that further progress in the recycling of agricultural waste is necessary for China to achieve its goals on emission peak and carbon neutrality.

The participants presented a series of recommendations, namely enhancing resource conservation and utilization, strengthening environmental and ecological protection in agriculture, implementing the program of variety development, quality enhancement, brandname building, and production standardization, as well as encouraging innovation in green agricultural technology.

The participants also recognized three crises facing the world: the climate crisis, degradation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity, and pollution and waste. These three crises are interconnected with each other, and all closely related to food security and sustainable development. To effectively respond to these three crises not only requires scientific and technological progress, but also strengthened regulation of technology.

### **TOPIC 3: Food loss and shock response**

Topic 3 focused on food loss and shock response. Participants discussed critical approaches to effective prevention of and response to food crisis.

Participants believed that China's endeavor to reduce post-harvest loss has been underpinned by a wide range of support policies and programs.

On the one hand, the government has pooled substantial research resources to investigate and assess post-harvest loss, making almost parallel research progress with FAO and western developed countries.

On the other hand, various food research institutes and businesses in China have mounted collaborative innovation efforts on the R&D, extension and application of post-harvest technologies and equipment. China's National Food and Strategic Reserves Administration has spared no effort to implement the strategy of developing the food sector through technology innovation and human capital development. It has also established post-harvest service centers under the national quality grain project, i.e. Action Plan on High-quality Chinese Grains and Edible Oil. With investments

from both state-owned and local enterprises, the centers have produced positive outcomes. Over 4000 such service centers have been set up nationwide, leading to a drop of 4 percentage points in food loss at storage and drying stages alone. In addition, President Xi Jinping has launched an important initiative for China to host the International Conference on Food Loss Reduction in due course, with a view to facilitating experience sharing and enhancing global food security.

Participants also analyzed the technological, economic and policy factors that cause post-harvest loss in China, and concluded that four questions need to be answered before food loss can be effectively lowered.

1. Why is it important to drive down food loss?
2. Who seeks to reduce food loss?
3. Who has the capacity to cut food loss?
4. Who shall take up the work on the ground?

At present, the meteorological disasters that affect China's major food crops and the temporal-spatial pattern featured have evolved over time, making climate change adaptation tailored to the local situation an essential approach to sustain agricultural output. Many measures against meteorological disasters in agriculture have been adopted, but systemic theoretical research and application demonstration is still lacking. More efforts are needed in disaster early-warning, selection breeding and cultivation technology.

In addition, participants noted that food is lost throughout the food supply chain in both the form of food waste and inevitable loss. To cut food loss, the government must quicken the pace of legislation, upgrade technology, equipment and facilities, and enhance public education. As an effective conduit for cutting loss, e-commerce businesses should be promoted to standardize farm production and marketing activities, driving down food loss while creating value addition and higher rural income.

Participants also proposed the following measures to strengthen shock response ability of the food supply chain. First, supply chain technology needs to be improved to prevent food loss. Second, concrete actions should be taken to step up legislation, improve law enforcement and strengthen guidance on public opinion. Third, food reserves and logistics needs to be improved. How long food reserves should be stored is a question of considerable importance in the international community. In a word, efforts should be launched on the supply chain to reduce loss and waste, so as to increase supply, better ensure food security and consumer health, and improve resource sustainability.

#### **TOPIC 4: Food security and equitable livelihoods of urban and rural residents**

Topic 4, food security and equitable livelihoods of urban and rural residents,

highlighted the livelihood and development issues facing people in the food systems. China has accomplished its poverty reduction goal under the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 10 years ahead of schedule, providing Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to reducing poverty on a global scale. Since the reform and opening up, the incidence of poverty in China has dropped from 97.5 percent to zero and extreme poverty has been eradicated.

In poor rural areas, people have seen their income grow rapidly, with ever-improving living conditions, infrastructure and public services, and fundamental changes in rural governance. China's success in eliminating extreme poverty can be attributed to strong political leadership, consistent anti-poverty actions and the policy of reform and opening-up.

China's experience include: 1) Poverty alleviation programs are led by governments and participated by various stakeholders; 2) China has remained committed to a targeted poverty alleviation strategy; 3) China has inspired poor people with the motivation to fight poverty; and 4) China has mobilized private actors to build a strong synergy in the fight against poverty.

Two principles need to be followed to ensure equitable livelihoods during food systems transformation. First, the voices of workers and professionals whose jobs are relevant to food systems must be heard so as to help the food systems grow in a sustainable manner. Second, to build resilient food systems, people involved in food systems development must be empowered based on the principle of putting people first.

Special attention must be paid to the ways of benefiting smallholder farmers worldwide through food systems transformation and reform. It is important that these 500 million smallholder farmers gain from this process as they contribute to 75 percent of global food production. Measures include strengthening the farmers' organizations, so that farmers will be better able to utilize digital technologies and e-commerce platforms, which give them easier access to the market and at the same time create more job opportunities for women and young people in rural areas. In addition, it is necessary to ensure fair investment in order to promote green technology and help farmers in remote areas access the market.

### **TOPIC 5: Sustainable food consumption**

Topic 5 focused on sustainable food consumption in the transformation of China's food systems. What China needs is to foster nutrition-oriented consumption patterns. It faces three major challenges. First, China's food production and supply fail to serve its upgraded domestic consumption. Second, food production and processing technologies fail to meet the new demands of consumers. Third, public perception of healthy diets fails to keep pace with new consumption patterns.

Sustainable food consumption requires a shift in dietary structure and improvement of dietary patterns. Measures include:

First, it is important to realize that sustainable food consumption is more than sustainable production. It is also about nutritious and healthy food.

Second, nutrition and health need to be factored into China's top-level planning and built into policies. The goal of carbon neutrality should be taken into account while formulating nutrition guidelines and recommendations. The Chinese government needs to promote institutional reform to enhance its governing capacity for making the complex food systems more effective, eco-friendly, inclusive and sustainable.

Third, China should prioritize technology innovation, especially R&D on agricultural technology. China should pursue innovation in nutrition-oriented production technology, and improve nutritional standards for agricultural products. It should also advocate moderate and targeted processing, so as to reduce loss and improve efficiency during the processing process.

Fourth, China should promote education on and share knowledge about food nutrition and health, and provide guidance on food consumption. It should raise awareness of recycling so that all the byproducts of consumer goods can be recycled.

#### **IV. Future plans**

The participants of the Dialogue exchanged ideas, shared experience and forged consensus through extensive discussions held from both Chinese and international perspectives. Going forward, China will continue to support the UN in hosting the Summit and work with other parties to facilitate the Summit's preparations. It will give high priority to building sustainable, inclusive and resilient food and agriculture systems and take proactive actions for better global food and agricultural governance.

##### **1. Reinforcing the fundamental importance of agriculture and food production**

China has embarked on a new journey of fully building a modern socialist country. It is now implementing a rural revitalization strategy that underpins agricultural and rural development. Standing at a new starting point, China will take more vigorous measures and pool more strength to promote the transformation of food and agriculture systems and better ensure the supply of grains and other major agricultural products, with a special focus on strengthening quality control and promoting low-carbon and green growth modes. China will prioritize the development of agriculture and rural areas, take full ownership for its food security and make food production a permanent priority in every year's program of work. China will further strengthen farmland protection and stewardship, step up technology development and put in place sound support systems to overcome challenges emerging from the transformation of food systems and enhance productivity and risk management ability. It will further increase the diversity of food supply to better meet people's different demands, and transform industry chains and supply chains into value chains. Through these efforts, China aims to build sustainable, healthy and resilient food and agriculture systems and safeguard national food security with higher standards.

China will continue to pursue its strategy with Chinese characteristics to ensure food

security based on domestic production, and faithfully implement the new development philosophy featuring innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development. While ensuring its own food security, China will also join hands with all countries to address food-related issues and boost the sound development of the global food and agricultural sector.

## **2. Transforming growth models in the food and agricultural sector**

In view of its challenges in agricultural and rural development, in particular, unbalanced, inadequate and uncoordinated development, China is committed to extending the industry chain, upgrading the value chain, developing the supply chain, and promoting integrated development of the primary, secondary and tertiary industries to deliver high-quality development and develop green growth models in agriculture. Meanwhile, China will continue to consolidate poverty alleviation outcomes and gradually shift the policy focus towards rural revitalization to enhance farmers' happiness and sense of fulfillment.

Vigorous actions will be taken in the following areas.

**Transformation of food systems and policy support:** China will focus on satisfying the growing demands of its people for quality food. It will further strengthen farmland protection and stewardship, accelerate technology development, and improve incentives and accountability to support food production. With special attention given to protecting farmers' benefits, China will improve its agricultural support policies by further drawing on international experience to boost farmers' enthusiasm for producing grain and other foods.

**Food Production and Sustainable Development:** China will adopt an integrated resource utilization and conservation approach in agriculture, and work relentlessly to restore agricultural ecosystems, develop eco-friendly production systems to deliver green and low-carbon development in agriculture.

**Food Loss and Shock Response:** China will commit to breed varieties that are high in yield, quality and tolerance, promote new cultivation methods, improve agricultural insurance policies, and build on its capacity for managing agricultural natural disasters to improve risk management, science-based responses, as well as prevention, relief and recovery programs.

**Food Security and Equitable Livelihoods of Urban and Rural Residents:** China will adhere to and scale up the effective approaches and practices in poverty alleviation. It will implement programs led by governments and participated by various stakeholders, follow through the targeted alleviation strategy, and boost the self-motivation and abilities of vulnerable groups to pursue development.

**Sustainable Food Consumption:** Based on national food consumption patterns, China will strengthen education on health and nutrition properties of food, provide consumers with better guidance, and establish sound institutional systems for nutrition to promote sustainable food consumption.

### **3. Taking a proactive part in global food and agricultural governance**

China will continue to play a constructive role in the UN Food Systems Summit by completing the report of the national pathway to sustainable food systems and sharing Chinese wisdom and solutions on food and agricultural governance with the international community.

Facing with global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and natural disasters, China looks forward to working with all parties to support the Summit in achieving positive outcomes.

China calls for all parties to join forces to open up new prospects for global food security and agricultural development through:

- building more inclusive and resilient global food systems. More political, financial and technical support should be devoted to agriculture to sustain growth in food supply capacity while more assistance should be channeled to key areas and priority populations.
- ensuring the safety and stability of global supply chains. Joint efforts should be made to minimize trade restrictions and uphold multilateral trading regime for the smooth operation of global agricultural industry chains and supply chains.
- boosting agricultural productivity. It is imperative to make agriculture more innovative, competitive and productive through advances in cutting edge technologies.
- reducing global food loss and waste. Concerted efforts on accelerating institutional reforms, technological advances and awareness building should be made to cut down food loss and waste from farm to fork.

China also plans to host the International Conference on Food Loss Reduction at a suitable time, and looks forward to the active participation of G20 members and international organizations in the Conference.