

Vision and Action on Jointly Promoting Agricultural Cooperation on the Belt and Road

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Since the world entered the 21st century, the pace for economic integration has quickened, giving rise to a new era of peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit. In September and October of 2013, President Xi Jinping P. R. China proposed the initiative of jointly building the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative) during visits to Central and Southeast Asia respectively, which has attracted close attention from the world. Rooted in the principle of mutual consultation, joint efforts and shared interests, the Initiative is committed to a free trade system and an open global economy, encouraging countries along the Belt and Road (B&R) to achieve coordination of economic policies and jointly creating an open, inclusive and balanced regional economic cooperation architecture that benefits all.

Agricultural exchanges and trade were an important part of the ancient Silk Road, via which flax, pomegranate, alfalfa, grape and other plants came to China, and Chinese know-how and products like well digging, silk and tea went to Central Asia and farther. Countries were benefited from wider spread of farming skills and commodities. Agricultural civilization expanded and prospered in Asia, Europe and Africa through closer connectivity of countries. In the new era, agriculture remains the foundation of the national economy in B&R countries, and agricultural cooperation is their common pursuit since many long to fight hunger, eradicate poverty, and achieve food and nutrition security. Therefore under the Initiative, agricultural cooperation can be a good foothold for B&R countries to build a community of common interests and destiny.

In the past three years, great progress has been made in agricultural cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road. We have entered into proactive collaborations and connection through bilateral and multilateral cooperative mechanisms. Cooperative scope has expanded in width and depth, and is joined by increasing number of players in diversified ways. This Vision and Action is thus drafted to foster top-level design on agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road.

I. Background

Now the world is undergoing profound and complex changes. As repercussions of the financial crisis linger on, the economy recovers at a slow pace, and development is uneven. Trade and investment landscape and multilateral rules are undergoing major adjustments. The Initiative to jointly build the Belt and Road, embracing the trend towards a multi-polar world, economic globalization, cultural diversity and greater IT application, is a positive endeavor to seek new models of international cooperation and global governance.

Transformation has also occurred in the global agricultural development structure in recent years. Climate change inflicts deeper and deeper impact upon major grain producing regions. Bio-energy, financial speculation and other non-traditional factors build up uncertainties in the

global agricultural market. Food insecurity and poverty plague many developing countries, and there are still 795 million people suffering from chronic hunger and 2 billion people from malnutrition. Lack of momentum for a sustained growth and changes in the supply and demand structure at agricultural market are the new issues and challenges for countries all over the world to address jointly. Especially, it's imperative for many countries along the Belt and Road to achieve food and nutrition security and eliminate hunger and poverty. So there is an urgent need to conduct cooperation to jointly promote agricultural sustainability.

In post financial crisis years, countries are even more committed to agriculture which is foundation of the economy, paying more attention to the integration and utilization of global agricultural resources and deep exploration of agricultural market, thus more aspirant to carry out cooperation. This brings historic opportunities for countries to promote agricultural cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative. Now China is working closely with Belt and Road countries to dock strategies and build framework for cooperation. The bolstered bilateral and multilateral mechanisms offer platforms and infrastructure connectivity and financial intermediation provide guarantees to pursue the endeavor. Favorable conditions are laid for countries to achieve complementarities in agriculture and share development opportunities.

China's agricultural sector and that of the world are closely connected. It is significant to boost agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road, which is necessitated by the need for China to further expand and deepen the opening-up, and for the world agriculture to grow in a sound and sustained way. It is also significant in its conduciveness to shape the landscape of agricultural cooperation in the world, and tap comparative advantages of countries along the Belt and Road. It will foster orderly flow of factors, efficient allocation of resources, and deep integration of markets in the region, and facilitate B&R countries to gain economic benefits and win-win growth. Since late 1970s, China has scored achievements in agriculture and rural areas and made contributions to the world food security. Committed to shouldering more responsibilities and obligations within its ability, China is ready to contribute its wisdom to the global governance on food and agriculture, and share experience with Belt and Road countries so as to contribute more to agricultural and economic growth in the world.

II. Principles

Policy coordination. Countries along the Belt and Road are supported to conduct vision matching and policy dialogue, seek convergence of interests and the maximum common interest, and jointly hammer out the top-level design for key areas, leading industries, and important products of common concerns. Existing mechanisms should be fully tapped to drive forth long-lasting agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road in an innovative manner.

Market operation. Companies are leading players. Market is to play the decisive roles in resource allocation, and market rules and international norms are to be followed. Enterprises will be supported to conduct cooperation among them to seek complementarities and common development.

Government service. Cooperation mechanisms among governments will guide and work for agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road. Efforts will be made to deepen opening-up, improve investment and trade facilitation, set up or improve the service network, and optimize the atmosphere for cooperation.

Green and sharing. Countries are respected to choose their own development path and mode. Agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road echoes goals on food and agriculture of the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and advocates the principle of mutual consultation, joint efforts and shared interests for a green Silk Road. Concerted efforts are solicited to realize agricultural modernization with high efficiency, product safety, resource conservation and environmental consciousness.

Mutual benefit. Interests and concerns of all parties will be accommodated, advantages in agriculture of all countries be synergized, and cooperative potentials tapped. Cooperation along major economic corridors will be cemented to drive forward the whole cooperation process and build new cooperative ties along the Belt and Road marked by interdependence, mutual benefit, equality, safety and efficiency.

III. Framework

The Belt and Road run through the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa, connecting the vibrant East Asian economic circle with a long farming history at one end and the developed European economic circle with advantages in modern agriculture at the other. It links up countries with rich resources and huge potential across vast regions that enjoy advantages and complementarities in agricultural resources, technologies, productivity, and markets.

It is the shared vision and aspiration for countries along the Belt and Road to promote cooperation and develop agriculture. China is ready to work together with Belt and Road countries to plan and implement a group of key projects and build the new structure of agricultural cooperation with links running eastward and westward over land and sea, which supports the shaping of the community of shared interests, the community of shared responsibilities, and the community of shared future along the Belt and Road.

The Chinese government proposes that Belt and Road countries seek complementarities through stronger connection of strategies on agricultural cooperation, on basis of the principle of mutual consultation, joint efforts and shared interests and concepts of peace and cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and benefits under the Belt and Road Initiative, accommodate interests and concerns of all parties involved, proceed from science and technology, focus on policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds to deepen collaborations on optimal technologies, priority products, and trade and investment along the six economic corridors (new Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West Asia, China-Indochina Peninsula, China-Pakistan, and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar), and work jointly for a full-fledged and wide-ranged new cooperative relationship.

IV. Priorities

Belt and Road countries, with great potential and broad fields for cooperation, need to proceed from common development goals and advantages to seek closer collaborations in the following key areas:

Policy dialogue platform. We should enhance policy communication, improve existing policy dialogue mechanisms at different levels, and establish a tripartite policy dialogue platform for governments, institutes, and enterprises to exchange views on development and dock strategies, work out plans and measures to press forward cooperation, address problems through consultation, and provide policy support for pragmatic cooperation and implementation of key projects.

Agricultural science and technology. We should prioritize science and technology cooperation and strengthen knowledge sharing, technology transfer, information communication, and personnel exchanges through multiple channels. In accordance with needs of countries along the Belt and Road and the bigger picture of international cooperation on agricultural science and technology, we should establish joint labs, experiment and demonstration bases and agricultural science and technology demonstration parks (zones), prevent and control animal and plant diseases and outbreaks, and conduct germplasm exchange, joint research and showcase of findings to enhance exchanges on species, technology, and products. We should jointly build the public information service platform(s) for agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road, the technical advice and service system(s), and high-end think tank(s) and training base(s), so as to promote regional Internet of Things in agriculture and capacity of B&R countries to grow agriculture.

Agricultural trade. We should jointly build routes and infrastructure for integrated logistics such as transportation and storage so as to improve facilitation, increase volumes and expand fields on trade. We should encourage building all kinds of stable channels for trade of Belt and Road products and boost cross-border e-commerce. We should have closer cooperation on inspection and quarantine, and jointly develop safe, efficient and convenient traceability system(s) and supervision and control measures to inspect and quarantine imports and exports so as to regulate market behaviors and secure a higher level of animal and plant health and safety in Belt and Road countries.

Agricultural investment. We should draw on comparative strength in agriculture and cooperative mechanisms and channels of international financial institutions to increase investment in infrastructure and the whole industrial chain including production, processing, storage, transportation and distribution and impel the implementation of key projects. We should upgrade collaborations among enterprises, adopt all possible ways to improve their capacity and profile for transnational investment, and promote mutually beneficial growth of agribusinesses. We should encourage two way investment into agriculture. China welcomes agricultural investment from enterprises of Belt and Road countries and encourages Chinese enterprises to take up social responsibilities and contribute to agricultural development along the Belt and Road by assisting the host country to advance agriculture, create employment opportunities, and improve livelihood.

Capability building and non-governmental exchanges. We should foster farmer-focused capacity building and non-governmental exchange activities. Efforts should be made to jointly provide vocational education and training to empower farmers with necessary capacities and organizational skills, and build up confidence and trust among involved countries. We should also collectively build training bases for transnationals to cultivate all around talents and managers.

V. Mechanisms

For smooth implementation of collaborative activities as planned, countries along the Belt and Road should build on existing mechanisms and improve modalities creatively to vigorously promote agricultural cooperation.

Bilateral cooperation between governments. We should conduct communication and consultation at different levels through various channels to seek comprehensive development of bilateral relations so as to support agriculture cooperation. We should facilitate signing of

memorandums or formulating of plans on agricultural cooperation under the MOUs of cooperation on the joint development of the "Belt and Road" between governments. We should play the role of existing high-level cooperative mechanisms to attract more Belt and Road countries and territories as well as international and regional organizations to set up high quality active agricultural cooperation mechanisms. We should underscore intergovernmental talks on treaties and instruments to accelerate the signing of bilateral investment and trade agreements, and enhance communication and coordination to heighten cooperation on investment protection, finance, taxation, customs clearance, inspection and quarantine, and personnel exchanges to meet enterprise needs with government services, thus creating a sounder environment and better conditions for agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road Multilateral cooperation mechanisms. We should deepen cooperation with IOs and give full play to existing agriculture related multilateral mechanisms such as the G20, APEC, SCO, UNESCAP, the Asia Cooperation Dialogue, the League of Arab States, China-ASEAN, and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. We should also deepen cooperation with the WTO, FAO, OIE, IPPC, IFAD, WFP, and the CGIAR, and with global and regional developmental financial institutions such as the WB, ADB, NDB, AIIB, and SRF to explore new financial services, thus creating an open, inclusive, equitable, competitive and mutual beneficial environment for agricultural cooperation.

Major conferences and forums. We should make the most of platforms set up by major conferences and forums such as the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, the Boao Forum for Asia, Roundtable Meeting on ASEAN Plus Three Food Security Cooperation Strategy, the China-ASEAN Exposition, the China-South Asia Expo, the China-Eurasia Exposition, the China-Central and Eastern European Countries Economic and Trade Forum, the China-Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation Forum on Entry-Exit Animal and Plant Quarantine & Quality and Safety of Agricultural Products, and the China-Arab States Exposition. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, we should establish a dialogue mechanism for Belt and Road agricultural cooperation, a research and communication platform for agricultural planning, and an information-sharing platform for agricultural resources, industries, technologies, and policies at the Belt and Road portal.

Overseas agricultural cooperation parks (zones). We should work together to jointly build agro-industrial parks to seek cluster and platform effect so as to reduce the cost of agricultural cooperation and prevent risks. We should also guide and support enterprises to participate in parks' construction and operation, and infrastructure development in sectors including planting, animal farming, processing, and logistics to optimize the agro-industrial chain, thus supporting the connectivity of the economic corridors and the maritime Silk Road. Demonstration zones for agricultural cooperation can be jointly established on basis of aspiration and local conditions of B&R countries to support and showcase Belt and Road agricultural cooperation

VI. Action and Future

The Chinese government has been promoting and expanding the opening-up of agriculture and optimizing policy frameworks to partake in the process of agricultural globalization. The Belt and Road countries have been priority areas for China to have cooperation in agriculture for years. Many provinces and autonomous regions have taken advantage of their linkages in location and culture with neighboring countries for conducive and productive cooperation. Western provinces and autonomous regions collaborated with Central Asian countries in dry-land farming of grain, cotton and animal production, while northern provinces worked together with Russia in cereal and vegetable production in the Far East region, and southern provinces

proceed from tropical agriculture to engage in cooperation with Southeast Asia and South Asia on grain and cash crop cultivation. All have made notable achievements. In addition, China has explored many ways to assist B&R countries to raise production and improve the ability for safety and health control such as construction of technology demonstration centers, fielding experts, and training technicians and administrators, thus making positive contribution to the world food security.

In the future, China will keep promoting agricultural cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative by partaking in the development of regional agricultural cooperation platform(s), supporting talks on agriculture-related trade and investment agreements bilaterally or multilaterally, jointly devising the plan of bilateral cooperation on agricultural investment, increasing agricultural investment in least developed countries, facilitating implementation of 10 cooperation plans between China and Africa, mobilizing the “South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund” and promoting South-South Cooperation in agriculture, supporting developing countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, engaging in agricultural cooperation with developed countries innovatively, assisting in formation of a new pattern of relationship on agricultural cooperation, and promoting agricultural sustainability in the world.

Next, China will promote building of overseas demonstration parks (zones) for agricultural cooperation and domestic cooperative experiment zones for agricultural opening-up and cooperate with Belt and Road countries in finance, taxation, insurance, and inspection and quarantine of animals and plants, bolstered exchanges of personnel and information, sharing of agricultural technologies, experience, and development modalities, and jointly planning and implementing seven key projects, i.e. enhancing comprehensive grain productivity in the region, science and technology cooperation and demonstration, joint prevention and control of animal and plant diseases and outbreaks, agricultural vertical integration, strengthening trade infrastructure, building the platform for agricultural R&D and training, and developing IT application network(s) for agriculture.

The Belt and Road Initiative is proposed by China but shares common aspiration of countries along the route. China is ready to work with Belt and Road countries under the existing bilateral and multilateral cooperative mechanisms and frameworks and walk toward each other to promote agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road to another broader and higher stage that respects interests and appeals of all parties concerned. China is willing to make greater contribution to food and nutrition security and agricultural sustainability in the world.