

China is Lightening Farmers' Burdens

Zhen Zhong

Assistant Professor

School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development

Renmin University of China

In recent years, farmers' burdens remained at low levels as a whole as more efforts were made to implement the policy of strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers enriching rural areas and enhancing the supervision of farmers' burdens. Contradictions arising there from have decreased substantially and the relationships between cadres and the people in the rural areas have been obviously improved.

However, recently less attention was paid to lightening farmers' burdens and the supervision of that work was neglected slightly in certain places. The random fees collection among farmers kept on emerging; fundraising and apportioned charges began to rebound; appropriating government subsidies for farmers and using them as compensation for charges occurred now and then; the procedures for labor and money raised under the case-by-case principle remained flawed. Farmers' burdens in some fields were growing fast.

Main content of policy

In order to further lighten farmers' burdens and prevent their rebounds, the General Office of the State Council promulgated a document laying out its opinions on further easing farmers' burdens. Its main contents include:

- General requirements. In 2012, the scientific outlook on development was fully implemented. It focuses on the protection of farmers' legitimate rights, with emphasis on the standardization of agriculture-related fees and reliance on enhanced supervision and inspection. The work of supervising and controlling farmers' burdens was integrated to other fields like balancing the urban-rural development, strengthening the rural social management and implementing the policy of strengthening agriculture, benefiting farmers and enriching rural areas. Supervision and control of farmers' burdens was extended to other areas including rural infrastructure construction, rural public services, and socialized services of agriculture. These measures would ensure that farmers' burdens were controlled at low levels and that society was harmonious and stable in rural areas.
- Primary tasks. First, agriculture-related fees and prices would be placed under strict control. Documents related to agricultural fees would be strictly audited. The practice of publicizing agriculture-related fees and prices would be carried forward in all regions.

Second, the case-by-case approach to rural fund- and labor-raising would be implemented in a standardized manner. It would be implemented through fully respecting farmers' wishes, strictly standardizing the discussion procedures, accurately defining the scope of application, and reasonably determining quantitative limits of labor and money to be raised. The procedure for the case-by-case approach to rural fund- and labor-raising would be improved

and its organization and implementation would be standardized. Special checks would be strengthened and such violations as delegation of the power to determine the quantitative limits to lower levels of authority would be rectified with a firm hand.

Third, the problems aggravating the burdens of village-level organizations and specialized farmers' cooperatives would be thoroughly settled. Regular auditing and supervision of fee collection on village-level organizations would be enhanced. It would be strictly forbidden to transfer spending on operational funds for the development of rural infrastructure and for public services that should be paid by the government to village-level organizations. Departments concerned in the local government would be forbidden to commission any village-level organization to collect fees from farmers. Supervision and control of specialized farmers' cooperatives' burdens would be strengthened to ensure the prevention of arbitrary fees, fines, fundraising and apportioned charges in an in-depth way.

Fourth, an institution for controlling farmers' burdens would be built and improved. An institution for countersignature, information publication and filing of documents concerning the policy of lightening farmers' burdens would be established and improved without any delay. An institution for auditing rural infrastructure projects would be implemented all over the country. A mechanism would be built to manage farmers' participation in rural infrastructure projects. The supervision card for farmer's burden would be further improved to update the content and be marked on the complaint hotline. A regime for monitoring farmers' burdens would be built and improved to provide scientific foundations for government's decisions. Its monitoring scope would be expanded and the quality would be improved.

Implementation of policy and evaluation

- Highlighting key points and special operations were carried out to settle problems in lightening farmers' burdens. In 2012, as arranged by the State Council, the MoA, the NDRC and the State Council Office for Rectifying Malpractices jointly launched special operations to clean up random fees on village-level organizations and achieved first results nationwide.

Special operations were carried out in 506,000 villages with 84.3% of village-level organizations covered, cancelling 594 types of fees on farmers, reducing 711 types of fees, returning 72 million yuan to farmers, examining and dealing with 502 persons, and lightening farmers' burdens by 674 million yuan. Meanwhile, 5,879 cases of imposing illegal fees on village-level organizations were investigated and dealt with, founding 81 million yuan of illegally collected money and returning 57 million yuan to farmers. Meanwhile, 883 documents were formulated to set up a long-term mechanism with 192 persons were held accountable.

Violations of the case-by-case policy on rural fund- and labor-raising in 33 counties were corrected, 174 fund- and labor-raising projects were probed for exceeding the due scope, 76 fund- and labor-raising projects were probed for exceeding the due standard, and 9.784 5 million yuan of illegally collected funds were under investigation. Farmers were returned 7.038 7 million yuan and 22 persons were examined and dealt with.

In eight counties with prominent problems concerning farmers' burdens, designated jointly by the MoA and the governments of 7 provinces, comprehensive operations were carried out, reducing farmers' burdens totaling 28.68 million yuan and returning farmers 4.06 million yuan.

- Large-scale supervision over farmers' burdens was carried out through enhanced coordination. Seven member departments of the State Council's joint conference on reducing farmers' burdens carried out special checks in Liaoning, Henan, Hunan and Ningxia on the situation of farmers' burdens. Random checks were carried out in 79 villages in 18 counties, or over 280 rural households, and 58 units collecting agriculture-related fees. The random checks found that the policies of lightening farmers' burdens and benefiting farmers were not fully implemented in a few places and some new situations and new problems appeared. Malpractices found in checks were rectified in an in-depth way in 4 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) mentioned above to protect farmers' interests.
- Leadership responsibilities were emphasized to maintain combined force for lightening farmers' burdens. In accordance with requirements of the central authorities, local authorities at various levels adapted themselves to changes in the situation of farmers' burdens and continued the responsibility system for lightening farmers' burdens. It was inculcated that the mechanisms that the top leaders of the CPC Committee and the government should be held responsible for work concerning farmers' burdens. It was also emphasized that the main cadre should be responsible for special operations. Most local governments at different levels improved leading institutions and offices for work concerning farmers' burdens and improved coordination between departments. In certain places, responsibility declarations were signed by cadres at all levels, and management by objectives and the "one-vote negation" system were introduced.

In 2012, fees borne by farmers in the country—fees collected by the village, social responsibility expenditures, money raised under the case-by-case principle for village-level public welfare undertakings, and money for labor - averaged 45.63 yuan per capita, up 1.48 yuan or 3.35% from the previous year.

Farmers' burdens remained at low levels and the situation with the lightening of farmers' burdens remained stable. But random fee collection among farmers kept on emerging in certain places; fundraising and apportioned charges began to rebound; the policies of lightening farmers' burdens and benefiting farmers were not fully implemented in a few places; the procedures for labor and money raised under the case-by-case principle remained flawed. The risks of rebound of farmers' burdens existed.

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