

Urban Modern Agriculture and the “Vegetable Basket” Project

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INTRODUCTION

Development of urban modern agriculture saw remarkable results

The guiding philosophy of developing urban modern agriculture was first clarified. Fuzhou issued two documents, namely, Opinion on Advancing Development of Urban Modern Agriculture and 2013-2020 Plan on Urban Modern Agriculture Development, to include the development of urban modern agriculture into the overall urban planning and promote shift of mode of agricultural development. Sticking to an approach of overall planning, Qingdao established a modern agriculture development framework featuring “one axis connecting three major areas in four districts. This was stretched to multiple points”, under which 10 major construction projects were implemented. As a result, the agricultural protection and supply capacities were largely enhanced.

Second, more emphasis was put on agricultural industry’s function of ensuring food supply and adding income for farmers. Haikou strengthened its support for construction and development of base for the “South-to-North Vegetable Transfer” project. Changsha included treatment of abandoned farmland into performance appraisal of government at district-and country-level so as to ensure stability of the crops area. Beijing fostered a group of leisure agriculture brands including “the Most Beautiful Village”, thus broadening channels of employment for farmers.

Third, Shanghai endeavored to develop family farms through the introduction of entry and exit mechanism for the business. Zhengzhou accelerated development of enterprise concentration and industrial cluster. A distinctive agro-processing industry bringing about economy of scale and driving other industries gradually came into shape.

Fourth, efforts were made to strengthen technological development and informatization. Nanjing attached great importance to developing biological agriculture. A special investment system fostered a group of industrial clusters. The annual production value of the biological agricultural industry exceeded 10 billion yuan. Tianjin prioritized the development of China’s first provincial agricultural internet of things and completed construction of 10 core application bases. Wuhan made proactive efforts to develop fresh food e-commerce. Eight hundred fifty (850) communities were equipped with “Smart Electronic Vegetable Box” that allowed final entry of products of the “Vegetable Basket” project into common households.

Fifth, full play was given to the exemplary role of modern agricultural demonstration parks. Xi’an turned its demonstration parks into platforms that drew social input in the agricultural industry and set up a special fund to support participation of social capital in agricultural development. Led by its national modern agricultural sub-sectors including ecology, facility

and quality agriculture in a bid to promote rapid development of urban modern agriculture.

Guiding philosophy and goal for advancing development of urban modern agriculture in new era

The urban modern agriculture across the country is apparently more developed than traditional agricultural areas, but still far less developed when compared with industrialized and urbanized areas. Agricultural modernization remains a short board and weak link in advancing modernization of industry, agriculture, defense and science and technology. With a high level of economic development, the big cities have abundant financial resources and concentrated strengths of technology, talent and capital. Those favorable conditions foster a huge market demand and enable those big cities to lead in advancing national agricultural modernization.

Three goals are expected to be first achieved in big cities by 2020. The first is to achieve agricultural modernization and turn those big cities into major consumers of products of “Vegetable Basket” project, concentration areas of advanced agricultural production essential, pilot areas of agricultural multi-functional development and prototype areas of agricultural standardization and core logistic centers of agro-products and demonstration areas of agricultural ecology. The second is to achieve coordinated development of agriculture, rural areas and farmers in order to boost comprehensive agricultural production capacity, contribute to sustained and rapid development of farmers’ income and facilitate the upliftment of public service in rural areas, aiming at strengthening agricultural industry, beautifying rural areas and enriching farmers. The third is to achieve unified development of modernization of industry, agriculture, defense, and science and technology with eye to enhancing agriculture’s supporting role to industrialization and urbanization and strengthening the driving effect of industrialization, urbanization and informatization to agricultural modernization while achieving two-way flow of resources between urban and rural areas to break existing urban-rural dual system.

In order to first achieve those three goals, full play should be given to six functional aspects of urban modern agriculture, namely, service, ecology, quality, technology, enriching farmers inheritance, with priorities given on them for better development. The first is to develop a city-serving agriculture. Full play should be given to urban modern agriculture projects’ short delivery radius and distance from city to prioritize development of fresh agro-products, with emphasis attached to projects of “Vegetable Basket,” “Fruit Plate” and “Milk Bottle”. As to those cities which are located in major grain production areas, balanced emphasis should be put on projects of “Vegetable Basket” and “Rice Bag” to ensure stable development of grain production and continuously boost comprehensive agricultural production capacity.

The second is to develop an eco-friendly agriculture. Full play should be given to functions of facilitating production, people’s living and ecological improvement of urban modern agriculture, especially its function of ecological conservation as “Lungs of the City”. With the development of ecological agricultural and circular agriculture that contribute to improvement of the environment, urban residents would be able to enjoy white cloud and blue sky at day while seeing shining stars at night.

The third is to develop a highly productive agriculture. Those big cities should make good use of their solid agricultural foundations, advanced facilities and equipment and sound

distribution and delivery systems via standardized, professional and scaled production to develop highly-processed agro-products, extend chain of agricultural industry, foster a group of well-known brands and bring more benefits to farmers.

Fourth is to develop a technology- and innovation-driven agriculture. Those big cities should make good use of their strengths of technology and talent to promote combination of production and scientific research. Based on market demand, more efforts should be spared to develop technological innovation application, with enterprises being major subjects and seed industry being a major focus. Driven by the fast development of informatization, the development of integrated application of information technology should be accelerated, with more emphasis put on smart agriculture, thus achieving a leapfrog in development.

Fifth is to develop a farmer-enriching agriculture. Those big cities should make more efforts in developing leading and distinctive agriculture, promoting marketing and sales of agro-products, supporting development of new business of catering and recreational sightseeing, adding sources of income for farmers and promoting rapid increase of their income so as to narrow the gap of income between rural and urban residents.

Sixth is to develop a civilization-inhering agriculture. The agricultural history and culture as well as natural landscape should be well protected so as to preserve distinctive features of rural areas and folk customs while building a rural area that is not only comfortable home for rural residents to enjoy their life but also a place of peace for urban residents to enjoy their vacations and escape from the hustle and bustle of rural life.

A new round of “Vegetable Basket” was in solid progress

The MoA worked with members of ministerial joint meeting on food management of “Vegetable Basket” project to vigorously advance a new round of development of the project by granting more policy support, improving distribution and delivery system and strengthening quality and safety supervision and therefore achieved a positive progress and remarkable result in various sectors.

First, a steady development of production was sustained. Since the implementation of the new round of “Vegetable Basket” project, the steady development of its production was vigorously promoted by implementing construction of standardized vegetable and tea planting field, orchard, standardized livestock and poultry breeding farm and healthy aquatic breeding demonstration farm, by initiating construction project of winter-withstanding vegetable-restoring facility in northern cities and by steadily implementing extended performance appraisal of the “Vegetable Basket” project in some areas. According to statistics, the total output of the “Vegetable Basket” project in 2012 reached 1.07 billion tons, up to 14.8% compared to that of 2009, of which the production of vegetables, fruits, meats, poultry and eggs and aquatic products ranked first worldwide for years in a row.

Second, a modern distribution and delivery system came into shape. A wholesale market-centered market system continued to grow while a national landscape where large-scale markets and system of distribution and delivery drew open competition among multiple players in various channels and form. So far, there were 4,400 wholesale markets nationwide and 25,000 farmers’ market both of which were outlets of products of the “Vegetable Basket” project. Emerging distribution channels such as the e-commerce and

chain operation were on the track of sound and rapid development.

Third, the product quality and safety improved steadily. With the continuous lifting of agricultural production standardization, the number of products labeled as pollution-free agro-products, green foods and organic agro-products and marked by agro-product geographical indications continued to increase, with increasing improvement of agro-product quality and safety test and inspection system as well as its supervision system, thanks to the quality and safety of agro-products which sustained an overall momentum of steady and routine inspection of vegetables, livestock products and aquatic products in major cities reaching 97.9%, 99.7% and 96.9% respectively, up by 1.5 percentage points, 0.2 percentage point and 0.2 percentage point compared to those in 2009.

Fourth, the effort of the “Vegetable Basket” project on enrichment of farmers was clearly shown. According to estimation, the total production value of the “Vegetable Basket” project was worth over 5 trillion yuan, up 31.4% compared to that in 2009. In 2012, the share of income from vegetable planting and gardening industry to the per capita income from household operation increased to 47.7% from 40.3% in 2009.

However, the “Vegetable Basket” project was faced with some new problems, including increased pressure in ensuring balanced supply, product quality and safety and price stability. In order to overcome those difficulties, priorities should be given to the following five aspects. First is to ensure stability of crop area by implementing the most strict farmland protection system while giving priorities to including vegetable fields in suburb areas into category of permanent basic farmland and trying to ensure supply of at least one vegetable field per person in certain places.

Second is to strengthen production capacity by attaching importance to the development of standardized vegetables and tea planting fields, orchards, standardized livestock and poultry breeding farm and healthy aquatic breeding demonstration farm, thus continuously enhancing balanced supply capacity of the “Vegetable Basket” project.

The third is to strengthen quality and safety supervision by implementing “four most strict measures” to ensure food safety, attaching balanced emphasis on production and supervision, promoting agricultural standardized production and accelerating establishment of agro-product quality and safety tracing system.

Fourth is to improve distribution and delivery system by strengthening early-warning mechanism of production of the “Vegetable Basket” project, making overall planning on construction of wholesale markets and supporting development of agro-product e-commerce, thus effectively relieving the contradiction between cheap product price harming farmers’ interest and high price harming common people’s interest.

Fifth is to improve regulation and security mechanism by comprehensively making use of methods including finance, tax, price and insurance, exploring to establish a regulation catalog mechanism of product of the “Vegetable Basket” project, improving food reserve and emergency supply mechanisms and securing the prices of the project products to run within reasonable range.

The core of advancing the new round of “Vegetable Basket” is to ensure effective and safe

supply of “Vegetable Basket” products to urban and rural residents; its focus is during the winter season, China’s northern area and big cities; and its key is to put in place the mayor-responsible mechanism. In light of the new trend in the new era, what’s essential when ensuring full play is given to role of the “Vegetable Basket” in securing food supply, stabilizing price and benefiting common people is to strengthen implementation of requirement of the mayor-responsible mechanism and accelerated relevant performance appraisal and incentive mechanism.

As required by the mechanism, those mayors shoulder four responsibilities. First is to ensure food supply, with emphasis on put on boost self-supply capacity of fresh food including vegetables, fresh milk, poultry and eggs and meats. Second is to ensure food safety and quality incidents from happening. Third is to make emergency response to ensure supply of food without risks of running out when emergency incident takes place. Fourth is to carry out market regulation to ensure the product prices to run within reasonable range while balancing interest between farmers and urban residents and between production and sales areas.

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