

Chapter 47

Produce Internationally, Consume Locally: Changing Paradigm of China's Food Security Policy

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ABSTRACT

China is one of the world's biggest importers of agricultural products. Until quite recently, China's agricultural policy focused on food self-sufficiency. Globalizing trade in agricultural commodities, however, has brought new challenges to establishing secure supply and achieving security rather than self-sufficiency. In the face of emerging trade tensions with the USA, one of China's responses to the emerging volatility of the global market is to expand production facilities abroad and thus diversify deliveries. This chapter discusses how China's Belt and Road Initiative may serve improving food security of the country by establishing of a predictable system of agricultural production and trade across Eurasia, particularly, with the involvement of land-abundant Russia and the countries of Central Asia. The author explores possible responses to emerging threats to China's domestic food market by elaborating an approach to theoretical definitions and practical issues of ensurance of food security and adaptation of China's policy to contemporary global challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Food security is commonly defined as a condition when people have access to sufficient amounts of safe and nutritious food and are therefore consuming the food required for normal growth and development, and for an active and healthy life (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 1992). Food security is the physical, social and economic access by all people at all times to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy

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life (FAO, 1992). FAO's approach is based on physical availability of food and agricultural products on the domestic market (domestic production plus import) and economic access to adequate supply by all people (purchasing power, food inflation, distribution, etc.) (Erokhin, 2017c). Jash (2015) explains FAO's dimensions of food security along the four pillars: food availability (sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis); food access (sufficient resources to obtain appropriate food for a nutritious diet); utilization (appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and health care as well as adequate water and sanitation); and stability (ensuring that a population, household or individual have access to adequate food at all times, without any risk of losing access to food as a consequence of sudden shocks. In this vein, food security is argued to be a complex sustainable development issue, linked to health through malnutrition, but also to sustainable economic development and environment.

Food security is usually categorized as a non-trade concern within trade policy as it incorporates factors other than those directly relevant to the operation of an international market system (Erokhin, 2017b). The concept of food security emerged after World War II, when reconstruction efforts created a global food regime that was increasingly sought through economic policies including trade liberalization and the opening of economic markets (Schanbacher, 2010). In the current global dynamics, food security is increasingly assessed in the light of concerns over global trade in agricultural commodities, distribution of agricultural production facilities and food products, and insufficient production to meet the future needs in food. An increasing number of developing countries have transitioned from being net food exporters to net food importers (Valdes & Foster, 2012). Liberalization of international trade has become a significant source of tension in contemporary agricultural change with the incorporation of agriculture into the world trading system (Lee, 2007). In the conditions of globalization, where liberalization of food trade and the reduction of administrative protection of food producers are mandated by the rules of the WTO, many countries have lost a part of their sovereignty over food policies (Lawrence & McMichael, 2012). Some of them (primarily, developing ones) have become food dependent, others managed to benefit from easier access to foreign markets and unified framework of global trade in food. In general, globalization has refocused attention from trade-based food self-sufficiency to availability-based food security.

Many countries are now concerned about the sustainability of their food supply. As a counter to liberalization, they are now re-examining their strategies for achieving food self-sufficiency rather than food security, and are seeking measures to improve the sustainability of food supplies, while also protecting their domestic food markets from increasing imports (Valdes & Foster, 2012). In an attempt to decrease the reliance on imports, some countries reduce the availability and access to food for the population. Abundant food stocks in some countries coexist with shortages in some others, while unexpected price surges and influences of other factors push millions of people into poverty, aggravating income inequalities and threatening food security. Price instability is detrimental not only to poor countries, where deteriorating living conditions of people may raise food conflicts, but even to some developing countries. International trade plays a vital role in stabilizing food supplies and food prices, but importing and exporting countries also worry about the unreliability of world markets. Even high-income countries feel threatened by volatile food markets, and want to guarantee food availability and accessibility in the long run (Saravia-Matus, Gomez, Paloma, & Mary, 2012).

Being the most populous country in the world with the biggest internal market for food and agricultural products, China is one of the most demonstrative examples of a country extremely concerned about food security and sustainability of food supply. In China, understanding of food security differs from the internationally accepted one of the FAO, particularly, in the context of food self-sufficiency

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