

## AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE

*May 16, 1951*

According to statistics compiled by the old regime, China's farmland amounts to about 1.45 billion *mu* [1 *mu* = 1/15 hectare]. Before the anti-Japanese war the highest annual output of grain, not counting beans and peas, was over 135 billion kg. In 1949 the country's total grain output fell to 105 billion kg. Last year it was up somewhat, totalling over 120 billion kg., but on the whole, agricultural production remains below prewar levels.

It is true that in a few localities in the old liberated areas of northeast and north China, agricultural production has exceeded, reached or approached prewar levels. This is because we conducted the agrarian reform<sup>105</sup> and encouraged the peasants to form mutual-aid cooperative teams, improve farming techniques, select fine strains, undertake water conservancy projects and expand output. In general, however, agricultural production in the new liberated areas is below prewar levels, owing to the havoc wrought by twelve years of war,<sup>20</sup> when the Kuomintang regime bled the peasants white through exploitation, many water conservancy facilities were damaged, and countless farm animals died.

To increase agricultural production, we must do the following three things.

1. *Complete the agrarian reform in the new liberated areas.*<sup>2</sup> That is the only way to arouse the peasants' enthusiasm. The experience of the past few years shows that once the land has been distributed among the peasants, they will save every cent possible on food and clothing and invest all they have in production. When the peasants have their own farm animals, when they have installed waterwheels and formed mutual-aid teams, production is bound to increase.

2. *Prevent floods and combat droughts.* Last year about 50 to 70 million

---

Excerpt from a speech made at the First National Conference on Propaganda Work of the Chinese Communist Party.

*mu* of farmland were flooded. In most years to come, so long as the total area affected does not exceed those figures, and there are no other natural disasters, we can still expect good harvests. In such a vast country, floods are likely to occur somewhere every year, so relief funds should be included in every annual budget.

We have spent a considerable sum on water conservancy—about 150 million silver dollars.<sup>12</sup> However, most of that money was used for temporary solutions to the problem of flooding, rather than for the permanent control of rivers. Most of the existing water conservancy facilities have to be repaired every year, or they will not stem the floods. Water is vital to agriculture, but we have not yet harnessed it effectively. In the years to come, we must do our utmost to bring water under permanent control. This is not a task that can be accomplished in one or two years: it demands persistent efforts over a long period of time. Nevertheless, we must make those efforts, because an average annual flooded area of 50 million *mu* would mean an annual loss of at least 7.5 billion kg. of grain, which is an enormous amount.

According to estimates, the country as a whole is poor in water resources. In addition, some places suffer from frequent droughts. Therefore, from an overall, long-term point of view, top priority should be given to water storage, along with flood control. We must urge local authorities to build reservoirs, dams and dikes, and call on people in mountainous areas to preserve their water resources, use them efficiently and prevent soil erosion by planting trees and grass. In some parts of north and northwest China many wells should be dug to guarantee an adequate supply of water during dry spells.

Thus, in promoting economic development, two of our major tasks, both requiring large yearly expenditures, will be to discharge floodwaters to prevent waterlogging and to store water as a precaution against drought. Since the purpose of building water conservancy projects is to bring the rivers under permanent control, it is a task of vital and lasting importance. Surveys are now under way, and construction plans are being drawn up.

To cope with flood or drought, we must store sufficient supplies of grain. Last year good harvests were reaped, and people everywhere said that grain was very cheap. Right now there is talk of a possible grain shortage due to lack of rain in the North and excessive rain in the South. I have often thought it necessary to take precautionary measures in the matter of grain reserves. How much grain should we have in reserve? Roughly 5 billion kg. should be enough.

In a famine year, when as many as 50 million peasants have no grain because their crops have failed, we must be able to offer each of them a daily

ration of 0.25 kg. for a period of six months until the next harvest season. With a monthly grain allotment of 7.5 kg., each peasant will need 45 kg., and the total needed by 50 million peasants will be 2.25 billion kg. Also, in a famine year as many as 15 million city residents will probably require a monthly grain ration of 12.5 kg. per person, or 150 kg. a year. This means we shall need a total of 2.25 billion kg. of grain for city residents. All told, the relief grain for the rural and urban populations will come to about 4.5 billion kg. Only if we have 5 billion kg. of grain on hand will it be possible for us to cope with this difficult situation.

Of course, it would be much better if the government had as much as 10 billion kg. of grain in reserve, half in the peasants' keeping and the rest at the government's disposal. That would enable us to come through a very severe famine. With huge grain reserves as a strategic asset, we should have no need to fear a possible war launched by the imperialists. But an increase in grain reserves depends primarily on the peasants. Whenever there is a good harvest, they must be encouraged to store more grain for future use. If all peasants stored an average of 5 to 7.5 kg. per person, the total grain reserves in rural areas would amount to 2 to 3 billion kg.


2. *Readjust the geographical distribution of farm products.* We need to build railways in southwest and northwest China. Grain is now very cheap in southwest China. In Chengdu, for example, it is hard to sell rice, even at the low price of 1,000 yuan<sup>2</sup> per kg. In contrast, everyday clothing, such as trousers, is very scarce in some parts of southwest China.

Poor transportation facilities make it difficult for local farm products to be moved to other parts of the country and for manufactured goods to be shipped in from other regions. Only small quantities of such goods can be sent to southwest China, mostly transported on carrying poles. If railways are built in southwest and northwest China, these difficulties will disappear. Railway construction in the two regions is very important, not only for the economy but also for national defence.

By accumulating more grain reserves during good harvest years and building more railways to provide convenient transportation, we shall be able to avert a panic over grain supplies. When railway construction is completed in southwest China, we shall classify the various crops and readjust the areas where they are grown, so that major crops, like cotton and grain, will be cultivated in areas with suitable soil and climate. More land should be devoted to growing wheat. Wheat flour now constitutes two-thirds of the staple food of people in Beijing and Tianjin. Since there is not enough wheat, they have to depend on corn meal for the rest. We should encourage the cultivation of soybeans in the Northeast. In southern regions, however, land

on which soybeans are now grown should be planted to cotton. At present, in the whole country only 57 million *mu* are devoted to cotton cultivation. In future we need to increase that figure to over 80 million *mu*.

Rubber is a major strategic material. Since the outbreak of the Korean War<sup>88</sup> we have been unable to import it. Hainan Island is suitable for rubber plantations, but its current output is relatively small. Rubber trees can also be grown in some other parts of the country, although with lower annual yields than in the Malay Archipelago. Still, it is better to have low yields of rubber than none at all. To meet our demand, we need to plant as many rubber trees as possible.

Until railways have been opened in southwest China, peasants there will still have a hard time, because most of their grain cannot be transported to market in other regions. Fortunately, the agrarian reform has made their lives somewhat easier. Nowadays, in addition to having enough to eat, they are able to purchase more cotton cloth, so that all young women can afford decent clothes. If we readjust the distribution of farmland for different crops, the peasants' income will begin to rise considerably. 

China is an agricultural country, but it has always had to import grain, cotton and other farm products. Although the situation is much better now than in previous years, agricultural development remains of paramount importance. Without a developed agriculture, it will be hard to expand the nation's industry.