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'CHINA IS PAYING INCREASED ATTENTION TO AGRICULTURE DURING MIDDLE EAST CRISIS'

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The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s Central Document No:1 in 2026, the first document issued by the CCP Central Committee (CC) this year, for the 23rd consecutive year focused on agriculture, farmers, and rural development. Signalling the CCP's priority on rural issues, it continued the emphasis on the importance of boosting grain production, but in a significant policy shift this year it moved direct incentives from the "agricultural production" section to the "farmers' income" section. China's 15th Five Year Plan has similarly accorded high priority to guaranteeing food security and raising farmers' incomes.

2. Grain production has always been a major concern in China. The chaos in grain production and consequent famine that killed an estimated 40 million people during the Great Leap Forward impressed on China's leaders and the Chinese people the importance of ensuring adequate food supplies. This is reflected in the CCP Central Committee's first document of the year for the last 23 years, called Central Document No: 1, highlighting the importance of grain production and enlarging the amount of arable land under cultivation each year together with specific guidelines for agricultural and rural work.

3. Concern in the upper echelons of the CCP has recently got elevated because of the adverse international environment and apprehension that there will be a global food shortage around 2030-35. There is apprehension that with the worsening Sino-US ties, slowing grain production of traditional grain exporting countries, rising temperatures, and the surge in global anti-China sentiment, Beijing may find it difficult to source food supplies. In fact, as far back as early 2020, Zhou Li, a former Vice Minister of the CCP CC International Department and now a senior Researcher at the Chongyang Institute of Financial Research of Renmin University and Director of the China Russia Humanities Exchange Research Centre, listed challenges that would confront China. Among these he anticipated a global food crisis and said that major food producing countries are faced with large scale harvest failure due to various factors and that rising food grain prices have further escalated because of international speculation. He assessed that as the world's largest importer of soybeans China will be directly affected.

4. Since the 'Big Two' (NPC and CPPCC) Session in March 2026, there has been a noticeably pronounced emphasis on agriculture and food grain production. China's leading economic newspaper, the Economic Daily, has been publishing at least two or three articles and Commentaries nearly each day on agriculture. Jin Guanping, a prolific Chinese journalist of the Economic Daily, in an article in the newspaper on February 7, 2026, urged efforts to

increase farmers' incomes. He pointed out that this year's Central Document No. 1 placed "promoting farmers' income growth in an important position and promotes it as one of the "four key tasks," demonstrating the Party and the State's unwavering determination to strengthen agriculture, benefit farmers, and enrich rural areas". Mentioning that by 2025, the per capita disposable income of farmers increased by 6% to reach 24,456 yuan and the income gap between urban and rural residents will further narrow, he admitted that various regions still face certain difficulties in continuously promoting farmers' income growth. Contributory factors include low prices for some agricultural products and increased pressure on migrant workers to maintain stable employment. Therefore, the situation regarding farmers' income growth is not optimistic. He stated that only by ensuring that farmers can profit from grain farming can they have a promising future and can farmers' incomes increase. Among the measures suggested were developing and strengthening county-level industries that enrich farmers, opening up local employment opportunities to ensure more stable employment and more substantial income for migrant workers, guiding farmers to invest their land management rights in cooperatives, and promoting the transformation of idle farmhouses into rural cultural tourism and commercial spaces etc.

5. A Commentary in Economic Daily (April 14) titled 'Long-term planning is needed to address the economic impact of the Middle East conflict' cautioned that "the risk of the Middle East conflict becoming protracted and complex should not be underestimated" and that it is adversely impacting the chain of "energy-fertilizer-food". It said the effects of the conflict will continue to permeate several future production and consumption cycles and therefore the global development agenda and food security will face severe long-term challenges. It identified food security as "particularly worrying, as agricultural production in and around conflict zones is directly disrupted, while global fertilizer shortages and high prices cast a shadow over next quarter's and even longer-term harvests".

6. Another important article in the Economic Daily (April 27) underscored that "food security of over 1.4 billion people is crucial to the overall development of the nation". It quoted Chinese agricultural experts and economists who emphasised that China's arable land resources are insufficient, and there is a serious mismatch between the main grain-producing areas and water resources. It admitted that the enthusiasm of farmers for grain production remains low and that abnormal weather combined with pests and diseases further amplifies the threat to grain production. They recommended too that incomes of farmers should be increased by all means and the foundation for grain production solidified. A separate article on April 29, also in Economic Daily, stated that geopolitical risks had quickly spread to the global fertilizer supply chain this year leading to significant rise in prices of the international potassium chloride (potash fertilizer) market, nitrogen fertilizers and phosphate fertilizers. It disclosed that drones are being used to transport fertilisers and agricultural supplies in mountainous areas. The article added that drones have also joined the "fertilizer transport team," becoming a key force in solving the problem of transporting agricultural supplies in mountainous areas. There has additionally been a lot of emphasis on modernisation of agriculture

7. Chinese authorities have additionally initiated a number of steps to conserve food grains. A couple of years ago Chinese President Xi Jinping directed that no alcohol should be served and the number of dishes at official banquets should not exceed four with one soup. Earlier

this year he declared war on the squandering of food and the authorities have repeatedly stressed the importance of food supply in China. According to the People's Daily (April 12) China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs dispatched five working groups and science and technology teams to 10 key provinces, including Henan and Shandong, to work with grassroots agricultural technicians in the fields, providing on-site guidance and technical services to promote the implementation of key technologies. This coincided with the Spring agricultural production which is in full swing across China. Liu Huanxin, Party Secretary and Director of the National Food and Strategic Reserves Administration, according to the Economic Daily (March 26) published an article titled 'Enhance food security capabilities'. He recalled that "General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that ensuring food security is a perpetual issue that cannot be relaxed at any time". He pointed out that the 15th Five-Year Plan outlined the need to "strengthen the supply guarantee of grain and other important agricultural products" and "enhance the capacity to guarantee food security". China also has land holdings or management contracts in South America and Africa, but contrary to earlier speculation these are estimated at only around 770,000 hectares and 300,000 hectares respectively.

8. Notwithstanding the CCP's concern and reports that grain production may drop, China's National Bureau of Statistics released data on December 10, that showed another year of a bumper harvest. China's grain output reached nearly 670 billion kilograms in 2020, up 5.65 billion kilograms, or 0.9 percent, from last year. Data also showed that because of the policies of the Soybean Revitalization Program, China's production of soybeans rose 8.3 percent year on year, and the land for growing soybeans grew 5.3 percent. The overall land for agricultural production also rose 0.6 percent -- reversing a straight four-year drop. While the consumer price index (CPI) in China has risen, because of the measures taken by the Chinese authorities so far there are no signs on the ground of a noticeable food supply squeeze.

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