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China Starvation in the name of Healthcare

Food Shortages Loom as Chinese Farmers Face Trouble Amid Pandemic

Jilin Province in China has announced that efforts will continue to ensure that spring plowing continues despite a province-wide COVID-19 lockdown. However, online videos showed police interrupting farmers working in the fields throughout China.

Fearing the delay in spring plowing could lead to a food shortage, analysts say the crisis is beyond fallow fields, viable seeds and fertilizers are the real crisis Chinese farmers are facing.

Lockdown Threatens Food Supply

Jilin, located in China's corn belt, is an important processing and production region for the country's cereals.

The authorities locked down the entire province on March 14.

The lockdown has affected 24 million people and threatened the national food supply. The entire area population is close to 54 million people.

On April 6, Jilin authorities claimed that to safeguard the spring plowing, more than 80 percent of seeding sheds covering 19,768 acres of land were ready, and over 90 percent of corn and soybean seeds had been delivered.

However, online Chinese videos showed farmers from various parts of the country were removed as they plowed the fields by local police for violating lockdowns, and were subject to either detention or quarantine for 14 days.

We were only able to reach one local seed company to confirm the official line on the readiness of seeds. The staff member said the company had been closed since the lockdown in early March. "In the pandemic, everyone is staying at home for the PCR test," she said, adding that she didn't know when business will resume.

Seed Crisis May Lead to Food Shortage

Liu is a Chinese journalist who requested anonymity. He believes the lack of viable seeds is more serious than the restrictions during lockdown.

He said: "Seeds and fertilizer are the two main things for spring plowing. But China's viable grain seeds come in at a high price."

According to Liu, many Chinese farmers have become victims of the opaque procurement practice in China. Some even had near-zero harvest because of bad seeds.

He explained that the seeds are controlled by foreign entities, and they are very expensive. "The farmers no longer keep the good seeds from previous harvest like in the old days," he said.

Liu said: "Foreign companies control the technology of the seeds that come into China. Some domestic seed companies, completely out of touch with modern seed technology, even sold inferior seeds which they claimed as self-bred seeds. As a result, the farmers had a poor harvest."

Liu blamed the many Chinese crop seed producers for the problems with the seeds.

Over the years, Chinese farmers have suffered economic loss owing to inferior seeds. In one 2019 Chinese media report, a case of inferior seeds cost 205 farmers in Jiangxi Province around \$726,000 loss, totaling 800 acres of fields.

In 2020, fake seeds led to no harvest in a 279-acre field involving 40 farmers in Inner Mongolia.

Chen Weijian is the chief editor of Chinese human rights magazine Beijing Spring. He indicated the lockdowns will seriously affect the price and production of fertilizers and pesticides. "Without pesticides and fertilizers, there's no productivity in the Chinese soil," he said.

"I believe that the food crisis in China will become more prominent in two or three years," he added, referring to the huge loss of farming land over the years of government-led rural land expropriation.

Recently, Beijing forced rural areas to restore farm fields in various parts of China. Some local officials responded to the latest policy by turning basketball courts and roads into farming fields by laying layers of soil on cement for plantation.

Chen said that this reveals the food shortage has reached an embarrassing point for Beijing.

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