



Pakistan, China agree on joint ventures in agricultural sectors

The First Meeting of China-Pakistan Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, China and the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, Pakistan during which both sides agreed on agricultural cooperation and several joint ventures in agricultural sectors. The important meeting was chaired by the Federal Secretary Dr. Hashim Popalzai; other participants were Chinese agricultural researchers; scientists and senior officials of the Ministries participated.

The meeting basically focused to take agricultural cooperation to a new high level and deliberation upon the methodology of execution with regard to the areas identified in the field of agriculture. Both parties agreed that Pak-China agricultural cooperation will focus on the vertical increase in productivity of existing crops, transfer of knowledge and technologies, protection of germplasm resources in order to increase the production of agricultural products for food security in Pakistan and export to other countries.

In this regard, both parties also agreed to promote and expand cooperation in the identified areas based on mutual understanding, focused on capacity building, germplasm resources, agricultural product processing, technology extension, fisheries, FMD Construction and market information.

Two sides agreed to establish technical linkages between research institutes for accreditation, certification, and supervision through exchange and visits. Pakistan's side offered to organize joint workshops and seminars with mutual support to enhance exchange and training on agricultural technology between two sides.

The agriculture of Pakistan offers great potential for bilateral cooperation in germplasm exchange. Major challenges faced by Pakistan include comparatively low productivity of crops, climatic stress, and soil degradation.

Exchange of germplasm could enlarge the number of gene resources and genetic diversity, and facilitate agricultural research institutes in both sides to develop high yielding varieties of various crops. Collaboration can be initiated for

the bilateral exchange of plant and animal (both terrestrial & aquatic) genetic resources for crop improvement and food security.

The Chinese side agreed to provide technical assistance to Pakistan on dates processing and packaging technology, potato processing, including potato flakes, flour, and starch and modified starch. Nutritious fruit snack making technology for fruit.

In the meeting the proposal was made for the establishment of Center of Excellence for Livestock & Fisheries Research at National Agriculture Research Centre, Islamabad and Centre of Excellence on Cotton Research at Central Cotton Research Centre (CCRI), Multan, in collaboration with the Chinese agro scientists and researchers as it has a stronghold on agriculture research.



Pakistan can be the food basket for Economic Cooperation Organisation states

Sindh Governor Imran Ismail said that Pakistan having huge agriculture potential can become a food basket for Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) member countries. Speaking at the 27th Executive Committee meeting of the ECO Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the governor said that Pakistan would welcome investment and transfer of technology in the food processing industry.



He said for attracting investment from ECO member countries the government will not only relax rules and regulations but also ready to follow an open visa policy. He noted Pakistan being a developing state offers plenty of investment opportunities. Giving an example of the European Union (EU), the governor said that more than 66 percent of total trade was carried out within the bloc and only 8pc was external.

Therefore, he said the ECO member countries having huge economic potential could easily beat EU trade figures provided they get united and move together after identifying each country's needs. He regretted that most of the ECO member countries even today look at the West despite the fact that there was a willingness for increasing trade relations among themselves.

He lauded Turkey for doing wonders on the economic side as they managed to get rid of debt whereas Iran though standing alone but still was working hard and moving forward. However, the Sindh governor stressed the need for stronger trade relationships among the ECO states.

In Pakistan, banks urged to increase agri-credit disbursement

State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Dr. Reza Baqir has praised banks for their efforts to increase lending to the agriculture sector, which reached a historic high by the end of the fiscal year 2018-19. "It is for the first time in Pakistan's history that credit to the agriculture sector has surpassed Rs1 trillion," said the governor in his keynote address.

He was chairing the annual meeting of the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) held in Peshawar as part of efforts to enhance agriculture credit in the underserved provinces and regions. Baqir, however, urged the banks to meet qualitative aspects of the assigned targets as well in line with the strategic shift and key policy actions taken by the SBP for agricultural financing.

He highlighted that most of the banks met their assigned targets except for some including Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL), Punjab Provincial Cooperative Bank Limited (PPCBL), some domestic private banks and Islamic banks, which fell short of the targets.

Province-wise agriculture credit disbursement showed a double-digit growth across all provinces and regions but banks struggled to achieve the targets in under-served regions. He urged the banks and institutions to step up efforts and commitment to ensure the achievement of agriculture credit targets in the under-served provinces and regions. The central bank governor pointed out that the SBP was considering three policy actions to further promote financial inclusion in the agriculture sector.

First, it wants to enhance transparency through disclosure of bank-wise performance statistics on a monthly basis covering agriculture credit disbursement, geographical distribution, outstanding

amount, number of borrowers and agriculture credit infrastructure. Second, it seeks to introduce a comprehensive scoring model for the ranking of banks based on key agriculture credit indicators and targets. Third, it will introduce incentives and penalties based on the performance scores of banks. Baqir emphasized that there were huge lending opportunities for banks, which would promote financial inclusion and aid their profitability.

The governor's speech was followed by a presentation where the performance of banks in agriculture financing in FY19 was reviewed. It was shared that the overall agriculture credit disbursement target of Rs. 1,350 billion had been assigned to banks for FY20, which was 89% of the total estimated credit requirement of Rs. 1,518 billion.

It was highlighted that Islamic banks and Islamic branches of commercial banks had been assigned the disbursement target of Rs110 billion for FY20, which was in line with the previous year to help realize the potential of Islamic agriculture financing. Furthermore, the overall target of outstanding borrowers was enhanced to 4.67 million with the addition of 650,000 new borrowers.

The committee deliberated on the new directions in agriculture financing by focusing on technology, especially the digitalization of agriculture loan processes

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through the adoption of Land Record Information Systems, Electronic Warehouse Receipt Financing System and initiatives like the Kissan Digital Portal. These were key priorities under the National Financial Inclusion Strategy 2023.

President Arif Alvi for modern techniques to improve the agriculture sector

President of Pakistan Arif Alvi has said that modern agricultural techniques of China can bring a revolutionary improvement in the agriculture sector of Pakistan. He was speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 5th CAC Pakistan Exhibition at Expo Center, Lahore. He said that Pakistan wants to get benefit from the experiences of China in agriculture, harvesting and other agricultural sectors and definitely, CAC Pakistan Exhibition is paving way for this.



"Agriculture plays a key role in Pakistan's economy and has an important contribution to GDP and employment", Arif Alvi said and added it has great potential to gain more benefits so the government is attaching great importance to this sector.

Arif Alvi said the joint ventures between Pakistan and China will bring Chinese researchers, agriculture experts, and the business community to Pakistan and when they join hands with Pakistani businessmen, our agriculture sector will get a boost. It will also help Pakistan to get rid of the issues of low production in the agriculture sector and post-harvest losses. He said that investment can play a fundamental role in economic stability.



The government is ensuring all possible facilities for ease of doing business to encourage local and foreign investors.

LCCI President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said that Pakistan cannot do well without improving the performance of the agriculture sector. It is necessary that all the sectors of the economy pick up and complement each other to excel for ensuring the viability of the economy and long term growth. The agriculture sector cannot be left out due to inherited limitations of resources and various challenges in the way of moving from the conventional methods of farming to modern technologies, he said.

The present scenario demands that both the government and the private sector need to join hands to make the most of the available resources by introducing innovative ways at affordable prices to our farmers. We need to understand that mechanized farming has to be adopted to enhance the per-acre yield in our country, he added.

WFP adviser appreciates Pakistan for prioritizing malnutrition

World Food Programme's Special Adviser on Mother and Child Nutrition Her Royal Highness Princess Sarah Zeid has appreciated the leadership of Pakistan for prioritizing the issue of malnutrition in

their agenda, the Foreign Office said in a statement.

In a meeting with Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi in Islamabad, the special adviser appreciated ongoing efforts in Pakistan to improve food security and decrease the incidence of malnutrition.

Qureshi received the Jordanian royal at the Foreign Office. He expressed appreciation at the WFP's commitment to Pakistan, especially its efforts in addressing malnutrition and stunted growth in Pakistan. He shared with the princess the vision of the government, based on which it had devised people-centric policies.

Elaborating on key initiatives undertaken by the government, the foreign minister referred specifically to its flagship Ehsaas program, which aimed at lifting people out of poverty, including through addressing malnutrition and stunted growth.

Huzaifa Ahmad, founder of Rizq, Faisal Jamil, Founding member of Robin Hood Army, and Hafsa Naeem, Chief Operations Officer of Tayaba attended the meeting and provided valuable inputs.

Princess Sarah was on a 4-day visit to Pakistan, during which she also called on PM Imran Khan and Special Assistant to PM on Poverty Alleviation Dr. Sania Nishtar, among others, and undertook a field visit to Balochistan.

For Pakistan, biotechnology is the best bet for food security

Pakistan, essentially an agricultural economy, faces issues of food security and farm productivity, caused by a number of reasons and studies suggest if necessary measures are not taken in time, the country will find it difficult to feed its population in the decades to follow. This was stated by Jens Hartmann, Regional Head for the Asia Pacific (APAC) for the Crop Science division of Bayer, in an exclusive interview to media, during his recent visit to Pakistan.

Hartmann said without plant science and technology, farmers would need an extra 376 million hectares to grow the same amount of food – let alone double production. “Since we cannot simply create more farmland at the expense of natural habitat, to grow enough food using less natural resources, we will need to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to agriculture.”

Therefore, he said, it was through the pillars of innovation, sustainability and the digital transformation they hoped to balance the growing needs of humanity and the natural resources of planet Earth.

Pakistan's food security challenges stem mainly from the rising temperatures, deforestation, land degradation, rapid population growth, old cultivation methods, low yield, sub-standard seeds, water scarcity, etc. He said the country needed to take the required steps on an urgent basis because it faced serious food secu-

ity challenges in the near future. For example, Pakistan has been ranked among the ten countries affected most by climate change and it was on track to become the most water-stressed country in the region by 2040 with a lack of surface water availability for irrigation, industry and human consumption.

Hartmann stressed small landholders must go for digital transformation for improved efficiency. This transformation, he said, would help them predict the weather, track market prices, decide on the use of hybrid seed and so on. “To achieve this object, the company has developed forums like Farmer Expos and Learning Centres, which are used to share knowledge with farmers on subjects like soil health, water management, crop protection, latest technologies, and their adoption, etc,” Hartmann said.

Incentives urged for halal food sector

Having the potential as well as resources, Pakistan was well-positioned to claim a big share in the international halal food market, but lack of incentives and hand-holding policies were holding this sector back.

This was stated by the LCCI President while talking to a delegation at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry. LCCI Senior Vice President Ali Hussam Asghar and Vice President Mian Zahid Jawaid Ahmad were also present. “The volume of international halal food trade is well over \$ 3 trillion but Pakistan

has a meager share,” said Irfan Iqbal Sheikh, president Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) hosting a delegation at the trade body's office.

Sheikh said some crucial measures by the government could help tap the huge potential in this sector, adding, promotion of halal products should be our national agenda as it could help exports take a quantum leap. “It is a matter of concern that there is no Muslim country in list of top halal food exporters,” the LCCI president said. He said Pakistan had a big potential for exporting halal meat globally and with little efforts it could triple exports of this sector by grabbing the international halal food market. “The global Halal food market is becoming one of the fastest growing markets and despite having best strategic position, a dynamic halal food sector, and a direct gateway to the millions of consumers in Central Asia and Middle East, Pakistan's share in international Halal food trade is negligible,” said he.

Shaikh said a number of non-Muslim countries like Thailand were leading in this sector, which should be a matter of concern for the Muslim countries. “Demand for halal Products has increased manifold because of growing Muslim population world over therefore the government should encourage the export of these products,” he stressed. The LCCI was doing the needful for the promotion of halal products but the government would have to come up with a package of incentives so that quality halal foods could be exported from Pakistan. ♦

