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Policies

China sets up lifelong accountability system to control soil pollution

[Xinhua, 18-01-2017] China will carry out a lifelong accountability system for polluters to arrest worsening soil pollution.

From July, polluters, both companies and individuals, will be responsible for restoring contaminated land, the Ministry of Environmental Protection said on Wednesday 18th January.

Before turning contaminated land into residences or other public facilities like business venues and schools, land users should treat and restore the land first, according to the ministry.

The restoration will be subject to third-party assessment and related information should be open to the public for no less than two months. If the land still fails to meet national standards, environmental authorities can disapprove land use applications.

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China plans huge spending on farmland improvement

[Xinhua, 24-01-2017] China plans huge spending to improve farmland quality in the next few years in hopes of propping up grain supplies as shrinking arable land has put the populous country under pressure to feed its people.

A total of 600 billion yuan (around 88 billion U.S. dollars) will be pumped into the field by 2020, Han Jun, deputy director of the central agricultural work leading team office, said on Tuesday 24 January at a press conference.

The central and local governments will provide the funds, Han said, adding that he hopes the efforts will also attract private investment.

It was the latest move in a nationwide official program to build "high-standard cropland," which, according to official documents, refers to large-scale, contiguous plots of land with fertile soil and modern farming facilities. This type of farmland can maintain stable and high yields and has sound ecological condition and strong capacity to resist natural disasters.

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Govt approves land consolidation plan

[Gov.CN, 29-12-2016] The State Council has approved the national plan for land consolidation (2016-2020), jointly released and implemented by the Ministry of Land and Resource and National Development and Reform Commission.

The plan is aimed at strictly protecting arable land to improve grain production, optimizing land utilization, and consolidating scattered, idle, and inefficient land.

It also urges more policy and fund support to land consolidation in poverty-stricken areas, and enhance efforts to restore degraded and contaminated land.

According to the plan, at least 400 million mu (1 ha =15 mu) high-level farm land should be built with 20 million mu reclaimed from land consolidation.

Meanwhile, land utilization per unit of GDP should be reduced by 20 percent, with land reclamation rate reaching more than 45 percent.

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China unveils guideline for rural asset shareholding reform

[Gov.CN, 30-12-2016] China has unveiled a guideline on reforming collectively-owned rural assets based on a shareholding cooperative system.

Farmers can voluntarily turn their rights in collective operating assets into shares and acquire corresponding revenue, according to a guideline jointly released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Dec 29.

China will finish the reform in five years, with a focus in suburban and economically developed villages that own operating assets.

Rural collective assets consist of resources assets, non-operating assets and operating assets including for-profit houses, buildings, agriculture infrastructures and collectively-funded enterprises.

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China to reform paid-use mechanism for natural resources

[Xinhua, 16-01-2017] The State Council on Monday 16th January released a guideline on reforming the paid-use mechanism for natural resources as the government seeks more efficient and rational use of the national wealth.

By 2020, China aims to have a paid-use mechanism that features a clear description of property rights, improved rules and better regulation for natural resources, according to the guideline, which was approved by Premier Li Keqiang.

Public natural resources include land, mineral deposits, water, forests, sea and islands.

Without proper regulation, such resources could easily be exploited, leading to irretrievable damage.

The guideline detailed major tasks for managing such resources, pledging to expand the paid-use system to cover land for public service and state-owned agricultural use, while fees for the use of water resources will be strictly collected.

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Mayors to be evaluated based on ‘market basket’

[Gov.CN, 09-01-2017] The State Council approved an evaluation method for mayors based on their role in implementing the “market basket” project.

A joint ministerial meeting, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, will be in charge of the whole process.

The assessment includes five factors: - production capacity, market liquidity, supervision of food quality and safety, regulation in supply and demand, and citizens’ satisfaction.

The evaluation, containing four levels, will be carried out once every two years. Any breakout event concerning product quality and safety during the assessment period will automatically result in a failure.

In addition, the assessment results will be part of the city governors’ performance evaluation for the year.

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China to promote development of agricultural product processing

[China daily, 28-12-16] The State Council, China's cabinet, has issued guidelines on agricultural product processing industry.

Accelerating the industry's development will help promote agricultural modernization, increase farmers' incomes, improve people's livelihoods and ensure steady economic growth, according to the guidelines.

China aims to raise the agricultural product processing efficiency ratio to 68 percent by 2020, and to 75 percent by 2025.

By 2020, revenue of the industry will rise by an annual average of over 6 percent.

The country pledges favorable taxation and financial policies for agricultural product processing companies to facilitate the sector's development.

The guidelines are believed to be part of the country's broader efforts to improve agricultural productivity and competitiveness.

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China issues five-year plan to cut emissions

[Gov.CN, 05-01-2017] A five-year plan (2016-2020) to save energy and cut emissions was issued by the State Council on Jan 5, 2017, setting a goal to cut energy consumption by 15 percent in 2020 compared with 2015.

It vows to continue upgrading industry by cutting high-emission industries and promoting new industries, including cutting-edge information technology, new materials, new energy, biotechnology, energy-saving industry and digital creativity industry. It expects that the output value of low-carbon new industrials will surpass 10 trillion yuan in 2020.

Energy saving in key sectors will be promoted, including manufacturing, construction, transportation, trading, agriculture and public institutions.

The plan also urges cutting emissions of major pollutants from manufacturing industries, mobile sources, people's daily life and agriculture.

Circular economy will be promoted, with waste generated by industry, agriculture and urban residents being recycled.

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Science, Technology and Environment

China releases new standards on pesticides MRLs in foods

[MOA, 29-12-2016] The 2016 National Food Safety Standards on Maximum Residue Limits (MRLs) for Pesticides in Foods was promulgated in late Dec. 2016.

The new standard system specifies 4140 MRLs for 433 pesticides in 13 categories of agricultural products, an increase of 490 limits compared with the 2014 version, covering almost all kinds of commonly-used pesticides and major agricultural products.

The new MRLs system highlights the following contents:

- (1) Setting 184 MRLs for 24 banned or restricted pesticides, including Fenamiphos;
- (2) Exempting MRLs for 33 pesticides posing no dietary risks in line with international practices; and
- (3) Recommending testing techniques for MRLs included in this version and providing national standards on 106 MRLs testing techniques.

China aims to develop 6,000 new residue limits mostly for vegetables, fruit and farm products during the 2016-2020 period, while gradually implementing limits on imported food.

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Expert sounds alarm on pesticide overuse

[China Daily, 23-01-2017] China should prioritize the drafting of national standards on pesticides to reduce the amount of residue that is left on agricultural products and prevent damage to the environment, according to a leading researcher.

Zheng Yongquan, a scientist with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences' Institute of Plant Protection, said national standards on pesticides, including limits on the maximum amount of residue allowed and application guidelines, are badly needed as the country faces mounting pressure to protect its ecology in rural areas.

Spraying inefficiencies in the application of pesticides, which lead to massive amounts of waste, also threaten aquatic life, bees and the following year's crop, Zheng said.

To prevent this and enable the rational use of pesticides among farmers, his team developed a system that can verify how much of the chemicals need to be applied.

The team's test kits, which include color-coded test cards, help farmers determine the quality of their sprays and calculate droplet density.

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Additives, contamination are top food concerns

[China daily, 17-01-2017] Overuse of food additives and microbial contamination were the primary food safety problems facing China last year, according to the top food authority.

The two together accounted for more than 64 percent of all food safety problems found in random inspections by the China Food and Drug Administration, announced on Monday, 16 January.

Additional food safety concerns revealed in the inspection last year included heavy metal contamination, and excessive amounts of pesticide residues and veterinary drugs.

Despite strengthened government efforts and improved food safety conditions, China still faces challenges, public health experts said.

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China steps up farmland protection as grain output falls

[Xinhua, 23-01-2017] China vowed to strengthen farmland protection on Monday as urbanization increased pressure on grain supplies.

Efforts must be made to stabilize farmland area and improve its quality to ensure grain self-sufficiency and food security, according to a document released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council.

China aims to retain at least 124.33 million hectares of arable land in 2020, with no less than 103.1 million hectares of permanent farmland and at least 53.3 million hectares of high-quality farmland, the document said.

China had 133.3 million hectares of arable land at the end of 2015, official data showed. The government has set a warning level of 120 million hectares.

The move came as China's grain output fell 0.8 percent year on year to 616.2 million tonnes in 2016 after 12 years of consecutive growth.

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The giant transgenic Chinese carp that could leap from lab to dinner table

[SCMP, 25-12-2016] Chinese researchers who created a rapidly growing “giant” transgenic carp have expressed cautious optimism it will one day land on dining tables.

“The enormous crown carp caught the audience’s attention,” Professor Hu Wei, a lead scientist in the research conducted at the Chinese Academy of Sciences’ Wuhan-based Institute of Hydrobiology, wrote in an article on the academy’s website.

The transgenic carp could grow to adult size twice as fast as common carp, he wrote. And it ate almost everything, from microorganisms to grass, and would thus be easy to grow in a fish farm.

The researchers mixed the genes of a fast-growing, grass-eating carp with an omnivorous species to create the traits.

They also developed a way to make the transgenic carp’s offspring infertile, reducing the environmental risk if the alien species escaped into nature.

From a scientific point of view, the transgenic carp species was ready for commercialisation, Hu wrote.

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Robot nannies look after 3 million chickens

[Bloomberg, 12-01-2017] In a nation where food safety is so elusive that even some chicken eggs have been found to be fake, China’s consumers have good reason to be skeptical about their groceries. That’s forced many food processors to look for novel ways to highlight the wholesomeness of their products.

About 3 million laying hens raised near Beijing by the Bangkok-based conglomerate get daily checkups from machines dubbed “nanny robots.” The sensor-filled humanoids, perched atop a base with wheels, roll through a massive complex of windowless coops for 12 hours a day, monitoring the fowls’ temperatures and movements. Human colleagues pluck feverish or immobile birds from their cages to protect the rest of the brood and keep sick birds and their eggs from reaching kitchen tables.

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Young entrepreneurs drive China's new agriculture

[Xinhua, 13-01-2017] Gaining a foothold in coastal cities was once the goal of many college graduates from rural China, but a growing number are heading back to dig wealth from the farmland.

The trend for entrepreneurs going back home echoes China's move to upgrade the agriculture industry. The government hopes well-educated graduates will inject new life and competition into traditional farming.

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China shows progress in environmental protection

[Xinhua, 13-01-2017] Despite daunting tasks ahead, China has made significant progress in environmental protection, Chen Jining, minister of environmental protection, said at the two-day work conference that ended Wednesday, 11th January citing the most recent available data.

In 2016, average density of fine particles measuring no more than 2.5 micrometers in diameter, known as PM 2.5, in 338 Chinese cities fell 6 percent, according to the minister.

"If we look at the year as a whole, we have made substantial progress, but if we look at winter alone, the improvement is trivial," said Chen.

As to water quality, the environment minister said that there are 3,186 water quality monitoring stations in China, forming a monitoring network.

According to the network, China's surface water quality improved in 2016, with an additional 5.7 percent reaching "drinkable" quality or better compared to the previous year.

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China makes progress in fight against desertification

[Xinhua, 22-01-2017] China will step up efforts to fight desertification to meet a global target of halting net land degradation by 2030, a senior official said Sunday, 22 January.

The country plans to rehabilitate more than 11,300 square kilometers of severely desertified farmland in the next three years at a cost of at least 27.2 billion yuan (about 4 billion U.S. dollars), Zhang Yongli, deputy head of State Forestry Administration, said at a press conference.

Zhang said China will enhance vegetation protection on desert land and improve compensation mechanisms to reward localities working toward fighting desertification.

China will also strengthen international cooperation, especially with countries along the Belt and Road, to reverse desertification, Zhang said.

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China showers 1.15 billion yuan on rainmaking project for parched northwest

[SCMP, 24-01-2017] China's top economic planning agency has approved a 1.15 billion yuan (HK\$1.3 billion) rainmaking project for the country's dry northwestern provinces in one of the biggest government programmes to modify weather.

According to the National Development and Reform Commission, a feasibility study by the China Meteorological Administration found that rainfall and snow could be increased in an area of 960,000 sq km, 10 per cent of the country's territory, if the proposed investments were made.

The NDRC approved the budget to buy four new planes, upgrade eight existing aircraft, develop 897 rocket launch devices and connect 1,856 devices to digital control systems. The whole project will take three years.

The usual practice of making rain is to use aircraft or rockets to "seed" clouds with catalysts such as dry ice to induce or increase rainfall to relieve drought.

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China to reduce marine fish catch for ecological protection

[China daily, 21-01-2017] China plans to reduce its marine fish catch in the next few years to protect the environment.

The ocean fishery output will drop to less than 10 million tonnes by 2020, down by 3.1 million tonnes from 2015, Vice Minister of Agriculture Yu Kangzhen said.

"When setting the target, we have considered the state of resources, fishermen's livelihoods and the sustainability of the fishing industry," Yu said. "To achieve the target, the government will cut down on fishing vessels, examine catches at ports, and act against undersized catches."

A total of 7.5 billion yuan (1.1 billion U.S. dollars) will be earmarked from the central budget from 2016 to 2020 to subsidize fishermen and encourage them to find jobs in aquaculture and recreational fishing.

China is the world's largest country in terms of fish catch with the most fishing vessels and fishermen, but overfishing in the past years has substantially depleted its fishery resources.

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China to spend \$37 Billion to tackle growing waste problem

[Caixin, 24-01-2017] China plans to spend 252 billion yuan (\$36.7 billion) through 2020 to tackle the country's growing garbage problem, the country's top economic planner said Sunday, 22 January.

About two-thirds of the money will fund "non-harmful" methods of household-waste disposal, such as incineration, landfills and recycling, according to a statement by the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

The move aims to reduce worsening soil and water pollution caused by household waste, it said.

The commission said it wants to cut the amount of household waste dumped in landfills each day from 501,500 tons in 2015 to 477,100 tons by 2020. Capacity at incineration plants will be expanded by more than 150% to 591,400 tons per day.

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China unveils pilot program on provincial territorial planning

[Xinhua, 09-01-2017] China unveiled a pilot program on provincial territorial planning on Monday 9th January to upgrade the country's capability and efficiency in managing territory.

Seven provincial-level regions, including Jilin, Zhejiang, Fujian, Jiangxi and Henan, are newly included in the pilot program, in addition to Hainan and Ningxia, which were part of the previous trial program.

Under the program, urban space, agricultural space, ecological space and the "red line," or bottom line, for ecological protection in pilot areas will be clearly defined.

The boundary between urban development and permanent farmland will also be defined, according to the program.

The program has set goals to improve the country's development quality and efficiency of resource use to achieve a sustainable environment.

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Trade and Business

Silk Road route back in business as China train rolls into London

[Guardian, 14-01-2017] After 16 days and 7,456 miles, the locomotive's arrival heralds the dawn of a new commercial era.

When the East Wind locomotive rumbles into east London, it will be at the head of 34 carriages full of socks, bags and wallets for London's tourist souvenir shops, as well as the dust and grime accumulated through eight countries and 7,456 miles.

The train will be the first to make the 16-day journey from Yiwu in west China to Britain, reviving the ancient trading Silk Road route and shunting in a new era of UK-China relations.

Faster than a ship, cheaper than a plane, the East Wind won't be quite the same train that left Yiwu on 2 January. Differing rail gauges in countries along the route mean a single locomotive cannot travel the whole route. But the journey still marks a new departure in the 21st-century global economy. The new train, which will start to run weekly while demand is tested, is part of China's One Belt, One Road policy – designed to open up the old Silk Road routes and bring new trade opportunities. China Railway has already begun rail services to 14 European cities, including Madrid and Hamburg. As a result, Yiwu's markets are now loaded with hams, cheese and wine from Spain and German beer is available on every corner.

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Food exports to China key part in Britain's post-Brexit era

[China Daily, 05-01-2017] China has been identified as one of the top priority post-Brexit markets for British food and drink, a government minister said on Wednesday.

Andrea Leadsom, secretary of State for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs, said that the country's food, farming and fishing industries will be having an extraordinary opportunity to "thrive".

Leadsom, in a speech at a farming conference in Oxford, spoke of the big world-wide markets beyond the EU for British food and drink.

"I saw this for myself in China, where there's a growing appetite for British food and drink. We now have our biggest export team based there, and the past year has seen a huge rise in British exports to China, up over 50 percent on 2015," she said.

Leadsom said China was just one of the priority markets Britain has identified in its international action plan.

Non-EU dairy exports are up 91 percent; wheat exports are up 80 percent; and, a real triumph, British lamb was voted product of the year in France last year, added the minister.

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China's top farm product export province sets new record

[Xinhua, 21-01-2017] Shandong Province in east China set a new record of exporting farm products worth 107.5 billion yuan (about 15.6 billion U.S. dollars) in 2016, according to the provincial government.

Shandong has been the country's top agricultural product exporter for the past 18 years. Shandong's farm exports, accounting for nearly a quarter of the nation's total, grew by 13.1 percent year on year in 2016.

Top export products from the province are vegetables, freshwater and seafood products, while fresh and dried fruits and potato products are gaining popularity.

The major export destinations are Southeast Asian countries, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.

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Farmers to share in enterprise earnings

[China Daily, 04-01-2017] Villagers are set to get a bigger slice of the money earned from collectively owned assets, a move aimed at protecting their interests.

According to a guideline issued by the central government, the country will reform collective ownership in rural areas in the next five years to enable farmers to have shares in the operating assets in their villages.

Earnings from such collective assets could come from factories, contracting out services or other enterprises started by the village.

Ownership of the collective assets was previously vague, so the campaign will specifically identify the assets' owners.

In the late 1970s, the country adopted a household contract responsibility system allowing families to run farms independently, even though the land remained collectively owned.

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Web brings world of choice to local tables

[Shanghai Daily, 07-01-2017] Due to online shopping services, Chinese now have much better and faster access to food from around the world, prompting changes in the local food industry.

Consumer demand for imported food is spurred by online shopping. With a few simple clicks, people can get almost anything from around the world delivered to their doorstep.

According to the Ministry of Commerce, there are more than 5,000 cross-border shopping websites, with total trade value estimated at 6.5 trillion yuan (US\$945 billion) in 2016.

Data released by a chain store research institute in Shanghai shows sales of imported food surged to 54.8 billion US dollars in 2015, up 70 percent year on year. Up to 60,000 types of food from 143 countries and regions were imported to China last year.

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Agriculture products, imported goods bestsellers for Lunar New Year

[24-01-2017] The Spring Festival has become an occasion for Chinese families to indulge in major shopping sprees, as internet giants add e-commerce twists to the Lunar New Year.

Agriculture products from rural China and imported goods are bestsellers as Chinese snap up gifts online for their family and friends in the anticipation for the celebratory feast.

Imported products are the latest darlings for China's first and second tier city residents like Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou. With a few clicks of the mouse, world-class delicacies can be a dish on anyone's dining table, from Alaska black cod, Canadian lobster to French wine and **British tea**.

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70% of food removed from supermarket shelves later offered online: insiders

[ECNS, 20-01-2017] Insiders at a food forum in South China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region said some 70 percent of food pulled off the shelves by supermarkets reenters the market through online e-commerce sites, according to Economic Information Daily.

Chinese supermarkets are required to remove food that is more than halfway to its expiration date, but strict supervision is lacking in online food sales.

Wu Pei, vice secretary general of Guangxi Food Safety Association, said most online shops fail to clearly show the expiration date and instead only hype lower prices in marketing to attract customers.

Zhang Xiaobo, a veteran agent for New Zealand milk and Australian beef in Pearl River Delta, said at least 70 percent of food unsold in supermarkets meet online consumers.

Overseas products that have not acquired import approval in China also sneak into the mainland market through online websites. A leading e-commerce site claimed to offer 1,330 types of bee glue products, but only 13 have been approved by Chinese regulators.

Experts have called for joint efforts to tighten supervision of food sold online, such as disclosing information on sellers of expired food or introducing more specific rules.

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Meat consumption drives demand for animal protein

[China daily, 14-01-2017] Bluestar Adisseo Company, one of world's largest producers of animal nutrition products, announced the launch of methionine in powder form. The product meets the growing need for animal protein that is driven by fast-growing demand for meat in China.

Adisseo is the world's second largest provider of methionine, with a market share of 27 percent. The company went public in Shanghai in 2015, the first European company to be listed on the A-share market. Its plant in Nanjing, in East China's Jiangsu province, is one of the group's largest facilities globally. About 47 percent of products produced in the plant are exported to other countries.

The compound annual growth rate of global market demand for methionine has been about 6 percent since 2013. China's market demand is growing faster, at 7 to 10 percent, according to data from FoodInfo, an information services provider focusing on the food industry.

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China raises anti-dumping, anti-subsidy taxes on US-made animal feed

[Caixin, 12-01-2017] China started levying hefty anti-dumping and anti-subsidy tariffs on Thursday on U.S. corn products used as animal feed — the latest development in a slew of trade disputes between the world's two largest economies.

Punitive tariffs on U.S.-made dried distillers grains with solubles (DDGS) have been raised to 42.2% to 53.7%, up from the original de facto 33.8% tax that the ministry imposed in September, the Ministry of Commerce said Wednesday. The government held proceeds from the taxes as a “deposit” until the final ruling.

The ministry announced its final ruling in an investigation that had been prompted by complaints from local suppliers in November 2015.

Chinese companies had said corn subsidies in the U.S. were indirectly benefiting U.S. suppliers of DDGS, allowing them to flood the Chinese market.

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Cooperl, New Hope Liuhe set up China pork venture

[Just Food, 16-01-2017] Cooperl, the French pork group, has set up a joint venture in China with local group New Hope Liuhe.

The companies plan to build a processing plant in China but its location, annual production, capacity and the timeframe for it entering service has not been disclosed.

The venture will operate on a 50:50 basis with each party injecting capital of EUR20m. It will focus on pork processing for cured, cooked, non-cooked and smoked products, Cooperl said.

"It's the first stage of co-operation between the two parties for the development of a complete production chain for pork products in China."

The plant will employ "western low-temperature cooking methods for high-quality products."

Cooperl added: "This project contributes to the implementation by New Hope Liuhe of developing a strategy for organised pork activities stretching from farmgate to fork."

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China to push traditional dishes, overseas mergers to boost food safety

[SCMP, 12-01-2017] China will promote traditional dishes and push food firms to set up overseas bases for raw materials such as grain and oil to improve its food safety record by 2020, the top state planner said on Wednesday 11 January.

Food scandals have aroused public anger in the world's largest food consumer in recent years, ranging from tainted infant formula to expired meat.

In a document published on its website, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), said it would also encourage Chinese firms to use mergers and joint ventures as a route to enter foreign food processing and research industries.

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