



# The future of food and farming - Foresight Report's implications for China



## The problems to be addressed

The Foresight report on Global Future of Food and Farming, released in January 2011, highlights the decisions that policy makers need to take today, and in the years ahead, to ensure that a global population rising to nine billion or more can be fed sustainably and equitably. It suggests a number of objectives and a range of policy and technological recommendations on how they may be achieved drawing on UK and international experience. These suggestions now need to be tailored to the resource base and socio-economic situation of China and other key countries. This study on the Foresight Report's implications for China is the first step in this direction.

Sustaining China's farming and food system is essential for the realization of Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the stabilization of global food markets. Although China is perhaps the greatest food security success of the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it now faces multiple challenges. These include increasing food demand due to income growth and changing consumption pat-

terns, limited size and degradation of natural resource base (land, water, energy), and climate change – all challenges that are addressed by the Foresight Report.

## Objectives

The main objectives of this study are five fold. First, to relate the global evidence on sustainable future food and farming provided by the Foresight report to the Chinese context. Second, to assess how far the policies and programmes put forward as part of the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan address the issues raised by the Foresight Report. Third, to highlight particular issues and successful policy and technological responses that could contribute to China's effort in sustaining the food and farming system. Fourth, to identify potential areas for UK-China collaboration through existing mechanisms e.g. SAIN and the UK-China Food Security Action Plan. Finally, to discuss how progress on these objectives could benefit the rest of the world.





## Implications

The main implications of the Foresight Report are positive for China in that it raises no issues that are not already being addressed at least in part by the GOC's development strategy. Moreover, the Report's 12 key priorities for action are mirrored by GOC policies formulated in the context of the 12th Five-Year Plan, which are less generic in nature than those suggested by the Report. However, this independent review highlights a number of areas of uncertainty about the challenges facing sustainable food production in China and how they can be overcome. In particular, it questions whether China can meet some of the demanding targets it has set for 2015 and 2020. A number of these targets are technically feasible but may be difficult to implement in the short to medium term because of institutional and socioeconomic constraints. For example, the 10th and 11th Five-Year Plans addressed the problems of non-point pollution from agriculture and the overuse and misuse of fertilizer, but progress has been limited. Consequently, there may be a case for launching a China Foresight Analysis, which, like the UK Foresight Report, seeks to break away from the conventional policy and technical responses of the past decade and forge new alliances between government

departments and pay greater attention to the socioeconomic determinants of sustainable agriculture.

Finally, and to place this independent review in a more global and bilateral context, it should be acknowledged that there is much to be positive about. First, much of China's past work on agricultural sustainability has had substantial global benefits, for example its development of improved rice cultivars. The actions in the 12th Five-Year Plan are likely to continue such benefits and even widen them because of the massive investment that is going into biotechnology and the extensive support being given to national agricultural research systems in Africa. Second, China and the UK have been developing strong research and development partnerships, through SAIN, the Food Security Action Plan, and numerous small collaborations, that could provide an effective framework for joint follow-up activities relating to the findings of the Foresight Report.

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