

China's Growing Agriculture Crisis. Devastating Shocks: Swine Fever, Floods, Droughts.

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For the past months the Peoples' Republic of China has been subject to one after the other devastating shocks to its agriculture sector. A deadly outbreak of African Swine Fever that halved China's huge pig herds in 2019, was followed by infestation from a plague of fall armyworms (FAW) which reached China in December, 2018 and now threaten China's corn belt. Now the worst floods in some 60 years is wiping out major rice and other crops in central China along the Yangtze and other rivers. Food Security is one of six national priorities for national security. President Xi Jinping has just issued a call to citizens not to waste food or face penalties, a sign that the depth of the food security threat is far worse than thought.

While any of the several problems would be manageable in normal times, the combination of agriculture disasters combined with the economic consequences of the China outbreaks of coronavirus are presenting challenges that could well impact global food security in coming months.

Fall Armyworm

At the end of 2018 the presence of a large infestation of dreaded fall armyworm was noted in southern China. In 2019 the devastation by the resilient fall armyworm (FAW) invasion caused destruction of more than 1 million hectares of farmland in China last year, damaging mainly corn and sugarcane crops. According to government news wires, so far in 2020 the fall armyworm infestation has already destroyed 1.07 million hectares in 24 provinces as of early August. Notably, the FAW infestation worked its way across Africa where it was first detected in 2016 to India and in 2018 to China.

Now as the plague moves north inside China, it threatens the heart of China's northeastern region, including Heilongjiang, Jilin, Liaoning provinces and the Inner Mongolia region, known as the grain basket of China, producing about half of the country's corn on some 13 million hectares. On August 21, Chinese state media reported presence of the dreaded FAW in Liaoning province in its northeastern cornbelt for the first time. The government has made fighting the pest a priority, however the insect is resistant to many pesticides and produces up to 3,000 eggs a season. The adults can travel up to 60 miles in a night. A major problem is that the FAW in China has already developed a resistance to many commonly used insecticides. As of February 20 this year, despite vigorous attempts at eradication with various chemicals including sophisticated spraying with drones, the FAW infestation range in China was 90 times larger than during the same period the previous year. That was just at the peak of the China coronavirus lockdowns which severely hampered timely pest [control measures](#).

African Swine Fever

The FAW is not the only major threat to China food security. In 2019 the African Swine Fever resulted in the death of more than 40% of China's pig population, the largest in the world according to official Agriculture Ministry statistics, though industry estimates put the loss as high as 60% or more than 215 million pigs. African swine fever (ASF) is an animal disease affecting pigs and wild boars with up to 100% fatality rate. There is no known cure meaning infected herds must be slaughtered to contain spread. The crisis in 2019 was the worst ever for ASF pig losses in China.

While incidences of ASF in China are dramatically down this year, the rebuilding of pig herds will take a minimum of three years according to the UN's FAO. And the new cases of ASF are still being detected. The US Department of Agriculture reports that China's overall swine production and slaughter will hit record lows in 2020 as African Swine Fever continues to impact China's hog industry. If all goes well, far from sure at this point, pig herds are [expected](#) to be only at 80% of pre-fever levels by 2022. With pig being the largest source of animal protein in the Chinese diet, the result has been doubling of consumer prices for pork products at a time the economy is in serious stress from COVID-19 and other factors.

Now, since June central China from Sichuan Province to Wuhan region along China's largest river, Yangtze and its tributaries, severe flooding is causing new outbreaks of African Swine Fever. As of early July, as record rains continued, a Shandong Yongyi survey of small pig farmers, corporate farmers, traders and slaughterhouses in 20 provinces revealed dozens of African swine fever cases had occurred since the heavy rains in Guangdong province, the Guangxi region and [other areas](#).

Then the Great Floods and Droughts

Every summer usually beginning May or June, there is Monsoon rainfall in central China in the region from Sichuan to Wuhan along the longest river in Asia, the Yangtze River. The Yangtze originates in the Tibetan Plateau. This year the rains have been recorded as the heaviest in some 60 years, since records began in 1961, and as of late August heavy rains have not stopped. The result has been severe flooding especially along the path of the Yangtze River basin.

By late July the intensive rains had raised the water levels along the Yangtze River to such a level level that the huge Three Gorges Dam, world's largest hydroelectric dam, situated between Chongqing in the West and Wuhan and finally, Shanghai, was deemed by some hydrologist experts to be in danger of collapse. To control flooding damage to Chongqing, officials were forced to open the Three Gorges Dam to release huge volumes of water. That water began causing severe flooding downriver in Wuhan, the site of the first declared outbreak of the coronavirus at the end of 2019.

Quite literally, a dammed if you do and dammed (sic) if you don't dilemma—flood Chongqing to save Wuhan and risk rupture of the huge dam or release water and flood Wuhan and major downriver regions. So far both have taken place. And the record rains are in the fifth declared flood as of late August.

Chongqing is a megacity with more than 33 million people in the metropolitan area, including some 23 million farmers. The entire Yangtze Basin contains considerable agriculture including rice crops that have been washed away from the flooding. In the

southwest, the Province of Sichuan with a major upstream section of the Yangtze, raised its flood emergency response to its highest level for the first time as its rivers overflowed and villages and farmland were inundated.

The 13 provinces in China that plant rice by July were all impacted by the record flooding. Farmers plant rice three times a year and the extended flooding from June into late August has impacted all three plantings. At this point there are no precise estimates of the total agriculture crop damage due to the flooding in the Yangtze region other than that it is [immense](#).

While central China is afflicted with record flooding, other parts of China have seen severe drought, especially in the wheat regions of northern and central China.

Wheat is mainly planted in central and northern China. Farmers only harvest once a year in late May to early June. This year droughts killed the crops in Henan, Inner Mongolia, Gansu, Xinjiang, Jilin, and other northern provinces. Henan Province alone produces some 25% of China's total agriculture production. According to independent assessments wheat production areas of Henan, Anhui, and Jiangsu provinces this year is lower in quality than 2019 and up to 30% lower in produced volumes. Inner Mongolia, Gansu, and Xinjiang is worse. State-run media Xinhua reported on June 16 that 50.7 percent of Inner Mongolia's land suffered heavy droughts this year. The region mainly grows wheat, as well as soybeans and corn. Crops and wild grass were [unable](#) to grow, impacting local animal husbandry.

While details of the extent of agriculture devastation are limited, as it is considered a matter of national security, the situation is clearly far graver than so far admitted. One indication is official remarks. Vice Premier Hu Chunhua recently asked the governors of each province in China to make sure sown areas of agricultural crops would not shrink and crop yield not be reduced this year. Given the extent of flooding damage, drought and insect damage to crops, that could be near to impossible. On July 27 at a Beijing food security meeting the Vice Premier warned that governors would be punished if they failed to uphold the promise, including with [dismissals](#).

Fortunately for China, its close economic ties with Russia and the fact the Russian grain harvest looks set to again be the world's largest mean that China will be able to import much of the deficit, albeit at a high price. However, with much of the world still imposing one or another degree of COVID-19 quarantine, global food availability is likely to become an increasing problem.

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Seeds of Destruction: Hidden Agenda of Genetic Manipulation

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This skilfully researched book focuses on how a small socio-political American elite seeks to establish control over the very basis of human survival: the provision of our daily bread. "Control the food and you control the people."

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