

Survey of Social Responsibility in Leading Agricultural Enterprises in China

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Abstract: A survey of leading agricultural enterprises in four provinces in China – Sichuan, Liaoning, Hebei and Inner Mongolia – shows only a rudimentary and incomplete understanding of corporate social responsibility. The leading enterprises have made progress in increasing farmers’ income, ensuring food safety, implementing regulations on environmental protection and participating in social welfare programs. However, there is still much room for improvement. This report concludes with suggestions as to how these enterprises can fulfill their social responsibility. ^①

1. Foreword

In the 1980s, China’s rural development policy focused on the household contract responsibility system and the growth of township and village enterprises, which boosted productivity by giving rural residents a greater measure of control over their produce. In 1998, the central government approved a policy of agricultural industrialization focused on leading enterprises – known as dragon heads – to which it increased its support each year, rapidly boosting their development. By the end of 2008, this group included 81,500 enterprises. There were 51,000 leading enterprises with sales revenues of over 5 million yuan, comprising 62.58 per cent of the total number of industrial enterprises.

These leading enterprises have raised both peasant household income and agricultural product quality, and contributed to environmental protection and welfare. By the end of 2008, rural income had risen by an average of 1,797 yuan per household. The quality and safety of agricultural products had also greatly improved. Leading enterprises have strengthened welfare programs in rural areas. Many have responded to the call of the Chinese Communist Party and the government to support and participate in their “new socialist countryside construction,” which aims to improve the livelihoods of people in rural areas.

Despite these advances, problems remain in the allocation of profits, poor performance in implementing contracts and imbalanced development among regions and industries. In particular, profits derived from agriculture tend to accrue to downstream processing agents rather than to farmers. A mutually beneficial relationship between enterprises and farmers is an important aspect of corporate social responsibility. Profits must be more fairly shared to protect peasant households and guarantee the long-term development of enterprises, as well as to uphold the fundamental basis of corporate social responsibility and the government’s ideal of a harmonious society. Emphasizing social responsibility in leading agricultural enterprises is in line with today’s global trend and will help the government achieve its goals.

This report will expound on the understanding and practice of corporate social responsibility in leading agricultural enterprises, and analyze the issues and reasons behind the findings. With reference to practices in foreign countries and in other industries, the report will propose measures

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to urge leading Chinese agricultural enterprises to actively fulfill their social responsibility.

2. Social responsibility in leading agricultural enterprises

There is no clear definition of CSR in China. The government has issued statutes referring to corporate social responsibility in general terms, as a concern for the public interest and for the environment.^② Some domestic scholars have done research in this field (LU Daifu, 2001; LI Zheng 2006) and support the government's concern. In the academic community, it is generally agreed that companies have a responsibility to contribute to social welfare in addition to pursuing maximum profits. A review of current laws and academic views on CSR shows that agricultural dragon head enterprises are considered to bear a special obligation to actively safeguard the interests of all stakeholders in their business. More specifically, these obligations include: helping farmers to increase their income, ensuring food safety, safeguarding employees' welfare, conforming to environmental protection regulations and participating in social welfare programs.

2.1 Helping farmers increase their income

The household contract responsibility system introduced in the 1980s, which allowed farmers to sell extra produce on the open market after meeting a quota for purchase by the government, gave farmers incentive to increase production and was initially very successful. However, as markets were consolidated and big buyers set the prices, individual farmers found their increased production was not bringing them much benefit in terms of higher incomes. The government therefore issued a series of policies to support the development of large enterprises that would drive agricultural industrialization and benefit both producers and consumers of agricultural products. Therefore, helping farmers increase their income is an important responsibility for agricultural enterprises, and one that distinguishes them from other enterprises.

2.2 Guaranteeing food safety

Providing consumers with quality products is the responsibility of all enterprises, but this is of prime importance when the products are foodstuffs, as product quality directly influences the health of consumers. Leading agricultural enterprises therefore have a critical responsibility to provide safe products.

2.3 Safeguarding employees' welfare

^② In January 2002, the government issued a *Code of Corporate Governance for Listed Companies in China*, providing that, "While maintaining the listed company's development and maximizing the benefits of shareholders, the company shall be concerned with the welfare, environmental protection and public interests of the community in which it resides, and shall pay attention to the company's social responsibilities." In January 2006, Article 5 in the newly amended Company Law stated, "When undertaking business operations, a company shall comply with the laws and administrative regulations, social morality and business morality. It shall act in good faith, accept the supervision of the government and the general public, and bear social responsibilities." In December 2007, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission published the *Guidelines on CSR Fulfillment by Central-level Enterprises*, tasking national-level enterprises with ensuring production safety, promoting product quality, protecting employees' legal rights and interests, strengthening resource management and protecting the environment.

Agricultural enterprises have the same responsibility as other enterprises in safeguarding their employees' rights, by paying standard wages and bonuses on time and in full, maintaining safe working conditions to prevent accidents and occupational diseases, and offering vocational training to provide employees opportunities to improve and advance.

2.4 Protecting the environment

Agricultural industrial enterprises have a heavier responsibility than other enterprises in protecting the environment. Like others, they must make efforts to utilize resources efficiently and reduce the discharge of pollutants. But since their production relies heavily on the natural environment, in order to ensure sustainable development they must instruct farmers in the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers to prevent or reduce environmental pollution in agricultural production.

2.5 Participating in social welfare activities

Dragon head enterprises exist in local communities and benefit from local support. Therefore, they are responsible to actively participate in and support cultural, educational, charitable and public welfare activities in their communities. They also need to maintain good relations with local residents and the local government and promote local economic and social development.

3. Incentives for leading enterprises to fulfill social responsibility

Leading enterprises' fulfillment of their social responsibility is affected both by incentives and restraints. Companies realize that by contributing to society, they can enhance their image and reputation, which is good for business. Thus they are driven by an internal incentive to fulfill their social responsibilities. On the other hand, they face many difficulties, including unpredictable weather conditions, imbalances of supply and demand, frequent damage to agricultural produce, and the longstanding conflict between peasant households and markets over fair compensation. The Chinese government has provided an external incentive by supporting leading enterprises since 1998, while pressuring them to guarantee supplies of agricultural products and to increase the income of peasant households. Since 2000, the government guideline has been, "To support industrialization is to support agriculture, to support enterprises is to support peasants." The government has issued policies concerning finance, taxation, banking, investment and trade, and accelerated access to funds, technology, land and raw materials for leading enterprises. As a result, 6,852 such enterprises achieved sales revenues of over 100 million yuan in 2008, up 477.74 per cent from 2000.

The central government has put in place a series of measures to support leading enterprises since the global financial crisis hit in 2008. China implemented its *Adjustment and Revitalization Plan for Ten Key Industries*, and especially supported leading logistics enterprises in February 2009. In the same month, the Ministry of Agriculture and the China Agricultural Bank jointly published the *Joint Opinions of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Development Bank of China on Further Strengthening Cooperation to Support Development of Leading Enterprises in Agricultural*

Industrialization to ease the credit crunch for leading enterprises. In May 2009, the State Council issued *Opinions on Stabilizing the Agricultural Development and Increasing Farmers' Income at the Present Stage*, explicitly requesting the government to support agricultural production and the development of leading enterprises. In November, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Development Bank of China published the *Joint Notice on Further Strengthening Cooperation to Promote Development of Agricultural Industrialization*. The aim of these policies is to urge leading enterprises to assist farmers and to assume social responsibility. If enterprises fail in this responsibility, they will lose the opportunity to benefit from the government's preferential policies, which provide a good incentive and deterrent system.

4. Research overview

4.1 Research scope

This survey investigated leading agricultural enterprises and stakeholders engaged in raising pigs, chickens or cows. Leading enterprises designated as dragon heads tend to have abundant capital, large outreach and strong capacity. They are engaged in production and processing as well as distribution, including intermediaries and wholesale markets. These entities are expected to develop markets, innovate, help raise farmers' income and promote agricultural efficiency. According to their scale, profitability and capacity, enterprises are classified as national or provincial leading enterprises. Key national enterprises must (1) own fixed assets over 50 million yuan in eastern China, have sales over 200 million yuan for the previous three years and an annual turnover in the domestic market of over 500 million yuan; (2) have good economic returns, a ratio of assets to liabilities not above 60 per cent, a high turnover and value-added products, a credit ranking of A or higher, and high immunity to market risks; (3) be competent in leadership, profitable, capable of strengthening peasant farms, and own a stable and large-scale supply of raw material resources; (4) produce products with a competitive advantage. Key leading enterprises are expected to have practical management, advanced equipment and strong technological capacity. They are to lead in processing, serve as intermediaries between farmers and markets, and function as service centers.

The introduction of modern agricultural methods and the higher consumption in China have boosted the efficiency and the importance of the rural economy. Modern methods of animal husbandry, for example, have impacted both leading enterprises and farmer households to their mutual benefit. At the same time, violations of quality standards and accidents related to the agricultural process have increased in recent years, garnering attention from the government and consumers. Also, some modern methods create pollution and negatively impact the environment.

Stakeholders in China's agricultural industry include: (1) local governments, in particular the officials and offices responsible for agricultural department, produce quality and safety inspection; (2) farms; (3) households engaged in raising livestock; (4) intermediary entities such as cooperatives, milk production groups and dairy stations. Investigating the stakeholders offers an alternative perspective of the leading enterprises' fulfillment of their social responsibility, helps validate information provided by the leading enterprises and increases the authenticity of the data.

4.2 Research focus

This survey examines the current status of the understanding and fulfillment of social responsibility of leading agricultural enterprises and underlying issues that affect that status. Social responsibility includes all the enterprises' obligations towards stakeholders, such as maintaining profitability while serving and protecting the interests of consumers, employees, the community and the environment. These include producing quality certified and safe products, abiding by commercial ethics, ensuring work safety and the health of employees, protecting the legal rights and interests of laborers, protecting the environment and supporting welfare services.

Currently, there is no universal definition of CSR, let alone indices to measure the CSR of enterprises. China does have a *Code of Corporate Governance for Listed Companies*, which requires companies to "be concerned" with environmental protection and public welfare and "pay attention" to social responsibilities. With reference to this code and to the government's goals of raising rural incomes and ensuring food safety, this survey evaluates the effectiveness of leading agricultural enterprises in five areas of CSR: increasing farmers' incomes, ensuring the quality and safety of agricultural products, ensuring employees' welfare, protecting the environment and providing welfare services.

4.3 Research methods

Both qualitative (face-to-face interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) methods were used in the investigation. The sample population for the quantitative study included leading enterprises, farms and households, while interviews were conducted with governmental organizations and cooperatives.

4.4 Research sites

The investigation was conducted in the four provinces of Liaoning, Sichuan, Hebei and Inner Mongolia. In Liaoning Province, 19 leading animal breeding enterprises, five farms and five animal breeding households were surveyed in the cities of Shenyang, Anshan, Yingkou and Dalian. In Sichuan Province, 13 leading breeding enterprises, two cooperatives, 15 farms and 20 breeding households in Shehong County of Suining City and Dongpo District of Meishan City were chosen for the study. In Hebei Province, 11 leading enterprises, three cooperatives, five farms and seven dairy households in Yongan County, Chengan County, Shahe City and Dianzhou County participated in the survey. And in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, three leading breeding enterprises, three farms (including one milk producer, one cattle breeding center and one private farm), two dairy stations and 20 animal breeding households were surveyed.

5. Profile of research subjects

The survey included 46 dragon head enterprises: 13 in Sichuan, 19 in Liaoning, 11 in Hebei and three in Inner Mongolia. Of these, 19 were national level enterprises, 11 provincial, and 16 municipal or county level. Classified by ownership, one was a state-owned corporation, 42 were owned by individuals, two were foreign-funded (a category that includes enterprises from Hong

Kong, Macao and Taiwan), and one was classified under “other” ownership. By proprietorship, nine were single proprietorship enterprises, 34 joint-equity enterprises, one cooperative, one partnership and one Sino-foreign joint venture. As for business nature, 24 were engaged in processing, 18 in animal raising and one in other business.

Excluding 14 enterprises that lacked data, the average total assets of the sample enterprises was 557 million yuan at the end of 2007. Among them, there were 17 enterprises (54.8 per cent of all the enterprises) with total assets over 100 million yuan, and 14 with total assets less than 100 million yuan. Among the sample enterprises, the highest figure in gross assets was 7.5 billion yuan, and the lowest was 9 million yuan. At the end of 2007, the average sales revenue of sample enterprises was 840 million yuan. One had sales revenue less than 5 million yuan, 9 enterprises had sales revenue between 5 million to 100 million yuan, and 21 had sales revenue over 100 million yuan. The maximum sales revenue was 10 billion yuan, and the minimum was 800,000 yuan.

5.1 Farms

The survey investigated 24 farms, including 15 pig farms, five chicken farms and four dairy farms. The breakdown was as follows:

Pig farms: The farms had assets from 0.5 million to 5 million yuan, comprised mainly of personal financial investment. They had an average of eight employees. In 2008, seven farms owned more than 1,000 pigs, five farms owned between 100 and 1,000 pigs, and three farms owned fewer than 100 pigs. National subsidies were available to these farmers for large-scale farm development, hog raising, animal insurance, building standardized piggens, etc.

Chicken farms: Among the five farms surveyed, there was one hen farm, one layer chicken farm and three broiler farms. The hen farm had assets of 10 million yuan, 80 employees, an area of 100 mu, 80 square meters of barns, 40,000 breeding hens, and an annual profit of 30 million yuan. The layer chicken farm had assets of 10 million yuan, 40 employees, an area of 22.5 mu, 8,200 square meters of barns and 40,000 layer chickens. The broiler farms were relatively smaller, with about 30 employees and 200,000 chickens every year. Most chicken farms received no government subsidy.

Dairy farms: Among the four dairy farms, there was one milk producer, one cattle breeding center and two private farms. The milk producer had 300 mu of pasture land, nearly 20 employees, more than 1,000 milk cows and 600 support cows. The breeding center had 700 mu of pasture land, 46 big pastures containing 50-100 milk cows and 32 smaller pastures with 10-20 milk cows. The total investment in pastures was 20 million yuan; the center was designed for raising 4,000 milk cows. As for the two private farms, the larger one had total assets of 16 million yuan, an area of 260 mu, 35 employees, and had grown from 800 milk cows in 2006 to 1,700 in 2008. The smaller one began production with assets of 7 million yuan in September 2008. It had pastures of 150 mu, a fodder base of more than 150 mu, over 300 milk cows and 15 employees. Government policies on subsidies for dairy farms are less explicit than those for pig farms; consequently dairy farmers receive fewer subsidies.

5.2 Households

The survey investigated 43 animal breeding households, including 15 households raising pigs, four raising chickens, and 24 raising dairy cows.

Pig-raising households: Among the 15 households investigated, 13 were located in Sichuan Province and two in Liaoning Province. The households in Sichuan had from eight to 180 pigs; most of them had a few dozen pigs. The average investment was about 120,000 yuan, including 50,000 yuan for buying piglets. These households bought farm equipment and piglets from individual peddlers or cooperatives. The households in Liaoning had an average of 300 pigs and the average profit per pig was 200 yuan.

Chicken-raising households: The two households had an average of 4 mu of arable land but they did little planting. Instead they raised 14,000 and 100,000 chickens respectively. The average profit was 2 yuan for one chicken.

Dairy households: Among the 24 households surveyed, three raised cows in enclosed areas, and 21 allowed them to graze freely. They had an average of three employees and had made an average investment of 2.2 million yuan, 60 per cent of which was for the purchase of cows. The average household had 22 cows, including 12 mature cows. Conditions were better for the animals in the three households with access to enclosed pastures. The pastures actually belonged to the dairy company Yili Ltd., which provided fodder, silage, technological support, epidemic control and collective milking. The milk was therefore also of relatively good quality. The households raising their animals used excess corn or wheat planted for their family's subsistence as fodder. They occasionally bought cornmeal and soybean meal from individual peddlers when their grain was insufficient. They rarely used silage. The small-scale households raised cows at home in poor environments and had to manage disease by themselves; therefore the quality of raw milk was not as good.

5.3 Cooperatives

The survey investigated five cooperatives – two in Sichuan Province and three in Hebei Province. The cooperatives in Sichuan were the Meishan Jiusheng Rabbit Cooperative and the Shehong Pig Cooperative. The cooperatives in Hebei were the Yongsheng County Jingshan Seedling Cooperative, Yongsheng County Zhongchi Vegetable Cooperative and Ningjin Qunfang Mushroom Cooperative. The two vegetable cooperatives sold their produce at a wholesale market in Yongsheng County. They were both large-scale operations with modern equipment and marketing knowledge. The Qunfang Mushroom Cooperative had 105 members and registered capital of 3.5 million yuan. Its main business was processing and selling various types of mushroom, as well as pesticides and other products.

6. Analysis of leading agricultural enterprises and CSR

Due in part to globalization, China began to pay attention to CSR in the mid-1990s and introduced

legislation to strengthen it. Domestic organizations gradually gained awareness of CSR and began efforts to respond to the government initiative.

6.1 Leading agricultural enterprises' understanding of CSR

The survey found that most leading agricultural enterprises had some level of understanding of the relatively new concept of CSR. Most business owners could cite several goals of CSR, such as assisting farmers to raise their income, guaranteeing the quality and safety of products, saving resources, protecting the environment and participating in charity work.

Firstly, two-thirds of the enterprises agreed that increasing farmers' income was their most fundamental responsibility (Fig. 1).

Secondly, large enterprises' understanding of social responsibility was greater than that of small enterprises. Thanks to government education, well-known large enterprises have a better understanding of the notion of corporate citizenship, and are leading the way for CSR development in China. For example, Yili Ltd., a dairy company based in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, is a CSR-conscious organization. It sees its corporate responsibility as not only producing fine products, but also being a good neighbor and a good citizen that contributes to society. In the eyes of consumers, Yili represents product variety and reliable quality. In the eyes of investors, it means great returns that protect their long-term interests. To its partners, it means a loyal ally and win-win friend. To the government, society and public, Yili is seen as an honest taxpayer, an environmental protector and an excellent corporate citizen.

Fig. 1 Leading enterprises' understanding of social responsibility

Understanding of social responsibility	Times mentioned	Rate of mention
Leading farmers to increased income	26	66.67%
Saving resources and protecting environment	17	43.59%
Guaranteeing quality and safety of products	15	38.46%
Ensuring the rights of employees	14	35.90%
Participating in social welfare service	10	25.64%
Following commercial ethics	10	25.64%
Paying tax as required	7	17.95%
Promoting employment	4	10.26%
Technological innovation	3	7.69%

6.2 Leading agricultural enterprises' practice of CSR

6.2.1. Increasing farmers' income

While large enterprises and multinationals are paying more attention to CSR, the practices of many leading enterprises are still questionable. They are providing farmers with more opportunities to increase their income, but the fair division of profits remains an issue. It is important for leading

agricultural enterprises to protect farmers' interests for the sake of their own long-term development. Many are therefore willing to guarantee the farmers' primary income and bear the risks of the market.

Firstly, leading enterprises are increasingly entering into contracts with farmers that spell out their mutual obligations and provide greater income security for farmers. The Sichuan Shehong County Food Co. Ltd. purchased an annual average of 200,000 pigs in the county from 2004 to 2008. This brought farmers an income increase of 1,500 yuan per capita. During the financial crisis, many enterprises continued to purchase agricultural produce at the contracted prices, guaranteeing farmers' incomes.

According to a study of 222 leading livestock enterprises by the Ministry of Agriculture from 2008 through the first six months of 2009, enterprises' purchases from farmers had increased 10 per cent compared to the same period the previous year, and prices had also increased 9 per cent (Fig. 2). Hebei Guobin Food Ltd. signed planting and recovery contracts with farmers at a guaranteed price. For example, influenced by the financial crisis, the price of white mushrooms in southern China depreciated to 2 yuan per kilogram in December 2008. However, the corporation continued to purchase them at 5.6 yuan per kilogram, paying over 2.6 million yuan to farmers.

Fig 2. Quantity and price of produce purchased by leading enterprises from farmers during the financial crisis

	Q1 2008	Q2 2008	Q3 2008	Q4 2008	Q1 2009	Q2 2009
Increase in quantity of produce purchased compared with the same period last year (%)	14.41	10.25	9.35	11.79	10.50	12.99
Increase in price paid for produce compared with the same period last year (%)	12.01	11.05	9.28	7.75	6.85	11.58

Secondly, enterprises are providing opportunities for farmers to work in factories, in operations such as raw processing, transportation and marketing. In 2007, there were 1.433 million employees in industrial organizations in Sichuan Province, an increase of 23.2 per cent over the year before. Leading enterprises hired 1.4 million, or 33 per cent, of the total. In Shehong County, for example, the number of employees working in selling, butchering, processing and transporting pigs had increased from 780 in 2003 to 1,890 in 2007. A new project by the Hebei Kaite Group will move nearly 1,200 unemployed laborers into industrial production and drive the development of local transportation. In addition, the project will utilize 120,000 tons of corn every year, boosting farm

produce and the income of farmers.

Thirdly, enterprises can benefit farmers through equity participation and profit sharing. In 2007, among industrial organizations and farmers in Sichuan Province, 7,650 had profit-sharing schemes, and 5,960 had equity participation schemes. In Inner Mongolia, some dairy farmers loan their cows to farms, pastures, or milk producers for an annual fee. For example, some cows raised by the Baotou Qishi Milk Product Group are owned by the corporation, and some belong to dairy farmers. The farmers are paid 2,000 yuan per year per cow, for 30 years, and any calves that are born belong to the company. Another arrangement is for farmers to provide cows to be raised by milk producers. The company will evaluate the cow and determine its price and a fixed number of years over which it will pay the farmer at an amortized price. The remaining value of the cow belongs to the farmer. For example, if a cow is priced at 6,000 yuan with capacity to provide milk for five years, the company will pay 1,200 yuan to the farmer every year for five years, at which time the farmer can choose to sell the cow to the company or take it back.

6.2.2 Improved quality and safety of food

Leading agricultural enterprises have taken a number of measures to ensure high product quality and food safety. Firstly, they are increasing their investment and involvement in the growing of produce and raising of animals. In 2008, enterprises invested more than 100 billion yuan in this area, including 47.4 billion yuan for infrastructure, 4.5 billion yuan for farmers' training, 32.2 billion yuan for animal feed and other materials paid in advance, and 16.8 billion yuan for other items.

Among the leading enterprises investigated, the majority had set up relatively effective supplier management systems to guarantee the quality and safety of food products. Hebei Guobin Food Ltd. carries out six kinds of quality checks on seed supplies, technology, management, quality instruction, purchases and price. The corporation provides technology and mushroom spores, and farmers must meet relevant standards and purchase products at market prices. In this way, the enterprise can control product quality starting at the source.

Secondly, they are strengthening animal health inspections and quarantine measures. The Ministry of Agriculture, in an investigation of 895 key national agricultural enterprises, found they had spent a total of 3.04 billion yuan in 2009, an increase of nearly 26 per cent over the previous year.

Thirdly, many enterprises are seeking quality control system accreditation. Among the 13 leading animal enterprises surveyed in Sichuan Province, six had implemented China's "pollution-free food" standard, three had adopted its "green food" standard, one had adopted the country's "organic food" standard, and two had implemented ISO 9000 standards; three enterprises had implemented more than one standard concurrently. In addition, five enterprises had set up quality tracking systems. Among 11 leading enterprises in Hebei Province, four had implemented the pollution-free food standard, two had implemented the green food standard and three the ISO 9000 standards; four had implemented more than one quality system concurrently. In addition, two enterprises had quality tracking systems. In Inner Mongolia, the Yili Group used the ISO 9000 standards to establish

its quality management system, had introduced and conformed to the ISO 22000 food safety management system standards, the ISO 14001 environmental management standards and the OHSAS 18000 occupational health and safety standards. The Yili Group also utilized an automated control system for milk collection, sterile filling, packaging and delivery from its warehouse.

6.2.3 Employees' benefits

Dragon head enterprises are taking various measures to improve the treatment of employees, firstly with job security. For example, when the global financial crisis began to affect China in 2008, many enterprises that serve foreign as well as domestic markets took measures to maintain their production and employment levels. Other enterprises decreased production but found ways to keep their employees, by adopting flexible work hours or increasing employee training, for example. According to our research involving 904 dragon head enterprises, even during the first quarter of 2009, when companies were most badly hit, the number of permanent workers at these enterprises was maintained at 2008 levels.

Secondly, enterprises are increasing employment opportunities by diversifying and adding new products, increasing their capacity and expanding their scale of operations. For example, in 2009 Huiyuan Juice Co. increased its processing capacity to 1.22 million tons by building 14 new factories and introducing 38 advanced product lines. It also added more than 10,000 employees in marketing alone, building over 700 direct marketing, sales and service organizations.

Thirdly, agricultural enterprises are investing more in training to improve the skills and professionalism of their employees. Among the 904 enterprises in our study, 85 per cent had increased training opportunities for employees. On average they had trained 1,387 employees, amounting to a total of 1.38 million person hours.

Fourthly, enterprises are contributing more to farmers' pay and welfare benefits. According to the Ministry of Agriculture's study of 895 key national enterprises, these enterprises paid out 4.379 billion yuan in wages and welfare benefits to employees in 2009, a 10.2 per cent increase over the previous year.

6.2.4 Environmental protection

Regarding environmental protection, some leading agricultural enterprises are making efforts to reduce pollution emissions by properly managing gas, liquid and solid waste, as industrial enterprises are doing.

Firstly, to reduce polluting emission, Yili Group, for example, paid 18 million yuan for the construction and expansion of its sewage treatment plant, which now disposes of wastewater with the most advanced anaerobic technology. Its wastewater passes Grade A of the National Integrated Wastewater Discharge Standard.

Secondly, enterprises are developing recycling techniques. Among the 19 enterprises investigated in Liaoning, 11 had invested between 300,000 and 2 million yuan in recycling methods, including methane pools, organic treatment plants and polluted water disposal systems. Manure is used as fertilizer, and wastewater to irrigate farmland. Some pork processing enterprises in Sichuan province have implemented recycling systems that turn pig waste to methane gas and fertilizer for orchards.

Thirdly, enterprises are taking part in national ecological protection programs. For example, the Yili Group supports efforts to improve the balance between agriculture and animal rearing, to return farmland to forests and pastures and to restrict continuous grazing on grasslands, as urged by the government. By 2004, there were 57 million mu of planted grassland, 289 million mu of fenced pasture land, 408 million mu of fallow pastures and 749 million mu of degraded pastures under protection in Inner Mongolia.

6.2.5 Social welfare services

Leading enterprises actively participate in providing social welfare services. Firstly, they are participating in the government plan to build a “new countryside” and improve the environment of rural communities. Almost all the 13 leading agricultural enterprises investigated in Sichuan Province had invested in rural welfare services. Three had built roads in the community, one had built a kindergarten, three had built rest homes, and others had constructed tap water facilities, helped poor students, repaired village offices, or helped extremely impoverished households.

Secondly, they support education and cultural undertakings. Yili Group held classes to help students of low-income families in Hohhot city to complete their schooling. It also sponsored poor college students and projects to enable poor students to return home for Spring Festival. Regarding cultural and sports events, Yili Group has sponsored the Zhaojun Cultural Festival in Hohhot every year. It has also sponsored a National Commercial Goods Festival, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Sport Games, farmers’ sports meets, donated computers to 101 county-level Youth League Committees in the region, and supported various other cultural and sports events, such as the project Every County Online.

Thirdly, enterprises make charitable donations. Especially following the May 12, 2008 earthquake centered in Wenchuan, Sichuan Province, many leading enterprises responded rapidly. According to statistics, between May 13 and May 18, 2008, leading agricultural enterprises in Sichuan had donated 35 trucks of canned food, bottled water, and other goods worth nearly 3 million yuan. The Sichuan Meining Industry Group Food Company had an emergency mobilization meeting half an hour after the earthquake to assess its capabilities, organized a first batch of canned food to be delivered to the Air Force at 7:00 a.m. on May 13, and sent 20 tons of Halal (compliant with Islamic dietary rules) canned food to two towns in Qingchuan County on May 20. In order to guarantee maximum support to the disaster area, it delayed all domestic and foreign orders. Meining supplied over 85 per cent of the canned food distributed in the province. Besides such emergency donations, some leading enterprises contributed to the reconstruction of the disaster area. Yili Group donated money and goods worth 13 million yuan through diverse channels to assist in reconstruction. Apart

from disaster relief, Yili Group has launched the Healthy China Project to promote community, youth and environmental well-being, and a culture of healthy living. In 2008, this project launched two welfare programs, called Sunshine Community Welfare Dreams and Sunshine Mental Health Care Action, aimed at counseling youths in the Sichuan disaster area.

6.3 Analysis of issues affecting leading enterprises' CSR performance

6.3.1 Limited understanding of CSR

Chinese enterprises are still in the process of transforming from traditional to modern enterprises, and from domestic market orientation to domestic and foreign market orientation. Many enterprises are still heavily influenced by past economic models based on the family or on the planned economy, and their principals have only a vague concept of what CSR entails. The Dalian Zhangzidao Fishery Group, for example, classifies an enterprise's responsibility into three kinds: "Firstly, an enterprise shall bear and fulfill its economic responsibility to work for the rapid development of the national economy; secondly, it has an ethical responsibility to keep market stability, do no harm to society, and make efforts to protect society from negative impacts; thirdly, it has social responsibility."

6.3.2 Profits are not equitably shared between enterprises and farmers

Though leading enterprises have obtained remarkable progress in helping farmers increase their income, they are still far from the government's goal of "bearing risks together and sharing profits equally." Firstly, there is no standard method of compensating farmers. Our research showed that many companies did not provide contracts to guarantee fair payment to farmers. In Inner Mongolia, all 20 of the farmers interviewed had been engaged in long-term cooperation with enterprises, but only six of them had signed contracts on paper, including the three who were raising their animals in company-owned pastures. Therefore, neither side had clearly stated legal responsibilities or rights, and there were no mutual restrictions. The enterprises could decide the price of milk, and the farmers had to accept it.

After the 2008 scandal in which melamine was found in milk products, the industry suffered great setbacks. Some companies defaulted on payments or lowered the prices they paid for milk. Stricter quality inspection standards demanded higher milk quality, leading companies to reject milk and even close dairy stations, which led to farmers discarding milk or killing cows.

Secondly, farmers are not given a fair share of the enterprises' profits. Enterprises generate income from processing and marketing produce, but farmers do not share in this income. Farmers are treated merely as cheap providers of raw materials. Overall, farmers find themselves in a passive and weak position in their dealings with enterprises. Without an equal partnership, risks and benefits are not shared fairly.

6.3.3 Quality and safety control still weak

In spite of various measures adopted to guarantee quality and safety, leading enterprises still have work to do. Our research revealed that the poorest standards of safety and quality control of agricultural produce were in the production process. Deals are made between leading livestock and poultry enterprises and farmers in three ways: by verbal contract, written contract or through intermediaries. Enterprises have most control when they have a written contract and direct dealings with farmers. However, there are still some shortcomings in quality and safety control. When farmers raise livestock at home, enterprises cannot supervise their care or monitor their conditions. Occasionally, enterprises lower the quality and safety of input to reduce costs.

The situation concerning quality and safety of processed food is not optimistic as a whole. Effective quality and safety control systems (such as HACCP and ISO9000) are requisite to ensure safe, high-quality processed agricultural produce. Small enterprises bear a heavy burden in implementing quality and safety management systems, and take huge risks with regard to costs and proceeds. Large or medium enterprises commonly have more capital, pay more attention to product quality and brand promotion, and have more ability and inclination to pay for quality and safety management systems.

Delivery systems of farm produce are still inadequate as well. Agricultural products tend to be delivered in their natural form, in bulk, exposed and not properly refrigerated. The grading is simple, rough and lacks standardization; the packaging is crude, or in some cases there is no packaging at all; measures for keeping produce fresh are deficient. These factors increase the possibility of contamination during loading, transportation, resale and retailing of the produce.

6.2.4 Problems in safeguarding employees' interests, the environment and social welfare

Many agricultural enterprises are unable to adequately ensure their employees' welfare, take measures to protect the environment and participate in welfare services. Some of the enterprises we researched were found to provide a poor work environment, demand long working hours, offer only poor security, and neglect employee training. A few were in arrears on wage payments. Some enterprises may protect the environment by building methane pools or using organic manure, but often their measures meet only the most basic legal requirements in evaluation standards. Agricultural enterprises, especially small and medium ones, have no strong incentive to participate in environment protection. Also, many enterprises in China fail to view providing welfare services as their social responsibility. In our interviews, some enterprise principals considered acts of charity as an optional moral pursuit, and some even regarded them merely as a form of publicity.

6.4 Cause analysis

6.4.1 Laws are inadequate and enforcement lacking

China has issued some provisions on CSR, but they are scattered in various laws and regulations, such as Article 5 in the Company Law which states: "When undertaking business operations, a company shall comply with the laws and administrative regulations, social morality and business morality. It shall act in good faith, accept the supervision of the government and the general public,

and bear social responsibilities.” Article 17 states, “The company shall protect the lawful rights and interests of its employees, conclude employment contracts with the employees, buy social insurance, and strengthen labor protection so as to realize safe production. The company shall, in various forms, reinforce the vocational education and in-service training of its employees so as to improve their professional quality.”

Some other laws and regulations – the Labor Law, Law on the Protection of Consumers’ Rights and Interests, Product Quality Law, Environmental Protection Law, and Law on Donations for Public Welfare Undertakings – also mention CSR. However, some regulations are over-simplified and impractical, and some lack clout because they outline responsibilities and duties but omit consequences for failure to comply.

The most direct and dangerous result of this failure is laxity in enterprises’ compliance with basic legal and moral obligations. In fact, some aspects of CSR are compulsory for agricultural enterprises, such as meeting food safety standards. Several major incidents concerning lapses in food safety have had huge consequences in China – such as infants who died from malnutrition after being fed fake powdered milk in 2004, and the 2008 incident in which melamine-contaminated milk killed six and sickened hundreds of thousands of babies.

6.4.2 Lack of ability to fulfill CSR

An enterprise goes through the same stages in development as humans do – infancy, growth, maturity, decline and in some cases, death. It bears different social responsibilities at each developmental stage. In the beginning, it is still relatively fragile, and would prioritize profit maximization (economic responsibility) for rapid development. Even if it has the will to bear CSR, it lacks the financial resources to do so. Besides, subject to economic conditions and market competition, it may even be tempted to default on legal responsibilities and ignore its ethical and charitable responsibilities. When the corporation goes into the growth stage, in order to obtain resources from the government and society, it may seek profit maximization while abiding by laws and regulations (legal responsibility), fulfilling its minimal social obligations. In the stable development stage, for the sake of sustainable development, to obtain recognition from government and society, and to improve its reputation, it would tend to consider its ethical and charitable responsibilities and integrate them into its development strategy. Currently, most leading enterprises are in the transformation and growth stages, while some are still in the primary stage of accumulating capital. Even if a corporation has a strong sense of CSR and the will to assume it, its priorities must be aligned with the developmental stage of the enterprise. This is an important reason for the deficiency of CSR among leading enterprises in China.

6.3.4 Lack of supportive social climate

The attitude of dragon head enterprises toward CSR is greatly influenced by China’s current social atmosphere. China is experiencing a changing economic system; people’s values are changing deeply and rapidly, and many people view Adam Smith’s concept of “economic man” as a truth that

justifies the pursuit of economic profit without limit. They ignore the idea that enterprises have ethical and legal responsibilities. In July 2007, the Institute of Social and Ethical Accountability in Britain issued its fourth biennial report, *Responsibility Competitiveness Status 2007*, at a ministerial roundtable during the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit in Geneva. China ranked 87th in the report, the lowest among the BRICS (including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). However, in China, those who do not fulfill CSR are not condemned by the public or exposed by the media or government, and their products are not boycotted by consumers.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Our research and analysis show that CSR is still a relatively novel concept to most leading enterprises in China. Many are aware of it, but lack complete understanding of the concept. Large enterprises have a better grasp of the concept than small or medium-sized firms. Enterprises have made remarkable progress in helping farmers increase their income, guaranteeing the quality and safety of produce, protecting the environment and participating in charity work. But there is still work to be done.

Further research is also needed. Further studies could include the scope and practice of CSR in different industries and in enterprises with different capacities, the progress in CSR at different stages of an enterprise's development, and the emphasis on different social responsibilities. They could also further examine the environment in China, including the legal, social and market conditions that affect CSR practices in different enterprises. Finally, further research and analysis is needed into how the government can encourage and enforce CSR among enterprises. Currently, the government monitors dragon head enterprises, but without clear requirements and standards it is difficult to evaluate CSR fulfillment. The Ministry of Agriculture is planning a pilot project that would require enterprises to report their CSR practices; the impact of this should be studied.

7.1 The government should educate enterprises

The voluntary and spontaneous fulfillment of CSR will not occur without government instruction and regulation. As enterprises generally lack the initiative to undertake CSR activities, the government needs to step in to bridge the information gap through research, strengthened legislation, supervision and enforcement. It should also offer incentives to encourage enterprises to undertake CSR initiatives.

7.1.1 Increase research and introduce methods of evaluating CSR performance

First of all, the government needs to define and promote both the theory of CSR and policies for enterprises to implement. The lack of theoretical research, understanding and clear definition of CSR in China allows enterprises to avoid social responsibility. The key elements of CSR must be identified and an appraisal system created that is adapted to the situation in China. In 2001, *Social Accountability International* in the United States issued SA8000, a global social accountability standard that has been well received around the world, especially in developed countries. However,

SA8000 focuses on labor standards and lacks guidelines on responsibility in other areas. China cannot blindly implement or promote international standards; it should adapt these standards to the country's actual situation to protect the rights and interests of farmers, consumers and laborers, as well as protecting the environment. China's policies should meet world standards and be easily accepted by enterprises.

7.1.2 Improve legislation and ensure strict enforcement

Corporate social responsibility in leading enterprises must be based on a sound legal system. The Company Law revised in 2005 was the first to mention CSR, but its provisions are incomplete. The government should tap the reservoir of experience acquired by international organizations and developed countries and incorporate CSR into law, to detail explicitly the bottom-line responsibility enterprises must assume. To ensure compliance, law enforcement must be strict and lawbreakers must be penalized. Law enforcement and judicial authorities should ensure that laws are taken seriously.

7.1.3 Strengthen information disclosure on CSR

A good supervision system is the impetus for enterprises to fulfill CSR; therefore, a system of full CSR disclosure is needed.^③ There must be standard terminology, formats and reporting systems to ensure the reliability and comparability of CSR information. With reference to disclosure practices in developed countries and international organizations, similar systems should be put in place. Reports should be comprehensive, not only including information favorable to the enterprises.

Finally, an auditing system should be implemented for CSR reporting. Fiscal and auditing authorities and registered accountant associations should establish the rules and criteria for CSR reporting, determine the objective, scope and subject of CSR audits, and devise reasonable methods and procedures of reporting and auditing CSR practices. Auditors and accountants should cooperate with government departments to strengthen checks and supervision of enterprises' CSR reports.

As for incentives, the disclosure status of enterprises may be regarded as an important assessable item/index for the appraisal, authentication and selection of suppliers for government purchases or

^③ In 2006, the Shenzhen Stock Exchange issued Guidelines on the Corporate Social Responsibility of Listed Companies, in which it explicitly encouraged listed companies to establish social responsibility systems, to periodically inspect and evaluate the practice and problems of CSR, and to produce a social responsibility report for release with the annual report. In 2008, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council issued Guidelines on Fulfilling Social Responsibility by Central Enterprises, in which Article 18 instructs that, "If possible, central enterprises shall issue a social responsibility report or sustainable development report periodically. Such reports shall cover the current situation, planning, and relevant measures for fulfilling social responsibility. In addition, central enterprises shall establish a communication and dialogue system, collect and respond to feedback by stakeholders in a timely manner, and accept monitoring by stakeholders and the entire society." In 2008, the Shanghai Stock Exchange issued the Guidelines of the Shanghai Stock Exchange for Environmental Information Disclosure of Listed Companies, which states that "the Exchange encourages listed companies to disclose their specific undertakings and achievements in fulfilling CSR as required by the Security Law and the Information Disclosure Management Bylaws of Listed Companies, and disclose an Annual Social Responsibility Report on the website of the Exchange while disclosing their Annual Report." In 2008, China's textile and apparel industry also released Reporting Guidelines on Social Compliance for China Textile and Apparel Enterprises, the first industrial guidelines on CSR disclosure in China. By the end of November, 2008, 121 Chinese companies had released CSR reports, up 50 per cent over the same period the previous year.

contractors for government projects. Those who make false disclosures should be severely punished.

7.1.4 Shaping public opinion and encouraging stakeholders to safeguard their rights

The government should create a favorable atmosphere for CSR development by raising public awareness and encouraging public participation. Firstly, it should disseminate information to enterprises to make them aware of the benefits of CSR for their own development, and the negative consequences of neglecting it. Secondly, it should strengthen information for non-shareholder stakeholders, such as employees and consumers, to increase their understanding of CSR. The government should also simplify procedures for stakeholders to uphold their rights, decrease the costs involved in doing so, and set up special rights protection bodies.

7.2 Enterprises should respond positively

Enterprises should respond with a positive attitude, raise their consciousness about CSR, strive to fulfill their responsibilities as corporate citizens, and contribute to the construction of a harmonious society in China.

7.2.1 Promoting ethical enterprises and increasing awareness of CSR

Agricultural enterprises should improve their understanding of CSR and promote business ethics. They should be farmer-oriented, taking both farmers' profits and corporate profits into account, to sustain long-term development. Enterprises should realize that compliance with social ethics can bring monetary benefit, and more importantly, they need to realize that CSR is an obligation. Enterprises need to sustain a favorable reputation by actively engaging in CSR to promote industrial development, lead farmers to increase their income, and guarantee the quality and safety of food. In addition, they need to be conscious of the ecological impact of their activities and participate in the "new countryside" construction. Enterprises should also participate in social welfare and strive to be good corporate citizens.

7.2.2 Improving operations and management and boosting CSR ability

An enterprise's business revenue determines its ability to fulfill CSR. Therefore, it should first strive to modernize its system, improve and strengthen its management, production and operations, and increase its profit margin. Secondly, an enterprise should increase its stature through strategic reorganization through mergers and acquisitions so as to attain an economy of scale. Finally, it should take advantage of national policies and enterprise-related reforms to advance its growth.

7.2.3 Large enterprises should set the example

Currently, CSR has become an important part of enterprise development and a measurement of enterprise quality throughout the world. Because of globalization, if Chinese enterprises continue to shun their corporate social obligations, they will face a backlash from the international public. Therefore, Chinese enterprises must further emphasize CSR and actively fulfill their responsibilities.

However, the concept of CSR in China is still relatively new, and the financial capacities of agricultural enterprises are unequal. Therefore, it is impractical and impossible to demand that all enterprises comply with CSR standards. Around the world, large enterprises typically engage in CSR-related activities, inciting smaller ones to follow suit. Thus influential enterprises should take the lead in developing CSR schemes. Small and medium-sized companies may practice CSR on the basis of their abilities. This does not mean that they have less social responsibility, however. All enterprises, regardless of size, should seek a balance between development and social responsibility.

7.3 Enhancing social and cultural support

Firstly, the media should be utilized in raising awareness of CSR. By means of radio, TV and print media, as well as distributing handbooks and conducting training classes, public awareness and knowledge of CSR can be increased and people encouraged to participate. On the one hand, positive publicity can correct enterprises' misunderstanding of CSR and help them realize that fulfillment of their social responsibilities would aid their development. On the other hand, it may correct any misconceptions the public may have with regards to CSR. Due to the many years under a planned economic system in China, people are accustomed to the lack of social conscience among enterprises, and regard issues such as environmental protection, charity work and employee development as the responsibility of the government or individuals but not of enterprises. Through publicity, the public can be made aware of CSR, and realize that environmental protection and harmonious development of society correlate closely with CSR. They could boycott the products of enterprises that fail to bear their social obligations, thereby forcing enterprises to act responsibly.

Secondly, the influence of public organizations such as the media, consumer associations and labor unions could be harnessed to create a multi-level and multi-channel supervision system. In particular, the media should feature enterprises that do well in fulfilling CSR and expose those who neglect their responsibilities. The public has the right to be informed of these issues. In addition, through the media, not only will the pressure from public opinion influence the enterprises, the exposure of errant enterprises would also be a deterrent to other enterprises to disregard their social responsibilities.

Thirdly, CSR should be encouraged in order to improve profit sharing between farmers and enterprises and to strengthen the position of farmers. During the process of agricultural industrialization, farmers are generally in a weak position and their interests are neglected. The interests of farmers can be protected by constituting cooperatives to negotiate or collaborate with leading enterprises, thereby forcing the enterprises to fulfill their social responsibilities. Finally, university courses in economics and management should include the concept of CSR and inculcate a sense of responsibility in future corporate managers at an early stage.

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