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China expands genetically engineered corn cultivation to 3.79 million hectares in 2026

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USDA-reported figures highlight China's accelerating adoption of domestic agricultural biotechnology, with expanded GM corn and soybean cultivation and a growing pipeline of approved crop traits.



China is one of the world’s largest importers of genetically engineered (GE) agricultural commodities and GE-derived products. Major imports include soybeans/soybean oil/soybean meal, cotton, corn, distiller's dried grains with solubles (DDGS), rapeseed/rapeseed meal/rapeseed oil, and sugar beet pulp. These imports originate from a diverse range of trading partners, including the United States, Brazil, Argentina, Canada, and India. China reported that it imported approximately 112 million metric tons (MMT) of soybeans, 2.6 MMT of corn, and 1.1 MMT of cotton in 2025. Due to tariffs and other retaliatory measures, U.S. exports of soybeans to China fell to 7.1 million metric tons (MMT). However, China has agreed to import 25 MMT of U.S. soybeans in marketing years 2026/27, 2027/28, and 2028/29, which will ensure that China will continue to be the largest market for U.S. soybeans in coming years. These figures underscore China’s significance as a key market for U.S. biotechnology products. Major U.S. agricultural trade interests related to biotechnology include predictable and science-based regulatory approvals, regulatory transparency, and timely market access for biotech soybeans, corn, alfalfa, and feed products.

China continued to accelerate the commercialization and cultivation of domestically developed GE crops in 2026 while slowing the approval of foreign developed traits for import. GE corn and soybean production expanded geographically, with reported GE corn acreage reaching 3.79 million hectares nationwide and GE soybean acreage reaching approximately 68,700 hectares.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) reported that 40 GE corn events, 16 GE soybean events, nine gene-edited corn events, and six gene-edited soybean events have received biosafety certificates for production applications as of October 2026. China’s biotechnology research and development is also expanding beyond conventional insect resistance and herbicide tolerance toward a broader range of agronomic and value-added traits. Recent approvals include

a GE drought-tolerant corn event, GE high-oil soybean event, and gene-edited waxy corn event.

China’s core regulatory framework for the development, import, use, and cultivation of GE products has not undergone major changes since the last report. GE products remain subject to pre-market biosafety review, with additional variety registration and seed production and operation licensing requirements for commercial cultivation. However, MARA has provided less publicly accessible information on newly issued biosafety certificates since the end of 2024, reducing the transparency of the approval process. The 2024 Special Administrative Measures for Foreign Investment Access (Negative List) also continues to prohibit foreign investment in the breeding of GE crop varieties, breeding livestock and poultry, aquatic seedling species, and the production of their GE seeds or seedlings.

China is also advancing GE and cloning technologies in livestock, poultry, and aquatic species, although agricultural applications remain largely at the research and development stage. No agricultural GE animal biosafety certificate authorizing commercial production has been announced publicly as of October 2026. China is expanding microbial biotechnology applications in food ingredients, enzymes, nutritional fortifiers, and agricultural inputs, with recent approvals demonstrating continued commercialization of microbial-biotechnology-derived products.