

China's focus turns to oil crops as spring planting season nears

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China's top agricultural official has urged local authorities to strengthen grainfield management and shore up planting areas of major oil crops in the runup to the annual springtime planting season, which starts between February and May nationally from south to north.

Tang Renjian, director of the Central Rural Work Leading Group Office, said that the interventions were aimed at raising food productivity and securing a bumper harvest of crops including wheat, soybean and rapeseed in the summer.

He said increased food yield is crucial to stabilising food prices and bolstering confidence in China's economic recovery.

Tang noted that the production of the crops to be harvested in summer is generally faring well, though challenges have emerged such as rising production costs due to hefty fertilizer prices.

He said interventions including more vigorous irrigation and pesticide-spraying efforts are needed for wheat and rapeseed, whose seedlings are undergoing a key transition period and had been affected by adverse factors such as colder-than-usual temperatures and inadequate rainfall.

The minister encouraged officials to fight uphill struggles to expand the growing areas of soybeans, a major oil crop that had been edged out by corn and other lucrative cash crops in Northeast China.

He asked relevant departments to speed up the rollout of more detailed policies over subsidising soybean growers and soybean-growing counties; expand the pilot zones for insurance designed to reduce the risk of growing soybean; and narrow the price gap between soybean and corn.

China had resorted to a mix of methods to expand the crop's farming, such as rotating the crop with corn in Northeast China and intercropping the two foods in places such as Northwest China and the lower reaches of the Yangtze River.Â

The efforts had increased the area of soybean fields to 10.26 million hectares last year, the largest area since 1958, and pushed the crop's output to 20.28 million metric tons in 2022, the first time soybean output on the mainland has surpassed 20 million tons, according to the agriculture ministry figures.