

Research on the optimization of the party and government accountability mechanism based on the background of "tight balance" of food security

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ABSTRACT

Food security is an important part of national security, and it is of great significance to ensure food security under the "tight balance" pattern. This paper analyzes the internal and external contradictions facing China's food security, including the constraint of cultivated land resources, the decline of grain efficiency, the rigid increase of consumer demand and the structural contradiction between supply and demand, as well as the external risks brought by import dependence and climate change. In this context, as an important innovation in food security governance, the accountability mechanism of the party and the government has significantly improved the governance efficiency through the division of responsibility, target management, resource integration and multi-department coordination. However, there are still some problems in the mechanism practice, such as a fuzzy responsibility boundary, a single assessment system, and an insufficient emergency response capacity. To this end, this paper puts forward the optimization path, including clarifying the division of responsibilities, improving the assessment system, strengthening the emergency response capacity, promoting green development and strengthening the grassroots execution, so as to build a more efficient and sustainable food security governance system and provide institutional guarantee for coping with complex challenges.

KEYWORDS

food security; tight balance; the same responsibility of party and government; governance optimization

Food security is an important cornerstone of national security and a key to stable economic and social development. General Secretary Xi Jinping has proposed the strategic goal of "basic self-sufficiency in grain and absolute security in grain rations."^[1] It emphasizes that food security is "the leader of the country", highlighting its core position and strategic significance in national governance.

Although China's grain output is stable at more than 1.3 trillion tons, and its per capita share exceeds the international safety line, multiple factors such as climate change, natural disasters, epidemic situations and geopolitical conflicts have intensified global food price fluctuations and supply chain vulnerabilities, and the pressure on food security has significantly increased.

In response to the "tight balance" situation, the party and the government share the responsibility mechanism^[2]. At the historic moment, through clarifying the common responsibility of the Party committee and the government, to provide institutional guarantee for stable grain production and supply. However, in practice, problems such as fuzzy responsibility boundary, single assessment system and insufficient grass-roots executive force still restrict their efficiency, and need to be further optimized and improved.

1 Overview of the deep contradictions in the tight balance pattern of food security

China's food security faces both internal and external pressure. Internally, the cultivated land resources are close to the red line of 1.8 billion mu, and the medium and low yield fields account for 70%. The lower soil quality limits the potential to increase production; the contradiction between supply and demand of feed grain and high-quality cash crops intensifies, and the upgrading of consumption structure increases the production pressure. Externally, China is highly dependent on key grain varieties such as soybean and corn, and the global grain trade is concentrated in a few exporting countries, so external shocks may directly threaten food security.

1.1 Rigid decline and quality constraints of cultivated land resources

The decrease in the quantity and quality of cultivated land constitute the key bottleneck of food security. By the end of 2023, China's arable land area was 1.93 billion mu, close to the red line of 1.8 billion mu, and the per capita arable land was less than 1.4 mu, far lower than the global average of 4.8 mu. In terms of quality, first-class to third-class high-quality arable land accounts for only 31%, and low-yield farmland accounts for as high as 70%^[3]. The soil fertility is insufficient and seriously degraded. Long-term excessive cultivation in the black soil of northeast China causes the loss of soil organic matter and structural degradation, which further weakens the potential of increasing grain production and poses a continuous threat to the national food security.

1.2 Expansion of the "non-agricultural" and "non-food" phenomenon of cultivated land

Under the background of the constraint and declining quality of cultivated land resources, the phenomenon of "non-agricultural" and "non-grain" of cultivated land further aggravates the pressure of food security^[4]. "Non-agricultural cultivation" is mainly manifested in the conversion of high-quality cultivated land into construction land due to urbanization development, and the decrease of agricultural cultivation area, especially in the economically developed areas and the main marketing areas in southern China. "Non-grain conversion" is shown that high-quality grain fields are converted to orchards, tea gardens or cash crops, driven by economic interests, such as vegetables and medicinal materials. The planting area of orchards and tea plantations across the country has grown steadily for ten years, significantly crowding out the space for planting food crops. "Non-grain cultivation" not only reduces the area of grain cultivation, but also destroys the cultivation layer, weakens the soil fertility, and affects the stability of the farmland ecosystem. This trend has become an important hidden danger to threaten the stable grain production and supply, highlighting the urgency of optimizing the management of cultivated land resources.

1.3 Decline of grain efficiency and inhibition of enthusiasm for grain production

The decline of grain efficiency is the key factor to restrain the enthusiasm of grain production, which is mainly manifested in the reduction of farmers grain income, the accelerated transfer of agricultural labor force and the imbalance of resource allocation. In major grain-producing areas, the per capita GDP in 2023 will be less than two-thirds of the main selling areas, significantly lower than the main selling areas and the national average level, weakening farmers willingness to grow grain^[5]. At the same time, the acceleration of industrialization and urbanization has intensified the transfer of rural labor to cities, reduced the supply of agricultural labor, and reduced production efficiency. Moreover, the imbalance in resource and factor allocation further aggravates the differences in regional food production efficiency. studies have shown^[6]. The low efficiency of labor force and capital allocation directly affects the production capacity and benefit of the main grain producing areas.

1.4 The rigid increase of consumer demand and the structural contradiction between supply and demand

Although Chinas total grain output is stable at over 1.3 trillion tons, and its per capita grain output exceeds the international security line, this "surface balance" covers up the deep structural contradiction between supply and demand. With the growth of population, consumption upgrading and the expansion of feed and grain demand, the demand for food increases rigidly, while the adjustment of production structure lags behind, and the imbalance between supply and demand becomes increasingly prominent.

Urbanization and the upgrading of household consumption are the main drivers of food demand growth^[7]. By the end of 2023, the urbanization rate of Chinas permanent resident population reached 66.16%, and the consumption of meat and dairy products will continue to increase, and the proportion of feed and grain consumption in total grain consumption will continue to rise. In addition, the diversification of grain quality demand has exacerbated the gap between the supply and demand of high-quality rice and high value-added oil varieties, but the domestic production system still mainly focuses on the total balance.

The specific manifestations of the contradiction between supply and demand include: the traditional grain supply is sufficient, but the shortage of high quality grain and oil, and the high quality grain varieties depend on import or high price; the supply and demand of feed, the self-sufficiency rate of soybean is less than 20%, the import dependence is more than 80%, the fluctuation of the international market further increases the domestic risk; the imbalance between regional supply and demand, the low self-sufficiency rate of grain in the main marketing area in southern China, and the dependence on "north to south transportation" is increased^[8]. Logistics costs are rising and the transportation efficiency is difficult to meet the demand.

1.5 External risks posed by import dependence and climate change

Import dependence and climate change are the main external risks facing Chinas food security. In recent years, the demand for feed grain and high-quality grain varieties has increased, and the external dependence of key varieties such as soybean and corn has continued to rise. In 2022, Chinas soybean imports exceeded 90 million tons, accounting for more than 60% of the total global trade volume, and 85% of its dependence on foreign countries. This highly concentrated import structure makes Chinas grain supply highly sensitive to the fluctuations in the international market^[9]. For example, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has pushed up global corn prices, leading to a sharp rise in Chinas import costs.

The threat of climate change further aggravates the food security risks. In 2021, heavy rain in Henan affected tens of

millions of mu of farmland, causing grain production; in 2022, high temperature and drought in the Yangtze River basin led to rice production in Hunan and Jiangxi. Internationally, the drought in Brazil in 2021 led to the reduction of soybean production, and the global prices rose accordingly, and Chinas import costs increased. In addition, climate change has long-term effects on farmland quality and adaptability of grain varieties. For example, due to soil degradation in northeast China, the yield per unit area declines, further threatening national food security.

2 Proposal and practical background of the same responsibility of the Party and the government

With the increasingly complex situation of food security, the traditional single government management mode is difficult to cope with many challenges such as food production, supply and reserve. The combination of international market fluctuations, climate change and resource constraints has made the task of ensuring food security even more arduous. Under this background, the accountability mechanism of the party and government arises at the historic moment and becomes an important innovation of Chinas food security management.

The joint responsibility mechanism of the Party and government is the central government to promote food security from the economic task to the national security strategy. In the context of General Secretary Xis proposal that "food security is the power of the country", the mechanism stipulates that Party committees are responsible for strategic planning and policy coordination, and the government is responsible for specific implementation tasks, including food production, resource allocation and emergency management^[10]. As an important innovation in Chinas food security governance, the party and government accountability mechanism not only effectively improves governance efficiency by clarifying responsibility division, strengthening management by objectives, optimizing resource allocation and multi-department coordination, but also elevates food security to a national strategic height and provides a solid guarantee for production and supply.

However, the operation of the mechanisms still faces multiple challenges.

First of all, some local responsibilities have unclear boundaries and responsibilities are not equal, which affects the implementation of policies.

At the same time, the lack of cross-department cooperation and the low efficiency of resource allocation restrict the realization of production goals.

Secondly, the current assessment system focuses too much on sown area and total output, and ignores grain quality, resource protection and ecological sustainability, making it difficult for local governments to take into account the needs of short-term production increase and long-term quality improvement.

Furthermore, weak emergency response and long-term planning capabilities limit the adaptability and resilience of mechanisms. Some regions have been slow to respond to natural disasters and fluctuations in international markets, with weak grain reserves and scheduling capabilities, and long-term planning has paid insufficient attention to the sustainable use of resources and climate-change adaptation.

3 Optimize the path of the party and government responsibility mechanism

In order to further enhance the efficiency of the party and government responsibility mechanism in food security governance, in view of the deficiencies in practice, it can be optimized from the following five aspects.

3.1 Clarify the boundaries of responsibility and improve the synergistic efficiency

Refine the division of responsibilities of the party committees and the government to avoid ambiguous rights and responsibilities. Party committees should focus on strategic planning and policy guidance and bring food security into the core task of local development; the government should focus on production organization and resource allocation. At the same time, a cross-departmental coordination mechanism should be established to improve collaborative efficiency through information sharing and task decomposition. For example, food security coordination specialists should be established to coordinate agricultural, financial and other resources to provide support for the realization of the goal.

3.2 Improve the assessment system and strengthen the quality orientation

We will transform from quantity assessment to quality assessment, and introduce indicators such as grain quality and ecological protection on the basis of total output. For example, assess the planting area of high quality grain and oil and green agriculture, optimize the production structure, and encourage local governments to explore the path of quality improvement and ecological sustainable development through incentive mechanism.

3.3 Enhance the emergency response capacity and strengthen the long-term planning

We will build a rapid response system for grain production, circulation and storage, set up emergency reserve centers in major producing areas, and use digital monitoring to improve the efficiency of transportation. At the same time, we will incorporate climate change adaptation and ecological goals in the plan, promote the construction of high-standard farmland and the optimization of the planting structure, and enhance the resilience of grain production.

3.4 Promote green development and optimize the production structure

We will gradually shift from total safety to structural and quality safety, expand the planting area of high-quality grain and oil through policy support and technological promotion, promote green agricultural technologies, and increase the added value. Through the market incentive mechanism, farmers should be encouraged to adopt environment-friendly and efficient production methods, and strengthen the green development goal in the assessment.

3.5 Strengthen capacity building at the community level and enhance executive power

As the main body of implementation, the grassroots government should improve the efficiency of policy implementation through financial support and technical training. Innovate governance models, such as promoting the "field chief system", implement the responsibility to people; strengthen the application of digital technology, realize accurate monitoring and scientific regulation, and improve the level of production and management.

By improving the mechanism of both the party and the government, Chinas food security capability will be further enhanced, providing solid support for coping with complex internal and external challenges, and laying a foundation for the stable development of economic and social development.

4 Sum up

Food security is an important part of national security. Under the current "tight balance" pattern, it is particularly important to ensure food security. Chinas food security is facing many challenges, including the constraint of cultivated land resources, the decline of grain efficiency, the rigid increase of consumer demand and the structural contradiction of supply and demand. In addition, external risks such as import dependence and climate change also pose a threat to Chinas food security^[11]. In order to meet these challenges, China has implemented the accountability mechanism of the party and the government, effectively improving the efficiency of food security governance through responsibility division, target management, resource integration and multi-department coordination. However, in practice, this mechanism still has problems such as unclear boundaries of responsibility, a single assessment system and insufficient emergency response capacity^[12]. In order to further optimize the food security governance system, an optimization path is put forward, including clarifying the division of responsibilities, improving the assessment system, strengthening the emergency response capacity, promoting green development and strengthening the execution at the grass-roots level. These measures are aimed to build a more efficient and sustainable food security governance system and provide a solid institutional guarantee for addressing complex and volatile challenges^[13]. Through these efforts, China aims to ensure food security, maintain social stability and national security, and meet the peoples needs for rich and diverse food varieties, quality, nutrition and health.

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