

Remarks by Dr. Yutong Li, Head of CSAM

8th Regional Forum on Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Asia and the Pacific

Discussion Forum on 'Agriculture Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Building Back Better through Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization'

Friday, 11 Dec 2020
(14:00 – 16:00 hrs Beijing time/GMT+8)

Respected panellists,
Distinguished participants
Good morning / Good afternoon!

It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you back to the afternoon session of today's 8th Regional Forum on Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization in Asia and the Pacific, which is the *Discussion Forum on 'Agriculture Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Building Back Better through Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization'*.

I hope that you have found the morning session informative. CSAM took the initiative to lead the organization of this policy dialogue with the UN Resident Coordinator in China and several agencies in the UN Country Team, to provide our partners in the Regional Forum with the perspective of China on food systems at large while being on the frontline of the fight to contain the pandemic and recover from its impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a severe threat to food and nutrition security across the Asia-Pacific region and the world. The disruptions resulting from the pandemic have undermined not only food production but also reduced incomes, including for smallholder farmers, migrant workers and other vulnerable segments of the farming community, which has restricted their access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food. There is risk of hunger and malnutrition rising unless concerted and effective mitigation measures are taken¹.

Supporting recovery in the agricultural sector is among the most critical needs of the hour in our region. Given the intricate linkages of agriculture with rural advancement as well as social and environmental development, putting agriculture back on track is vital for continued progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In this process, we must look beyond the current pandemic and aim to 'build back better'. This means we should build the resilience of the sector not only to better withstand future shocks but to sustainably enhance prosperity and cope with the disruptive impacts of climate change. And we need to make sure that the future

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9473en/ca9473en.pdf>

development trajectory of the sector is inclusive with due attention to the needs of smallholders, elderly workers, women farmers and migrant workers.

As I also mentioned this morning, sustainable agricultural mechanization is among the solutions that can strengthen the resilience of the farming community and can play a key role in the process of transitioning to a 'green' and prosperous future. For every step in the crop production lifecycle, use of farm implements and machinery can enhance efficiency. Sustainable agricultural mechanization not only supports the optimal utilization of resources such as land and labour as well as expensive farm inputs like seeds and fertilizers, but also helps farmers, including smallholders, to save valuable time. For instance, mechanization can help facilitate sustainable intensification through multi-cropping and timely planting of crops, which can give the crops more time to mature leading to increase in productivity. Moreover, machinery and facilities for harvesting, drying, processing, and storage can play a significant role in reducing agricultural losses, and less loss implies higher overall production and persons fed per unit area of land, all of which become critical in times of crisis.

At the same time, we must be conscious of the geographic, economic, social and cultural diversity of the Asia-Pacific region. While this poses challenges in upscaling solutions such as mechanization, it also offers us the opportunity to cooperate. The different sub-regional, national and local contexts enable a wide range of solutions to evolve, be tested and adapted. To transform this opportunity into tangible gain, we must exchange knowledge and best practices on sustainable agricultural mechanization. And this is indeed among our key objectives today.

CSAM has been working dedicatedly to promote sustainable agricultural mechanization for the benefit of our member States. Today, we are pleased to provide a regional platform for exchange of knowledge, experience and solutions for strengthening the role of mechanization in recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and building back better beyond the crisis.

Once again, a very warm welcome to all of you, and I look forward to active deliberations today and hearing perspectives from different countries and sub-regions.

Thank you.