

The Greening of Food and Agriculture in China: Organizational Forms in the Organic and Ecological Agriculture Sector

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China has gained an infamous reputation over the past two decades for food safety scandals pertaining to everything from contaminated processed food, to tainted milk, meat and seafood, to fake eggs, to pesticide-laden fresh produce. These trends have led to a surge in the domestic sales of organic and green foods in China, a surge that has followed on from and recently outpaced organic production for export. Based on in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, this paper examines how the organic, and broader ecological, agriculture sector is emerging in China, and to what extent small farmers are integrated into each of these types. We identify three main types of organizational forms in the ecological agriculture sector: private enterprises that lease land from local farms and hire farm workers; 'dragon-head enterprises' that process or package produce that is supplied on contract by farmers' cooperatives and individual farmers; and farmer cooperatives, which operate autonomously. We end by discussing how China's experience should encourage us to rethink the concepts of alternative food networks that are based on practices in the global north. This presentation will be followed up with Zhenzhong Si's discussion of government roles in conventionalization in the organic sector, and Aijuan Chen's presentation on scaling up organic production through farmer cooperatives.