

No hunger for bioenergy

April 24 (China Daily) -- China will strictly control bioenergy development at the cost of grain and oil crop shortage, declared Agriculture Minister Sun Zhengcai, on April 21 in a talk with the Danish Minister for Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Eva Kjer Hansen, in China on a visit.

As crude oil prices have continuously broken new highs in reaching the current level of \$110 per barrel, developing bioenergies is heating up around the world. Some 40.5 million tons of fuel ethanol and 5.4 million tons of bio-diesel were produced worldwide in 2006, increasing two and three fold respectively from the figures in 2001.

However, around 12 percent of corn in the world and 20 percent in the United States is used for producing fuel ethanol, and 20 percent of rap oil in the world and 65 percent in the European Union, as well as 30 percent of Southeast Asia's palm oil is used for producing bio-diesel, and has contributed the current global grain and edible oil prices.

Both the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and International Monetary Fund have expressed their concerns that roaring demand for biofuels would pressure farm produce prices globally in the long-run.

In this case, China should mainly utilize agricultural wastes, such as wheat straws and corn stalks, animal feces, as well as rotten leaves, and non-grain farm produces, like cassava, sweet potato, sweet sorghum, sugar beet, and jerusalem artichoke, as its own approach to develop bioenergies, rather than at the expense of grains that already short in supply, said Sun.

China has about 100 million hectares of mountains, shoals, and saline or alkaline lands which are not suitable for growing grains but energy plants.

Sun said roughly 26 million Chinese families in rural areas had started making use of self-produced methane last year, and five million more are expected to join in this year.

According to the Renewable Energy Development Plan for the 11th Five-Year period released last month by the National Development and Reform Commission, by the year of 2010 renewable energies will account for 10 percent of the national energy consumption structure, and electricity generated by biological materials will reach an installed capacity of 5.5 million kW.

Meanwhile, some 2.2 million tons more of fuel ethanol produced by non-grain materials are set forth for the 11th Five-Year period, and annual bio-diesel consumption will reach 200 thousand tons by 2010.

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