

China cleaning up 25 million acres of polluted farmland to meet soaring food demand

China has shut more than 1,300 heavy metal enterprises since 2016 as part of a long-term plan to curb widespread chronic soil pollution, an environment ministry official said on [Nov.29].

Soil pollution is one of China's biggest and most expensive environmental challenges. The last nationwide survey in 2014 showed that around 16% of its land – an area the size of Mongolia – was contaminated to varying degrees by fertilizers and pesticides, heavy metals, plastic and other chemicals.

But Su Kejing, director in charge of soil pollution at the environment ministry, told a briefing he was confident China could meet a target to make around 90% of contaminated farmland safe for agriculture by the end of [2020].

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Tackling soil and water pollution is a major part of China's efforts to boost agricultural productivity. China is trying to squeeze more food out of its farming belts, especially as its urban populations soar.

A 2015 government study estimated that heavy metals had contaminated at least 10 million hectares (25 million acres) of farmland, reducing annual grain production by 10 billion kg (22 billion pounds) a year.

Read full, original article: China shuts 1,300 metal firms since 2016 in soil clean-up