

How China's decision to aggressively expand GMO soybean planting and imports is reshaping geopolitical trade and food wars

China's recent decision to expand the pilot planting of genetically modified soybeans has the potential to reshape the global soybean trade.

Soybeans, crucial in animal feed, human food and industrial products, are immensely important in China. Although the country is a major soybean producer soybean production [at 20 million tonnes](#), China is remains the world's largest importer, accounting for more than 60% of global demand.

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In 2021 alone, China [imported more than 100 million tonnes](#) of soybeans, mainly from Brazil, the US and Argentina. This was a 13.3% year-on-year increase from 2020.

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The pressure of testy US–China relations has made it imperative for China's policymakers to increase local soybean production, including through GM seeds. Soybeans play a crucial role in China's economy and Beijing [consistently emphasises](#) the need for increased local production in its policy measures, targets and [five-year plans](#). Recent efforts, like draft rules on [registration requirements for herbicides](#) used on GM crops and the [14th Five-Year Plan on Bioeconomy](#) (2021-2025), have highlighted the government's commitment to exploring agricultural biotechnology for human consumption at scale.

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To achieve a higher [usage of GM technology](#) in agriculture it has commenced GM pilot programs to gradually introduce domestically-produced GM soybeans and other crops into the market for human consumption.

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