China reverses course, authorizes genetically modified corn and soybeans to wean itself off western imports

China is about to start growing genetically modified crops, and that has me wondering what it will mean for its yields, its self-sufficiency, future crop imports and rural culture.

China has long accepted imports of genetically modified crops but did not grow them itself except in pilot tests. China did, however, grow GM cotton.

That is changing.

In December the government gave licences to 26 domestic seed companies to produce and commercially sell GM corn and soybean seeds.

The goal is to increase domestic yields and total production to reduce the country’s reliance on imported grain.

China has slowly built up the capacity of domestic seed breeders to create lines that are competitive with multi national seed companies.

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The government in Beijing hopes introducing GM traits such as herbicide and pest resistance will help close the gap between China’s low yields and those in the United States, Canada and South America.

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It will be interesting to watch the real world impact as GM traits spread across Chinese farms.

But as noted, there is much more to successful production than just GM seeds.

A big issue that China’s agricultural sector will soon have to face is the declining population of working age people in rural areas.

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