

Our Agricultural Policy Vision Security, Happiness, Beautifulness

Agriculture contributes to a nation and its society not only through production, but also constitutes the link between the ecological environment and the foundations of our lives and culture. More so sustainable agriculture is the root of a nation's survival. In the early stages of Taiwan's economic development agriculture played the role of backing up industrial development. Concrete examples from that period are the export of cane sugar to earn foreign currency and the Rice-Fertilizer Barter Program that bolstered government tax revenue. It is fair to say that without agriculture Taiwan wouldn't exist. Although the agricultural sector's share of the value of total production and total value added to the national economy has steadily declined, this does not mean at all that the importance of agriculture for Taiwan has diminished.

In recent years the domestic agricultural sector has faced numerous severe challenges. The continued expropriation of agricultural land in the process of economic development, in particular, has caused a loss of arable land and threatens generational justice. Agricultural competitiveness proves difficult to improve due to longstanding structural problems plaguing the agricultural workforce and arable land. Agricultural policy constitutes an unholy mix of industrial policy and welfare policy. Trade liberalization has led to a massive influx of agricultural goods from abroad. Climate change has increased production risk for farmers. The exodus of conventional industries has caused a decline in farm household income. The widening wealth gap and worsening rural-urban disparities make it difficult for children from farming families to turn their lives around. We have reached the point where these problems must

be solved.

We suggest in our vision for Taiwan's agricultural policy a "safe agriculture," "happy farmers," and "beautiful villages." In order to put these three visions into reality the Taiwan Brain Trust (TBT) proposes five core values for Taiwan's agricultural policy. They are food self-sufficiency, sustainable agriculture, balanced development of urban and rural areas, small-scale farming, and region-specific agriculture.

First, as an island, the primary core value of Taiwan's agriculture must be food self-sufficiency. By maintaining food security the nation can be spared from food shortages, can enjoy stable supply and eat healthy food.

The second core value is sustainable agriculture, which means the use of environment-friendly production methods to strike a balance between production and consumption, while also strengthening food security.

The third core value is balanced development of urban and rural areas to preserve a stable natural environment. Rural development should leave room for autonomy and should be oriented toward maintaining the multi-functionality of agriculture instead of focusing on continued construction and the absorption of a greater population as is the case in urban development. Indicators on rural development need to be established to balance the development of urban and rural areas.

The TBT postulates safe food supply must be maintained as agriculture suffers due to global climate change. Furthermore food prices must be kept at a reasonable level to prevent an assault on ordinary people's living standards. At the same time we must ensure people's access to safe food and maintain the contribution of agriculture

to the ecological environment and culture. Agricultural policy must not merely emphasize agriculture's contribution to economic growth, the effect of agricultural exports on foreign currency income, or the migration of workers away from the countryside to supply labor needed for industrialization. We need to make greater efforts to propose core values for sustainable agricultural development and emphasize the important role of agriculture in the continued development of our economy as a whole. Complementing these core values, the government must make sure that amid continued economic growth and rising average income, farmer income and welfare as well as the rural environment are looked after in a reasonable manner. The income gap between small farmers and non-farmers must be narrowed, or else we won't be able to realize our vision of safe agriculture, happy farmers, and beautiful villages. **BT**