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Foreign Farmers' Education and Training Experience: A Real Treasure for China

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Abstract The core of issues concerning agriculture, countryside and farmers is farmer problem, and the key to farmer problem is the problem of farmers' overall quality. Farmers' cultural quality, technical level and ideological and moral standards, directly determine the success of countryside construction and agricultural development. Therefore, many countries have attached great importance to farmers' education and training, and established the training mode with their own characteristics, playing an important role in improving the comprehensive quality of farmers, promoting the advance of social modernization, and propelling sustainable social development. By probing into the history of the development of foreign farmers' education and training, I summarize the main features, and conduct in-depth scientific analysis, which will provide a reference for developing farmers' education and training, and resolving issues concerning agriculture, countryside and farmers in China during the period of social transformation.

Key words Farmers, Education and training, International comparison

Farmers' education and training is an important way to improve the quality of rural workers, promote economic development, promote employment, and improve people's livelihood. The countries of the world all attach great importance to the quality of the farmers. Concluding the practical experience of foreign farmers' education and training, is of great significance to promoting the development of farmers' education and training cause in China, enhancing the overall quality of farmers, and resolving issues concerning agriculture, countryside and farmers.

1 The basic practice and experience of foreign farmers' education and training

1.1 Generally valuing farmers' education

1.1.1 Mainly relying on the government input, developing farmers' education by the whole society. As to foreign farmers' education, the government would tilt in favor of farmers' education in terms of the input of funds and policy, to ensure the priority development of education for farmers. For example, in order to promote agricultural education, the U. S. government allocates a large number of research funds each year, and the funds have increased at an annual rate of roughly 8% every year since 1995. In Germany, the government includes the funding for migrant workers' education and training in the budget, refers to the training programs formulated by the agricultural schools and training centers, and arranges special funds for training according to the fiscal policy. In France, there are 350 agricultural technical schools across the country including approximately 200 private schools, and most of the principals and teachers' salaries are resolved by the funds of the Ministry of

Agriculture. Agricultural universities in Sweden can get funding of SEK 400 million annually from the government, so the agricultural universities have sufficient funding and advanced equipments. Japan has 57 county agricultural schools, the operating expenses of which are shared by the state (2/3) and the county (1/3). It is worth mentioning that there are three agricultural teachers colleges in France, providing high-level teaching staff for farmers' education.

1.1.2 Legislating for education, to ensure the smooth development of farmers' education. European countries generally implement the farmers' qualification examination. It is required by the government that only after one has completed agricultural vocational education (generally more than two years) and passed the examination can one get "Green Certificate" to be eligible for farmer. England's *Agricultural Training Board Act* promulgated in 1982, has ensured the smooth progress of the farmers' education. According to *Agricultural Education Guidance Act* enacted in 1960, France has established complete agricultural education and training system, using agricultural research institutes and agricultural schools as bases for the cultivation of talents engaged in agriculture. In 1969, Germany enacted the *Vocational Education Act*, making comprehensive and principled provisions on agricultural vocational education.

South Korea's attention to farmers' education is mainly reflected in the national legal system. *Education Act* promulgated by South Korea in 1949 has provisions related to agricultural education; *Basic Law for Training of Farmer and Fisherman Successors* enacted in 1980 and *Special Measure Act for the Development of Farming and Fishing Villages* passed in 1990, have established the training system for farmer and fisherman successors and professional farmers training system.

Educational legislation has propelled standardized and institutionalized development of farmers' education.

1.2 Sound farmers' education management system

1.2.1 Various forms of farmers' education management institutions and training organizations. In general, farmers' education is managed and led by specialized institutions. In the United States, Extension Service of the Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for farmers' education; in England, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is responsible for farmers' education; in France, the Ministry of Agriculture is in charge of farmers' education; in Japan, Institute of Farmer Research is responsible for farmers' training.

In many countries, there is not only education and training organized by social organizations, but also training organized by private business organizations. In France, Denmark, the Netherlands and Japan, farmers' associations, or other social organizations are responsible for the training of farmers and agricultural apprentice. In the United States, it carries out agricultural training through the villages, and uses spare time to conduct systematic training for young farmers, impart new knowledge to the adult farmers. In England, there is a large number of amateur agricultural schools and short courses, set up by society, groups and individuals in various regions. In Mexico, there are also more than 60 government-run and private-run institutions, specializing in vocational training activities for farmers.

1.2.2 Educational quality oversight mechanisms with strong operability. In order to ensure the quality of education and training, the foreign farmers' education has established strict examination and certification system. In England, only after passing the examination (eligibility examination includes written examination, inspection, practical operation, *etc.*), being determined by the Occupational Qualifications Committee, can the trainees who participate in training and education get "national vocational qualification certificate".

In Hungary, the government also has clear provision: for the farmers' education with certificate to be granted, the state should formulate unified teaching plan and outline, having a strict examination system; people who participate in training may not be able to get the certificate, and the elimination rate in some schools reaches 20%, even up to 50%. In other countries, the farmers' education and training institutions and organizations grant different types of certificates in accordance with different levels of entry, educational systems and training goals. In England, there are 17 kinds of certificates on farmers' education and training; in France, there are 4 kinds of certificates; in Italy, the certificate includes certificate of skilled workers, certificate of technical experts, *etc.*

1.3 Scientific concept of farmers' education

1.3.1 Educational content focusing on practical results. The object of farmers' education in England is not only the person who will be engaged in agricultural production, but also the practitioner in whole process of production. The main purpose is to train the farmers' ability to respond to market change trends and market demand, enhance their capacity of competitiveness and creation. In Germany, the goal of farmers' education is to cultivate new agricultural practitioners, provide back-

up power for modern agriculture, improve the employees' vocational and technical ability and their ability to promote and disseminate practical agricultural new technologies. In addition to the common agricultural and forestry education, farmers' education in France also focuses on the education and training of professional knowledge in some areas, such as agricultural machinery, agricultural product processing, marketing, protection and development of improved species of livestock, grazing horses, land consolidation, environmental protection, forest maintenance, agricultural management, agricultural services, and agricultural tourism. In Japan, in addition to the systematic knowledge and skill education for farmers, the knowledge on many areas is imparted for the farmers, such as foreign agricultural policy, agricultural operation and management, marketing of agricultural products, production technology on farming, forestry, animal husbandry, sideline production and fishery, storage and processing technique of agricultural products. Moreover, the education of health and longevity is carried out for farmers.

1.3.2 Educational thought focusing on practice. As for the foreign farmers' education, any form of training attaches great importance to the practice, and has strict operating procedures. Farmers' education in Germany, requires the students to attend class in school for 13 weeks per year; learn in the qualified farm in the rest of the time. In three years of study time, the students must undergo 15-week production practice, combining the theory and practice. In New Zealand, the government has clear provision on teaching for farmers: in 3-4 years of the study period, the students must have 48-week farm practice; some majors require 72 weeks, and the writing of internship report. In England, it requires the teaching content of agricultural vocational schools to be very practical; focuses on the teaching of practical skills (the ratio of practice and theory teaching should be at least 4:6, and 6:4 in some courses). For the 3-year schools in England, the state implements "sandwich-type" work-study teaching policy and system. The first year is spent on learning the course of agricultural basis in the school; the second year is spent on practice in agricultural enterprises under the guidance of teachers; the students come back to the school learning professional courses.

1.3.3 Educational methods in line with reality. The combination of a variety of training institutions forms the training and education system in line with the actual situation in rural areas. In England, the farmers' education and technical training has basically formed three different levels of education, with the agricultural training network as the main force, supplemented by universities, research and advisory agencies. These levels are well connected, and the farmers' education and training system combining formal education and amateur training is established, which can be adapted to the needs of personnel at different levels. In France, farmers' education takes more flexible form: the state and individual set up schools together. The vocational training is not only deep into the fields, and also implemented in a peasant family. In Japan, training organizations not only hold correspondence lectures for high school students, to make

them personally experience the agricultural operation, but also set up farmers' evening school, farmers' tutorial schools, and farmers' training classes, to conduct education and training on a variety of professional knowledge for the children in rural areas.

2 The measures for the development of farmers' education and training in China by drawing on the foreign experience

2.1 Establishing strong policy support mechanism The government is duty-bound to develop agricultural vocational education, carry out farmers' training, and cultivate new farmers, which have the prominent characteristics of public welfare. Governments at all levels should include training new farmers in the overall planning of the new rural construction; promulgate policies and measures conducive to the development of farmers' education and training undertaking; through a variety of preferential policies and incentives, mobilize the enthusiasm of the social forces, training institutions and farmers, to gradually establish market-oriented, government-aided, multiplex farmers' education and training mechanism. At the same time, it is necessary to speed up legislation for farmers' education and training; establish special regulations for farmers' education and training; provide legal protection for farmers' education and training system, farmers' education and training institutions, farmers' education and training input, farmers' rights to receive education and training in legal form.

2.2 Establishing stable financial input mechanism The process of training and educating farmers is the most effective improvement process of the accumulation of human capital in rural areas, so we should increase capital investment.

First, the budgets at all levels should include the rural labor training funds in the budget, to achieve the institutionalization of farmers' education and training investment. Second, we should actively use finance, credit, taxation and other means, to encourage businesses, individuals and social non-governmental organizations to participate in the farmers' education and training undertaking, and gradually establish government-supported diversified input system that the social forces jointly participate in. Third, we should further increase special financial investment in farmers' education and training, and vigorously support the construction of new farmers' technology training project, sunshine project of labor transfer training, rural practical personnel training project, *etc.*

2.3 Establishing market-oriented operation mechanism

The content and form of farmers' training should be in line with the laws of the market operation, playing the role of market mechanism. First, the training content should be determined based on market demand. We should set up the training profession around the type of work with good market prospects and strong demand; design the training content, and implement the order training, in accordance with the labor units' vocational skill requirements. Second, choosing the training institutions should be market-oriented. We should take the form of bidding,

to fairly and transparently determine the education and training institutions, making the training institutions with good conditions and high training quality undertake the project of farmers' training.

2.4 Establishing open cooperation mechanism It is an arduous task to train a large number of farmers, and farmers' education and training resources are relatively weak. Therefore, we should break the boundaries of places, sectors and industries to establish and improve open cooperation mechanism; comprehensively use the education and training resources on agriculture, education, science and technology, culture, and caucus; vigorously implement various kinds of projects for farmers' education and training, such as green certificate project, new farmers' science and technology training project, sunshine project of rural labor transfer training, and the distance education project for party members and cadres in rural areas.

2.5 Establishing the regulatory mechanism of farmers' education and training Due to the lagged effect of farmers' education and training, we should carry out effective supervision and management on its work process, to ensure the quality of farmers' education and training. First, we should establish the publicity system, to publicize the name of the training units, training tasks, training professions, training time, expenses standard, government subsidy standard, employment orientation, *etc.* to farmers. All provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) should publicize the name of the training units undertaking the project, the training tasks, subsidies, *etc.* to the society; publish informants' hot-line telephone, and receive social supervision. Second, we should strictly implement the inspection and acceptance system, to ensure the quality of education and training.

2.6 Establishing regular international exchange and cooperation mechanism Strengthening the international exchanges and cooperation, is an effective way to promote the rapid development of China's agricultural vocational and technical education. By strengthening exchanges and cooperation with advanced countries, we can timely learn more information about agricultural vocational and technical training carried out abroad; learn from foreign advanced educational thinking and management experience, to promote the healthy development of China's agricultural vocational and technical training undertaking.

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