

Speech at the Sino-German Entrepreneurs' Forum on Smart Agriculture

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25 April 2023, Weifang, Shandong Province

Thank you very much for having me here today. Thank you, Mr. Wang Geng, thank you, Ms. Leely Zhang, for organizing this event. And thank you Mr. Wang Xiaobing for your speech.

When I told a friend that I'm going to attend this conference today on smart and digital agriculture she looked at me with big eyes, surprised, and said "sorry but 'digitalization' and 'agriculture' – what does that have to do with each other?"

I have to admit that she is from the financial sector. But it shows you how, at least in Germany, some people have a very outdated view on how food is being produced. They care about that there is food and they have something to eat. I do not know about China, but in Germany and maybe in some other countries in Europe it is the same thing: Digitalization in agriculture seems new to some people. But IT and electronics have been shaping agricultural life for many years.

All of you here know better than anybody what digitization can achieve in agriculture:

- It optimizes harvests.
- it increases productivity and quality in times of scarce resources.
- You know how digitalization helps to supply plants more efficiently and save fertilizer and pesticides.
- It also increases animal welfare and helps to save resources, protect our environment, and also protect our climate.

I want to stress that last point because:

- Smart agriculture does **not only enhance productivity**.
- It is **not only about profit and productivity**.
- It is **not only about selling digital techniques to the farmers**.

We need the broad view: **Digitalization helps to solve the most pressing issues that we are facing today and it also helps to solve conflicting goals:**

- How do we achieve high yields despite a decreasing workforce (that is a problem China and Germany both are facing)?
- How do we achieve high yields without overusing our resources?
- How do we achieve high yields and still reduce emissions and protect our climate?
- In short: How do we use our resources without using them up for the following generations?

One of the answers is efficiency and optimizing processes with the help of digital solutions – that is smart agriculture.

Strong countries like China and Germany have a responsibility to further develop the agriculture sector. We bear responsibility for our future and for the future of agriculture.

China is a large country with the biggest – well now with the second biggest population – in the world to feed. In addition, the Chinese will and competence to innovate combined with China speed form a very good basis for the transformation of conventional agriculture to smart agriculture.

Germany may be a small country – especially in comparison – but has a very high level of knowhow and quality in machine engineering, research, and development.

This goes well together. We can learn from each other, benefit from each other, and also share our experiences.

With China speed and German quality, **the conflicting goals that I pointed out before can be solved and we can have a climate smart, resource smart agriculture.**

Since 2018, smart agriculture has also been one of the key topics of our Sino-German Agricultural Centre (DCZ), that is funded by the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture and is the major platform for bilateral cooperation and exchange on agricultural and rural issues between our two countries. There have been numerous activities in the sector of smart agriculture, for example a study tour that then led to a dedicated website on smart agriculture. So, I think I our countries can build on that.

Introducing digital technologies to agriculture and the digitalization of rural areas are priorities for our government. Demonstration projects play a big role to experiment with the use of digital technologies in agriculture and rural areas. For example: Since 2019, the Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture in Germany is financing 14 digital experimentation projects in Germany (Digitale Experimentierfelder) to research and test the application of digital technologies in crop and livestock production.

So, we see that both our governments work on implementing smart agriculture in everyday life.

One more thought: Germany and China face similar challenges when it comes to our decreasing work force and the revitalization of rural areas. The job of a farmer working on a field in a small village is not everybody's dream job in the year 2023 – but it is a necessary job.

Now look at digital agriculture. Nowadays it is more: working on a smartphone, being an agricultural entrepreneur, being an IT specialist and expert. That is much more attractive, this can make the job of a farmer more attractive for the young generation and also let them go back to the rural areas and revitalize them.

So, my conclusion for today is: **With smart agriculture in mind I am very optimistic about the future.**

Thank you again for having me here.