



Cooperation in Agricultural Technology between China and Argentina: A pact to improve production and wellbeing of farmers

By ROOTS

On January 11, 2024, a cooperation agreement between Argentina and China took place. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding was celebrated between the Ministry of Agrarian Development of the Province of Buenos Aires (MDA), Argentina, the International Institute of Agricultural Equipment Innovation and Smart Agriculture of the Belt and Road (IIIAESA), and Baobab-the International Association for Popular Cooperation. This Memorandum of Understanding covers areas of cooperation such as genetic improvement, biological inputs, agricultural machinery and equipment, education and training. It aims to outline a concrete work agenda for the development and access to technology for small agricultural producers.

This event is the result of a path of cooperation that had previous steps. In July 2023, a group of professors from the China Agricultural University (CAU) arrived in the Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, on a visit organized by Baobab at the invitation of the Rural Federation for Rural Uprooting and Production. The team visited the vegetable and onion production and processing units of the Rural Federation, located in the main productive areas of the province. They also met with experts from the National Institute of Agricultural Technology and the Ministry of Agrarian Development of the Province of Buenos Aires and toured Experimental Stations belonging to these institutions (such as the INTA Hilario Ascasubi Experimental Station, and the Gorina Experimental Farm, belonging to the MDA). On this visit, the professors were able to learn in person the productive potential of Argentine family farming, as well as its limitations and needs. Based on and following this experience, a tripartite cooperation seminar was held online on August 29, 2023.

With the deepening of exchanges, the potential for agricultural cooperation between the two countries, especially in the field of family farming, has become increasingly clear. The willingness of all parties to cooperate led directly to the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding, an event that was held virtually between the authorities present in both countries. As An Guanghui, Commercial Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Argentina, emphasized in his speech, the Memorandum “will further deepen agricultural scientific research and industrial cooperation between China and Argentina, achieve mutual benefits and win-win results at a higher level, and will make new contributions to promoting common development and ensuring food security.”



Signing of the Memorandum in China. Photo: Mauro Ramos



Signing of the Memorandum in Argentina

Mechanization: A Need for Family Farming in Argentina

In Argentina, the family, peasant, and indigenous agriculture sector, together with groups of small and medium producers, represent 80% of the total

agricultural establishments, according to data from the last National Agricultural Census carried out in 2018. [1] Despite occupying only 11% of rural land, it is the sector responsible for food production for the local population, fundamental to the country's food security and sovereignty. It energizes regional economies and generates genuine employment at the local level, explaining approximately half of employment in the rural sector. [2]

Despite the importance of the sector and its productive potential, it has low levels of capitalization and mechanization. The supply of machinery for the family farming sector in Argentina is limited, with little machinery according to its specific needs in terms of scale and production. On the other hand, low levels of capitalization make it difficult for smaller producers to access technology. This results in limitations in productivity, but also in greater physical efforts in the work of producers, especially in vegetable production in peri-urban areas, where production is carried out mainly with human labor force and involves the entire farmer family.



Visit of the Chinese delegation to one of the productive units of the Rural Federation, located in the most important horticultural belt in Argentina, in 2023. Photo: Baobab Archive

On the other hand, the modernization and mechanization of the sector are necessary to improve the population quality of life. Although in Argentina rural lands correspond to approximately 95% of the country's total continental surface, only 7% of the population lives in rural areas, while the remaining 93% resides in urban areas. [3] This process of expulsion of the population from the countryside to the city is related to a decrease in smaller-scale productive establishments and a greater concentration of land and production. According to the national leader of the Rural Federation, Lautaro Leveratto, “improving the socio-productive conditions of agricultural families allows them to strengthen their roots in rural areas,” which is one of the main objectives of the organization.

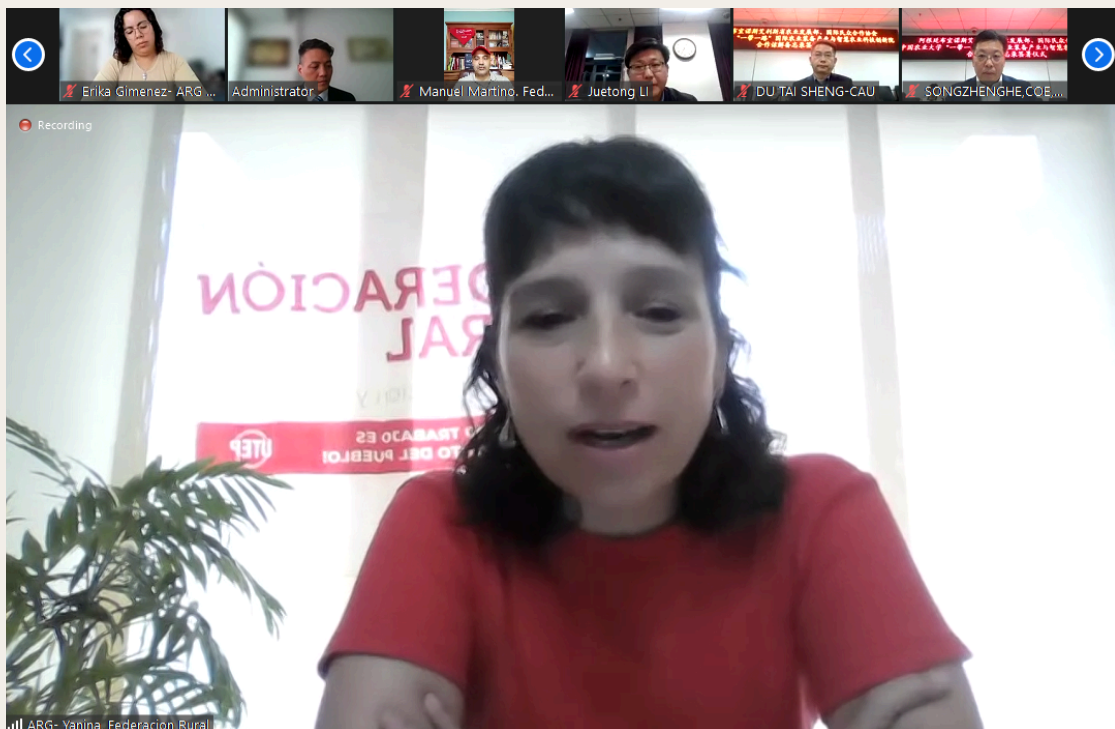
As expressed by the Vice President of the CAU, Du Taisheng, the promotion of agricultural mechanization has been a priority of the country since the orientation established by Mao Zedong in the 1950s. The use of machines on small agricultural lands has played a fundamental role in China to guarantee food security and eradicate poverty in rural areas. In this sense, cooperation between both countries is a great opportunity for family farming in Argentina.

Advance cooperation to improve people’s life quality

According to the Vice Director of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China, Li Juetong, signing the memorandum will allow taking advantage of the agricultural complementarities of both countries to promote technological development and increase the well-being of both peoples. In the same sense, Javier Rodriguez and his MDA team consider that this Memorandum represents a milestone on the path of cooperation between both peoples and will allow working on specific aspects that respond to the province's needs in terms of agricultural development.

For her part, Yanina Settembrino, leader of the Rural Federation and member of Baobab, expressed that the organization “is committed to the cooperation and solidarity of the people, and this is an important step in cooperation between the people of Argentina and China. Today the producers of the province of Buenos Aires are one step closer to fulfill their needs to overcome the barriers in production”.

Finally, Luiz Zarref, Baobab Coordinator for Latin America, cited the words of President Xi Jinping, who in his 2024 New Year message stated that “No matter how the global landscape may evolve, peace and development remain the underlying trend, and only cooperation for mutual benefit can deliver.” These words inspire the Baobab's work to promote and enhance technological exchange between countries in the Global South, in order to improve the quality of life of communities. This new step in cooperation between China and Argentina brings new hope for peasants in both countries and around the world.



Yanina Settembrino (Rural Federation, Argentina) moderating the conference

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