



Press Release

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Insecure Land Rights: The Single Greatest Challenge Facing China's Sustainable Development and Continued Stability

Survey of 1,700 farmers finds that fundamental reforms are needed to continue economic growth and promote social stability

Seattle-The findings of a survey released today indicate that despite recent efforts to protect farmers by China's central government, many farmers across the surveyed 17 provinces report the further deterioration of control over their land.

The survey finds that the pace of land takings continues to accelerate, often leaving farmers poorly compensated and embittered.

New urbanization programs promoted by local authorities to reclaim agricultural land in the country are instead being used to usurp more land from farmers for development. And the majority of the relocated farmers receive neither urban status nor the corresponding services and benefits.

Meanwhile, a large percentage of farmers report being pressured by local government officials to enter into so-called "voluntary" land transactions, transferring control over their land to companies and other outsiders.

"This survey comes at a time when farmers in Wukan village in southern China have made clear the dire consequences of insecure land rights," said Roy Prosterman, founder and chairman emeritus of Landesa, and one of the survey's authors. "The protest by Wukan villagers shows the serious impact of the discontent caused by land takings."

Conflict over land accounted for 65 percent of the 187,000 mass conflicts in China in 2010, according to Chinese researchers. Approximately 4 million rural people's land is taken by government every year.

"Nevertheless, some farmers with relatively secure land rights have begun to make mid- to long-term investments in their land," said Keliang Zhu, attorney at Landesa, and one of the survey's authors. "That boosts harvests and farmers' incomes."

The survey data indicates that an added 363 billion yuan (approximately \$58 billion) was generated in the year of 2010 alone by farmers' investments in their land. It is useful to keep in mind that this comes from only a minority of farmers. The amount of untapped potential that could be unleashed by near universal secure rural land rights is enormous.

The authors point out that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all sparked their economic miracles through rural development based in substantial part on broadly distributed secure land rights for farmers. Such secure land rights hold the key to decisively solving China's large rural-urban income gap and creating a prospering rural middle class of 700 million plus people.

The survey helps illuminate the different forces shaping China's countryside.

"The central government has taken enormous steps to protect farmers," said Jeffrey Riedinger, Professor and Dean of International Studies and Programs at Michigan State University, and another survey author. In 2010 and 2011, the Ministry of Land & Resources and other central agencies began the process of amending the land takings law. The State Council recently issued several policy directives to clamp down on abusive practices against farmers' land rights. "Despite this," continued Riedinger, "local officials and well-connected enterprises have continued wresting land from farmers."

The survey is the sixth in a series by Landesa, in cooperation with China Renmin University, and Michigan State University. Conducted in mid-2011, the survey covered 1,791 households in 17 provinces that together contain three-fourths of China's rural population (Anhui, Fujian, Guangxi, Guizhou, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Jilin, Shaanxi, Shandong, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Zhejiang). The previous surveys were done in 1999, 2001, 2005, 2008, and 2010. The findings are accurate within $\pm 2.3\%$ (at the 95% confidence level) for the entire rural population of these 17 provinces.

A summary of the survey's findings is available in both [Chinese](#) and [English](#).

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