

China-UK Sustainable Agriculture Innovation Network (SAIN)

SAIN's Mission

To contribute to the achievement of a resource efficient, low carbon economy and an environmentally friendly society. SAIN will provide a coherent framework for the development and implementation of China-UK collaboration on environmentally sustainable agriculture, and in this way support the aims of the current Sustainable Development Dialogue as a foundation for long-term China-UK collaboration.

SAIN's Origins

China-UK collaboration on sustainable agriculture dates back more than 20 years, but most of this has been on an inter-institutional basis and particularly between universities. It has never been set within a long-term strategic framework that is designed to meet national policy objectives. The earlier collaboration was of a technical nature and focused on soil erosion, crop nutrient management, integrated pest management and biological control, waste management and plant breeding. More recent collaboration is largely concerned with climate change, the environmental impacts of agriculture, ecosystem services and poverty in rural areas and water resources management. It is increasingly aimed at capacity building and providing support for policy development but much of it remains piecemeal and fails to take account of potential synergies between different activities.

However, events during the past three years have provided a basis for a more ambitious approach. First, the emergence of a scientific consensus on areas of mutual interest that arose from the UK-China Partners in Science Conference – Appropriate Science and Technology for Rural Sustainable Development held in Yangling, Shaanxi in November 2005. Second, the Sustainable Development Dialogue (SDD) was launched in November 2005 providing a new platform for China-UK collaboration which includes a Work Programme on Sustainable Agriculture and Fisheries. The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Sustainable Agricultural Cooperation between British Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Hilary Benn and Chinese Agriculture Minister Sun Zhengcai in November 2008 further signalled strong commitment to the growing partnership on agriculture. Ministers agreed to establish the Sustainable Agriculture Innovation

Network (SAIN) as an important vehicle for delivering on the MoU and the SDD Agriculture and Fisheries Work Programme.

SAIN's Objectives

- Support the implementation of the UK-China SDD and its natural resources management theme by fostering innovation in three areas: policy development; institutional mechanisms for collaborative research; and translating policy and science into practice on the ground
- Stimulate innovative thinking and research on all aspects of environmentally sustainable agriculture and its relation to the local, national and global economy
- Communicate information on environmentally sustainable agriculture issues and opportunities for change, and disseminate best practices to key audiences (farmers, policy makers, businesses)
- Contribute to global sustainability through wider sharing of expertise between developed and emerging economies.

How will SAIN operate?

SAIN will be overseen by a high level Governing Board (GB), supported by a Secretariat Office in each country, and by four Working Groups (WGs). The Secretariat Office in China is located at the North West Agriculture and Forestry University (NWFU), and the UK Secretariat Office is located at the Overseas Development Group, University of East Anglia. Programme priorities and modalities will be guided by the Governing Board of key Government and academic stakeholders as well as independent experts. Each Working Group (WG) will be responsible for leading a specific workstream and will be co-chaired by UK and Chinese experts with around five members in each WG drawn from each country and supplemented by other national and international experts where appropriate. The SAIN Coordinators in the Secretariat Offices will be de facto members of the WGs. The WGs will function as a virtual network reaching out across both countries and with a rolling programme of well defined time-limited tasks. The membership and location of the WGs and the substance of their work may change in the future as new challenges, priorities and opportunities emerge.



SAIN's initial work programme

SAIN's initial work will focus on four inter-related themes:

- Application of research and better communications tools to improve soil and crop nutrient management and lower non-point source pollution.
- Expanding use of agricultural biomass & livestock manure for biogas, liquid biofuels and organic fertiliser production.
- Addressing the interface between agriculture and climate change, including the way agriculture will be impacted by, and therefore need to adapt to, climate change, and the ways in which agriculture contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. This will include maximising the potential contributions of (i) and (ii) to climate change adaptation and mitigation, and helping to ensure that policies on other agricultural issues also support climate change objectives.
- Providing policy advice on how the concept of the circular economy can be applied to agriculture by exploiting the opportunities for greater recycling, waste minimisation, and more efficient use of water and other critical resources, as identified by (i), (ii) & (iii).

SAIN's expected benefits

- Improved focus on policy innovation and greater relevance of R&D to SDD objectives and policy formulation
- Greater emphasis on collaboration for integrated policy development
- Better linkages and greater synergy between joint projects
- A more holistic approach to programme development
- Improved complementarity with activities of other bilateral and multilateral donors
- Increased translation of R&D into action on the ground
- Increased sharing of research and expertise

- Better implementation of central policies
- Enhanced learning (including opportunities to share expertise between developed and emerging economies)

Who is involved so far?

SAIN is supported by the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), who will both provide funding for the UK and China SAIN Secretariat Offices. Initial stakeholders include the NWAUFU, China Agricultural University, Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, Nanjing Agricultural University and the Research Council UK office in China, and DFID, the FCO, BBSRC, CABI in the UK. Participation will be widened as the WGs are appointed and the Work Programme is developed.

The Chinese Secretariat at NWAUFU is headed by Prof Tong Yanan (tongyanan@nwsuaf.edu.cn) and the UK Secretariat at the UEA by Dr Lu Yuelai (y.lu@uea.ac.uk). Members of the Governing Board will be appointed in the next few weeks. UK members will include Prof Robert Watson, Chief Scientist, Defra and Prof Gordon Conway, Chief Scientist, DFID. WG co-chairs will also be appointed within the next few weeks and most of the WG members shortly afterwards.

Find out more by visiting our website at: <http://www.sainonline.org/English.html>

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