

TOP NEWS

Envoy: US sorting out top priorities

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China, which has become a bipartisan consensus and a key element of Washington's China policy," Wang said.

In recent months, US diplomats have variously defined Washington's ties with Beijing as "competitive," "collaborative" and "adversarial."

The definitions aim to "leverage competition to contain China's growth and secure the US' global leadership and hegemony," Wang said.

Wang noted the hawkish atmosphere toward China in the US as well as the Biden administration's need to advance a domestic political agenda ahead of midterm elections next year.

"The US leadership is expected to take a balance between its short-term calculation for political interests and a long-term strategic perspective (on ties with China)," Wang added.

Deep political ties

While Branstad, a former governor of the state of Iowa, had little diplomatic experience before becoming ambassador, Burns has deep political ties and diplomatic experience.

He served as US ambassador to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization from 2001 to 2005 and as US ambassador to Greece from 1997 to 2001, and was a spokesman for the State Department from 1995 to 1997.

Diao, the Renmin University scholar, said Burns has a certain degree of global perspective, has been engaged in the affairs of a number of regions, and worked for the administrations of former presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

"The Biden administration chose him partly to underline the bipartisan consensus on China policies," Diao said.

Also on Friday, Biden announced his intention to nominate Rahm Emanuel as ambassador to Japan. Emanuel is a former mayor of Chicago and was chief of staff for former president Barack Obama.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, noted that it has taken months for the Biden administration to officially nominate people for a slew of key diplomatic posts.

"This reflects a series of challenges at home and abroad, and Washington needs some time to sort out its top priorities among various critical tasks," Su said, adding that "the Biden administration has been prudent in deliberating its next top envoy to China".

Burns is a trustworthy candidate for Washington, as he has been a senior career diplomat who once served as undersecretary of state, she said.

"Although he could not be defined as a China hand, he does have a background in researching the US-China relationship and he is familiar with the ties," Su said.

Biden has chosen Burns "in an effort to advance the future agenda regarding the Indo-Pacific strategy, as Burns aligns with him on a range of topics such as US values, ideology and the concern about the US military advantage in the region," she added.

In addition, Burns has said the two countries could work together on topics such as climate change and the COVID-19 response, Su said.

"It remains to be seen if he can tackle China-US ties in a more balanced and cool-headed approach as US ambassador, instead of simply implementing the commands from Washington," she added.

The nomination reflects that "the state of US-China relations now is unprecedented" and that Washington believes its relations with China "require a seasoned diplomat to deal with them", Chas W. Freeman, US assistant secretary of defense in 1993 and 1994 and a veteran China expert, said in a written interview.

Freeman said US Senator Ted Cruz of Texas is holding up every nominee for a foreign policy job to dramatize his opposition to the Nord Stream 2 natural gas pipeline, the flagship energy project between Russia and Germany.

"I would be surprised if ambassador Burns did not confront similar obstruction," Freeman said when asked about potential obstacles to Burns' nomination in the Senate.

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Farmers sell apples via a livestream at an orchard in Yantai, Shandong, in November. WANG SHUYUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

APPLE SECTOR RIPE FOR SUCCESS

Chinese growers set sights on latest global opportunities with popular fruit

Editor's note: Implementation of the China-EU Geographical Indications Agreement is expected to expand the reach of quality products from both sides. This series looks at goods poised to tap into East-West markets.

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Shandong, SUN RUISHENG in Shanxi and MA JINGNA in Gansu

For 10 busy days in August, fruit farmer Zhang Yuqing could be seen fussing over the apples in her orchard.

"We need to carefully trim the branches to make sure the fruit is exposed to as much sunlight as possible. It's crucial for their color and taste," she said.

"A farmer must know what the trees need at their specific stages of growth. It's like taking care of babies."

Zhang, 66, grows the apples in her 0.67-hectare plot in Yantai in East China's Shandong province. Fittingly, the close attention she pays to her trees has earned her the nickname "Apple Mom" among fellow Liujiawang villagers.

Zhang, who has three decades of experience growing apples, has also been replacing the old trees in her orchard with newer varieties in recent years.

Her expertise and efforts on the ground reflect the latest developments in the apple growing industry, which is a major pillar of the agricultural sector. Apple growing hubs across the country are increasingly meeting international industry standards through the use of improved technology and investment in global business practices, resulting in bigger markets at home and abroad.

Yantai is expanding the markets for its crunchy, pink and red apples by upgrading old orchards and investing in automation, sorting and transportation to boost the quality and quantity of its products.

It plans to upgrade its 80,000 hec-

CITY OF YANTAI
Shandong



5.6 million metric tons of apples are produced every year

About **600,000 tons** of apples are sold to more than **80 countries** and regions annually

WENDENG DISTRICT
Weihai, Shandong

220,000 tons of apples were produced in 2020

JINGNING COUNTY
Gansu

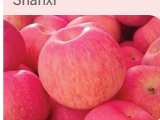


820,000 tons of apples were produced in 2020

More than **170 apple varieties** have been introduced to farmers

4.6 billion yuan
The output value in 2020

JIXIAN COUNTY
Shanxi



Rich **loess soil**

23,000 residents have been lifted out of poverty in the past three decades through apple farming

More than **200,000 tons** of apples are produced annually

1 billion yuan
The annual output value

Sources: Industry reports; city and county governments

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tares of orchards within two years to increase output and maintain quality, according to 2020-2025 industry development plans issued by the city government last year.

The city has 186,660 hectares of apple orchards, which produce 5.6 million metric tons of apples every year. About 600,000 tons of Yantai apples are sold in 82 countries and regions every year, including Southeast Asia, the European Union and the United States, according to official figures.

There are also plans to build more than 300 apple distribution centers in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen by 2022 to help expand markets.

Apples from agricultural hubs

like Yantai are set to reach even more consumers worldwide, following their inclusion on the list of China's 100 geographical indications under protection in the European Union. The indication is a label for products that have a specific geographical origin with qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin, according to the World Intellectual Property Organization.

Quality quartet

Last year, China and the EU rolled out measures to protect 100 of the EU's geographical indications and 100 Chinese geographical indications against imitations.

Apples from four areas in China — Shandong's Yantai and Wendeng



You must know what the trees need at their specific growing stages. It's like taking care of babies."

Zhang Yuqing, who is known as "Apple Mom" among fellow villagers in Yantai, Shandong province

in the city of Weihai, Jingning county, Gansu province, and Jixian county in Shanxi province — have attained the geographical indication classification, amid the growing global recognition of quality Chinese agricultural products.

"Being included in the list is hugely significant in developing the city's apples into a global brand and in expanding the global market," said Wu Chenguang, deputy head of Yantai's bureau of agriculture and rural affairs.

Yantai's annual apple exports are expected to hit 800,000 tons in five years, according to the city's plan, with major companies beefing up technology and automation in preparation for the increase.

Qilu Quanyuan Supply Chain spent 10 million yuan (\$1.54 million) setting up an automatic apple-sorting production line last year.

The apples are tracked and checked by cameras for their color, appearance and condition before packaging, the company's production manager, Zhou Yannan, said.

In neighboring Weihai city, Wendeng district's apple orchards cover more than 11,000 hectares. Farmers produced 220,000 tons of apples last year and a modern industrial park covering more than 2,600 hectares has been set up to tap markets, in line with the industry's expansion plans.

In Gansu's Jingning, the environ-

mental conditions and climate are advantages that help nurture the county's popular apples. Jingning's orchards are situated 1,340 meters to 2,245 meters above sea level, average annual rainfall is over 420 mm, there are 2,250 hours of sunshine a year and the average daily temperature variance is about 12 C.

More than 66,600 hectares of orchards produced about 820,000 tons of apples last year, with an output value of about 4.6 billion yuan, according to industry figures.

Over 170 apple varieties have also been introduced to farmers and 1,300 hectares of land set aside for a product demonstration base to help take the industry to the next level.

Li Jianming, head of the county's fruit research institute, said investments include state-of-the-art "smart-sorting" production lines, while packaging lines have also helped provide jobs for more than 1,200 local farmers.

"We have shaped the Jingning Apple brand and increased the income of fruit farmers through the construction of apple nurseries, plantations, industrial parks and delivery warehouses. Farmers' incomes have been increased, and seedlings and apple storage provided free for needy fruit farmers to help ensure production," Li said.

Higher standards

In Shanxi, Jixian county's rich loess soil and other natural advantages have been complemented by the latest management and production techniques that help its apples meet domestic and foreign storage, preservation and technology standards, said Yang Chaohui, head of the Apple Industry Development Association of Jixian and chairman of Jixian Hukou Organic Agriculture.

Apple farming covers nearly 19,000 hectares, with annual output of more than 200,000 tons and output value of more than 1 billion yuan.

Most of Jixian's orchards have geographical indication certification and its apples have an estimated value of more than 3 billion yuan, according to a research by China Fruit Marketing Association and Zhejiang University.

Ding Zhenrong, general manager of Jixian Super Zheng Fruit, said Jixian apples entered Southeast Asian markets a decade ago, with exports subsequently making headway in the US, Australia, Russia and other global markets.

The industry will now have to successfully move beyond COVID-19 and other challenges, such as supply-chain disruptions, rising transportation costs and the economic slowdown abroad, Ding said.

The sector also involves at least 90,000 farmers and apple growing makes up more than 80 percent of per capita rural incomes, according to county figures.

Over the past three decades, apple farming has helped lift at least 23,000 residents out of poverty.

Apple farmer Lyu Guiming said fruit farmers rely on apple cultivation to share in the benefits of development, with many of them enjoying modern homes and cars, infrastructure and other benefits paid for by lucrative harvests.

"The apple industry is made up of each household, each family, carefully planting the fruit themselves. Through detailed farming practices, our apples boast rich flavor," Lyu said.

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Africa: Recommitment to food security needed

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Right now, we are working to repair significant damage caused by a variety of factors, including droughts that have cost Africa \$372 billion since 2014, and the 2019-20 locust outbreak, which destroyed more than 356,000 metric tons of cereal crops, and nearly 1.5 million hectares of crops and pasture in Ethiopia alone.

We must not only recover from these losses but leapfrog over them to build a resilient future. On this path, business and public leaders must come together to step forward and commit to the targets set by the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is important to note that there are just nine harvests left for us to achieve the goals, and we are currently not on target.

We also committed 10 percent of our budgets toward agriculture under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme — a pledge that only a few

countries have fulfilled. It is now our time to drive efforts to recommit to food and nutrition security and sustainable food systems across the continent. Sustainable food systems require us to look at the entire value chain, from input supplies, mechanization, irrigation and extension to transportation, processing, distribution and healthy consumption.

There are a number of countries that have instituted food systems that work for their realities, leading them to better feed their people while giving them stable livelihoods. The government of Burkina Faso, for example, is succeeding in increasing its domestic rice output through investments and policies that favor local production.

The government is working toward production of 1 million metric tons annually, which will reduce rice imports by over 75 percent. In Tanzania, too, agri-industrialization flagship projects have increased the participation of women as

entrepreneurs in manufacturing and processing, creating opportunities that did not exist before. The aim is to increase the country's total GDP by 5 percent, while creating 1 million jobs by 2025.

I have recently been to both Burkina Faso and Tanzania, as well as Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Ethiopia, where I personally witnessed the impact of investments including flagship projects in agricultural development. Lessons can be drawn from the most effective strategies in such countries, with the successful programs adapted to suit different countries' contexts.

Development partners also have a fundamental role to play in Africa's agricultural transformation. As one example, 62 percent of farmers supported by the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa have adopted technology to increase their yields and incomes. The alliance has also leveraged \$141 million in new investments through partnership with the Africa Green Revolution

Forum's Agribusiness Deal Room. This is in addition to programming that has directly supported 3.5 million female farmers.

To review the progress and commitments that will move the continent's food systems forward, stakeholders will gather at the 2021 Africa Green Revolution Forum Summit, in Nairobi, Kenya, from Sept 7 to 10. The summit will feature pathways to the future of Africa's food systems based on equitable livelihoods, better nutrition, resilience in production and competitiveness in markets.

This year's forum meeting takes place at a critical juncture in the global discussion on food systems. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has convened the UN Food Systems Summit as part of the "decade of action" to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The summit has seen many coalitions forming globally to reenergize and refocus efforts to deliver healthier, sustain-

able and equitable food systems.

The Africa Green Revolution Forum Summit will leverage the momentum of the UN Food Systems Summit to elevate the coordinated African voice in identifying immediate actions for accelerating the progress, partnerships and recovery toward an inclusive agricultural transformation.

This is our time to elevate the future leaders of African agriculture, particularly youth, women and small-business owners, throughout the food system, from farm to fork. We must resume our commitment to achieving zero hunger on the continent by taking critical steps toward integrated food systems.

We own the decision to participate and shape a vision that commits resources to Africa's food systems transformation. Will you join us? I look forward to welcoming you at this year's Africa Green Revolution Forum Summit.

The author is former prime minister of Ethiopia and current board chair for the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.