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## Farmers' awareness, reaction and livelihood to the policy of returning cultivated land and grazing land to grasses in Ningxia, China

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**Key words:** Ningxia, awareness, reaction, livelihood, returning cultivated land and grazing land to grasses

**Introduction** Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is one of the ten biggest and most important grazing animal production areas in China. It is located in Northwestern China with typical continent arid and semi-arid climate. The area of rangeland Ningxia is  $2.443 \times 10^6 \text{ hm}^2$ . However degeneration and desertification become serious with climate change, population increasing and overgrazing in the last 50 years. Thus the central and local government started a policy which is well known as Returning cultivated land and grazing land to grasses project in 2000 to rangeland improvement and recovery.

**Materials and methods** Total 160 farmers were selected randomly from four counties for survey and research. Each farmer owns rangeland with  $21.3 \text{ hm}^2$  per household which is much higher than farmland with  $2.2 \text{ hm}^2$  and forest with  $0.9 \text{ hm}^2$  per household average. Some tools such as questionnaire, semi-structure interview, group discussion and key farmer individual visit were used in the research.

### Results and discussion

1. The study showed that farmers with more education increased over time in Ningxia. However farmers with senior high school education are still in very low percentage at 12.6%. The illiterate farmers still remain at 5.2%, for female, even up to 12.5%. However the working time for farming per year is almost the same between male and female. Thus more attention should be paid to education and training for farmers, special for women in countryside.

2. All the farmers were aware of the importance of rangeland environment to their life and production. Basically they had desires to improve their rangeland environment and gave high understanding and strong support to the government policies on rangeland recovery. However some of them were afraid that zero-grazing and part of grazing might reduce their income from animal production.

3. There are differences among farmers with different education in policy information accessing, understanding and adoption. Farmers with more education put technology as more important.

4. 95% farmers considered that zero-grazing and part of grazing were necessary for improving rangeland environment. All the farmers from the four sites had received their compensation from government. However some others mentioned the government should paid more compensation, specially more gain for food and compensation for part of grazing.

5. However the result also showed that farmer's income from animal production become down after the policy implemented with the restriction of grazing. Some farmers had to go outside for working. Though the income from labor outside farm increased significantly, but the total income still a little lower than that before the policy implemented. Thus more attention should be paid to farmers' livelihood later.

**Conclusions** It is concluded that positive effects have achieved from the implementing of reducing farmland and grazingland back to grasses policy. It is welcomed by farmers basically. It is suggested that: 1. more attention should be paid to education and training for farmers, specially for women. 2. A more effective compensation mechanism in long term for farmers involved in the policy implementing should be established.

### Reference

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