

## The Rise and Development of the Responsibility System

### *Historic Background of the Responsibility System*

The *Responsibility System* evolved during the latter stages of the cooperative movement (1955/56). Elementary Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives were very popular at that time. Mutual aid teams had improved the methods of dealing with natural calamities; promoted water conservation works; promoted road construction works; and had partially solved the problem of cash and input shortages in farm households. Therefore, a certain amount of agricultural development had taken place and people were becoming more prosperous. This led to the establishment of Advanced Agricultural Producers' Cooperatives in rural China. The basic characteristics of these cooperatives have been described in the following passages.

Collective Labour and Management. Collective labour and management led to carelessness on the job on the part of farmers because they no longer had to worry about the whole production process. In turn, since productive management was left to the direction of lower level operatives, leaders often issued confusing or contradictory orders, "like a swarm of bees" or *dafalong* in Chinese.

Workpoint Allocation and Distribution. Workpoints were allocated according to hours worked. This did not bring about any real distribution according to how well someone worked or according to productivity. Farmers were simply allocated workpoints on the basis of time and since payment was made on the basis of workpoints, the really productive workers often lost out. The agricultural production cycle lengthened and became more complicated with more technological innovations. As a result, there were no middle products and actual work was assessed on the quantity and quality of fruit at harvest time; this meant that those who did not work well shared the productivity of the better farmers. It is obvious that, since agri-products depend a great deal upon the quality and quantity of work at different stages, workpoint allocation according to time does not fairly reward the more conscientious and productive workers. In addition, everyone ate in a canteen "from the common pot" so there was no proper system of reward and punishment.

*Dafulong* and the "common pot" hindered the development of agriculture. In order to explore better ways of production the *Responsibility System* was introduced in some regions. Until that time collective labour with a unified system of accounting and distribution, based on workpoints, had been regarded as the only correct model for agricultural development within the Socialist philosophy. Therefore, the *Responsibility System* was initially seen as heterodoxy and suffered censure and repudiation. As a result, it was not established at that time.

Following this came the period of the "Great Leap Forward" and the "People's Commune Period" and these resulted in an increase in the *dafulong* and "common pot" syndromes. This resulted in five negative trends and they were:

- o a premature transition to Communism
- o an exaggeration of working styles; posturing,
- o the carrying out of orders by force, and
- o personal privileges for the cadres.

These were popularly referred to as the five adverse winds: the wind of communism, the wind of exaggeration, the wind of blind commands, the wind of coercion, and the wind of privilege.

Added to all this, the effects of natural calamities brought agricultural production to a standstill creating an adverse economic situation in China. The country and the people suffered heavy losses and famine ensued.

To reverse this trend, in November 1960, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued a statement concerning the policies implemented in the rural communes and directed that efforts should be made to correct the "leftist" deviations, commencing by rectifying the organisation and management of the collective economy. As a result of this the *Responsibility System* was once more introduced, but on a larger scale, and a rapid reversal of the adverse situation was witnessed. The rural economy became more productive. However, at this time also some political elements were not in tune with the thinking at national level and the *Responsibility System* was once more abandoned.

During the decade from 1966-1976 China went through a "Cultural Revolution". This was a period of ceaseless class struggle which brought the rural economy to the verge of collapse. The "Cultural Revolution" ended in 1976 and policies to reform the agricultural system were once more introduced in 1978. This time there were strong demands from the farmers themselves for the reform of "leftist" farming policies. Hence, the *Responsibility System* was introduced for the third time. Since 1979, the *Responsibility System* has made rapid advances and has been successful. In the current model there are two important modifications, and they are that the values of both collective unified labour and individual decentralised labour are simultaneously maintained and that the system has been able to arouse the enthusiasm of both collective management and individual managers.

### *Conclusion*

The rise and development of the *Responsibility System* was on the whole consistent with the situations prevailing in China.

Because Miyi County is an underdeveloped, isolated mountain area, there is a delay in its receiving information concerning centralised decision. As a result, the third introduction of the *Responsibility System* did not take place in Miyi until 1980. This meant that it was in a position, by then, to benefit from other people's experiences. As a result, at the end of 1982, just two years after the reintroduction of this system, the number of production teams on "output contracts" and "farm work contracts" was 299 and 555 respectively; 92.13 per cent of the total number of production teams in Miyi County. By 1984, the percentage of production teams applying for farm work contracts was 64.78%, and they all had had experience of household contracts. Table 3 depicts the rise and development of the *Responsibility System* in Miyi County.

### *Stages in the Development of the Responsibility System*

There were four stages in the development of the agricultural *Responsibility System* in Miyi County.

- (i) The Centralised Development Stage. The document entitled "Resolution on a Few Problems Concerned with the Acceleration of Agricultural Development", adopted by the Fourth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, on September 28th, 1979, affirmed the "contract" production and management system of group output. This, in fact, was an official approval of the *Responsibility System*. Coming at a time when the system was still under dispute, it gave added impetus to its re-emergence, and, within two years, it had spread rapidly. Twenty per cent of all production teams were involved in "Household Contracts"

The main problem with the group contract was its continuing relevance upon the workpoint system. Thus, productivity remained mediocre and farmers were still eating "from the common pot". These drawbacks in the group contract arrangements led to the farmers welcoming the Household Contract system.

At this stage, there are many different types of the latter contract in Miyi. Public land is managed by all households collectively and agricultural taxes, State purchase and collective quotas, and grain ration land are all managed by individual households. Thus management by household is mixed.

**Table 3: The Rise and Development of the Agricultural Responsibility System in Miyi County**

Year	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	
Total Number of Production Teams	832	924	927	927	929	
Teams Adopting Responsibility System	Teams Contracting Output by Group		666			
	Teams Contracting Output by Household		166	800	299	6
	Teams Contracting by Household Generally			555	919	929
Teams not Adopting Responsibility System			73	2	0	
Percentage of Teams Practising Output linked Contracts from Total Numbers in Miyi	about 20	86.5	92.13	99.78	100	
The Percentage of Teams Practising link Output linked Contracts by Household from Total in Miyi		20	59.87	99.14	100	

- (ii) Growth of the Household Contract System. On September 27th, 1980, the Central Committee issued a "Summary of Discussions on the Problems Involved in Further Strengthening the Agricultural Responsibility System". It was a summary of discussions held by the First Secretaries of the various Party Committees in the Provinces. It concluded in affirming the value of the Responsibility System and pointed out that it was essential to support it in order to increase productivity and income. It especially stressed that the Household Contract was a way of maintaining links with the masses, improving production, and solving the problems of basic needs in the mountain areas. Finally, they declared that the "Contract System" was dependent upon a Socialist economy and was in tune with Socialist ideals.

Under the guidance of the summary issued at that time, Miyi County developed rapidly and in 1981, 70 per cent of households were practising the Household Contract System and 20 per cent "output contract farm work by household". However, the method of accounting and payment was still dependent upon the workpoint system and teams had no initiative to manage. This meant that their skills were not being exploited to the full.

- (iii) Growth of Miscellaneous Contract Systems. By the end of 1981, many different kinds of *Responsibility System* had been approved by the Government. However many demerits as well as merits of the system emerged. Comparatively, Household Contract farm work is the best for agricultural production, especially in the mountain areas and farmers are free to manage the way they see fit. As a result, this is the most acceptable contract in Miyi County and it spread rapidly, within one year, from 1981-1982 until more than 60 per cent of all production teams were Household Contract teams. In its turn this put an end to the custom of "eating from the common pot" and farmers became more involved in management.

The farmers were happy with this system and in fact, were apprehensive that a further change in government policy might negate the developments that had taken place. However, in January, 1983, the Central Committee issued a circular entitled "Discussions on the Current Rural Economic Policy", in order to put the farmers' minds at rest. The circular stressed the strengthening and perfecting of the *Responsibility System* and reaffirmed the commitment of the Central Government.

- (iv) Expansion of the Household Contract System. From 1983 to 1985, the output contract system in agricultural production expanded. The number of production teams in 1983 was 99.14 per cent of the total number of production teams in the County. This situation continued throughout and the contract period was prolonged on the basis of no changes within 15 years. Such issues as duties, rights, and interests were legalised but, on the other hand, weaknesses were found in individual labour and management. These weaknesses were related to the prevention and control of plant diseases, elimination of pests, and the dissemination of advanced technology, etc. There were also problems related to the placement of surplus labour force before, during, and after production.

It can be seen that the "household contract" system is still not perfected and is still subject to many improvements. After 1986, a number of measures were introduced to correct the weaknesses that had arisen. A system of "double-level management" was introduced (this refers to the method of contracting out work that can be handled best at household level to households, at collective level to collectives). Professional contracts, transferring land on a small-scale to skilled farmers are now being undertaken in some places.