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OPINION

Beware the Pork Perk for China in the 2023 Farm Bill



Christian Josi | Jul 11, 2023



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An insidious incursion into American agriculture by an enemy State is stealthily unfolding, maneuvering through the corridors of Washington.

For baffling reasons, some politicians are pushing a radical and unprecedented carveout into the Farm Bill that would enable large foreign pork conglomerates operating on US soil to completely bypass state laws. Smithfield, a titan in the American pork industry—since 2013 a wholly Chinese-owned entity— would be the primary beneficiary of this. Yes, Smithfield, the

largest pork producer not just in the United States but the world, ceased being an American company in 2013.

Cloaked under the pretense of eradicating “cumbersome” food safety and animal husbandry regulations in California, Representative Ashley Hinson (R-IA) and Senator Roger Marshall (R-KS) [have recently introduced the EATS Act](#). This legislation erases state laws that contain standards for agricultural products sold within their boundaries. It would wipe out laws protecting baby and infant food safety, ensuring fire-safe cigarettes, preventing invasive pests, and hundreds more.

Simply put, it is far too radical and indeed dangerous to pass as written, evident by the notably low cosponsor count (only 15 out of 435 Representatives will even touch it). Likely seeing the backlash against the broad overreach of their EATS Act, Hinson/Marshall are now attempting to add a narrower version of it within the Farm Bill, one that solely eliminates food safety and animal husbandry laws in the pork industry.

An attempt to add a narrower version of EATS to the Farm Bill that solely benefits pork producers simply exacerbates the primary problem with it, which is that it eliminates the very state laws that Chinese-owned Smithfield has lobbied against. China wants no rules as it further takes over our pork industry—this carveout is as if China wrote it itself.

It is critical—as a nation—that we pay attention to the fact that Chinese conglomerates are buying up American farmland and agriculture companies, surreptitiously converting industries at the core of our national identity to their own. After gaining control of Smithfield, Chinese interests took a step further by acquiring a leading seed producer, Syngenta. China now has a firm hold on a significant portion of our pork supply chain, from the food that fattens the pigs to the companies that process them. They are coming for our food supply. This is much more concerning than TikTok (which should be banned but that’s another column).

The erosion of our farming sovereignty has reached its lowest point yet with the Hinson/Marshall Chinese pork provision. This is particularly disheartening because the Republican-controlled House, at least in their words, has pledged to be very tough on China. Granting preferential treatment to a sector prominently controlled by China, enabling it to circumvent state laws, represents a significant betrayal of the principles of Kevin McCarthy’s Republican conference.

Politics aside, a Chinese-dominated pork perk in the Farm Bill poses a grave threat to our agricultural sovereignty.

Over the last decade, foreign ownership—especially from China—in U.S. farmland has surged dramatically. According to USDA reports, foreign land holdings have increased by an average of 2.2 million acres per year since 2015, equivalent to an annual loss of an area larger than Delaware to foreign corporations, many from unfriendly or unreliable nations. As of 2021, foreign entities held a staggering 40 million acres of U.S. agricultural land, an area the size of Kansas. It’s important to note that this trend extends beyond passive investment; China is acquiring entire American companies, exerting alarming control over our food production.

Despite the severe implications, Rep. Hinson and Sen. Marshall—Midwesterners with staggering amounts of American-owned farms, farmers and other American agricultural interests in their constituencies—persist in their attempt to include a carveout for the China-dominated US pork industry within the Farm Bill. Stunning.

If House Agriculture Chair G.T. Thompson and Senate Chair Debbie Stabenow allow this measure to be incorporated in the Farm Bill, it would grant WH Group, the Chinese company that owns Smithfield, the ability to bypass state-level laws, as previously mentioned. Such a provision represents an unprecedented assault on our longstanding tradition of states' rights, enabling foreign corporations to operate beyond the jurisdiction of our state laws. Again, stunning!

This encroachment, though silent, demands immediate attention. American farmers, the stalwarts of our nation's heritage, are already under siege from foreign corporations. They deserve legislation that safeguards their interests instead of prioritizing those of Chinese conglomerates. Allowing China and other nations to acquire vast amounts of our land is concerning enough, but rewriting the rules to permit them to disregard state laws is simply unconscionable.

The proposed carveout in the Farm Bill isn't just a concession — it's a blatant capitulation. A gift, if you will. I hope clearheaded legislators—especially those Republicans who claim concern over China's encroachment on American institutions and interests—will step up and lead the resistance to this silent invasion of American agriculture, fomenting a resounding rejection of the pork giveaway to China in our 2023 Farm Bill. The EATS Act—and its pork-focused version for the Farm Bill—is nothing but bad news.

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