

Changes weighed to help farmers keep land rights

China will strengthen its protections of farmers' rights and interests by extending the current round of rural land contracts for another 30 years, if a draft revision of the Rural Land Contracting Law is passed by the nation's top legislature.



Farmers of an agricultural cooperative in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, walk back home after a day's work in October. [Photo/China Daily]

The proposed change aims to maintain the long-term stability and consistency of rural land contracts. It was submitted at a bimonthly session of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for its first reading on Tuesday.

The 30-year extension was mentioned in a report delivered by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China, at the opening session of the 19th CPC National Congress on Oct 18.

Liu Zhenwei, deputy director of the NPC's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee, said the current law has played a key role in rural economic development, keeping order in rural areas and increasing the incomes of farmers since it took effect in 2003.

"But to meet higher requirements of rural development, it needs a revision," Liu said.

The draft revision will better define the use rights of rural land, so that

farmers can enjoy “sufficient and guaranteed protection of their land rights”, he said.

Since the country adopted the household responsibility system in the early 1980s, property rights associated with rural land have been divided into two layers: the ownership right, referring to its collective ownership by a rural community (normally a village), and the use right that is held by an individual household that contracts a piece of land from the village.

The draft revision further separates the use right into the “contract right” and “management right”, according to Liu, who regarded it as a positive innovation.

The separation, as proposed by the draft, would allow farmers to retain contract right over their allowed land, and only transfer the management right if they choose to lease the land to others, mortgage it to banks or invest it in a cooperative in exchange for shares.

More than 30 percent of rural households have transferred their contracted land, totaling 31.9 million hectares, Liu said.

“In the past, we sometimes hesitated to rent more land out of concern that our business might suffer if the status of the land changed when the contract runs out. That’s because the current law limits our leasing rights to 30 years,” said Jin Weiran, who has rented rural land to plant vegetables in Rizhao, Shandong province, since 2007. “But now, I feel reassured.”

“Xi’s report and the draft revision means that what I paid in the rented land in the first several years can be rewarded after the land contract is extended,” he said.

Yu Liufen, Party chief of Yanbo village in Guizhou province, said land is the farmers’ lifeline, and they will no longer worry about uncertainties if the extension is approved.