

For further information, contact:
David Zhang at 84979816

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
3 December 2007

China's New High-Yielding, Disease-Resistant Wheat Boosting Domestic Production as World Prices Soar

*Chinese Scientists Responsible for Developing Innovative Wheat Varieties Recognized
with International Award for "Outstanding Agricultural Technology"*

BEIJING (3 December 2007)--An intensive domestic research effort to bolster China's wheat production has over the last four years produced new high-quality, high-yielding varieties that already have added 2.4 million tons to Chinese harvests and generated an extra US\$411 million in farm income. The new varieties also offer natural resistance to a new strain of wheat stem rust now emerging as a threat to global food security, according to a new assessment from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS).

In recognition of their contribution to Chinese grain production and international crop science, the Consultative Group for International Agriculture Research (CGIAR) announced today that its 2007 Regional Award for Outstanding Agricultural Technology in the Asia-Pacific Region will go to a Chinese wheat improvement team. The team comprises scientists from CAAS and the Shandong Academy of Agricultural Science (SAAS). The award was presented here at the CGIAR Annual General Meeting.

The success of Chinese plant breeders in boosting the size and sustainability of domestic wheat production is well timed, as soaring wheat prices in global markets are making grain imports particularly costly. In addition, the recent discovery that one of the new varieties has natural resistance to a rapidly spreading and potentially devastating form of wheat stem rust could be critical to sustaining wheat production worldwide.

“Now that these new wheat varieties have been sown on more than 8 million hectares, we can see how important they are likely to become to China’s wheat production capacity,” said He Zhonghu of CAAS. “They are particularly important in the area of disease resistance. It is not just the farmers who are benefiting. These new varieties are yielding a high-quality grain that food manufacturers say is producing superior wheat noodles and pan bread for Chinese consumers.”

“These new wheat varieties developed by China’s wheat improvement team possess what every crop scientist seeks but only rarely achieves,” said Ren Wang, director of the CGIAR. “In addition to offering bigger harvests and higher quality wheat, the recent finding that they are endowed with natural resistance to the strain of stem rust we’re seeing spread throughout East Africa is just more evidence of their outstanding quality.”

From 2002 to 2006, a team of scientists from CAAS and SAAS developed three improved wheat varieties for Chinese farmers that are five to seven percent more productive than previous varieties. In addition, their superior quality for bread and noodle production has made them particularly popular among Chinese milling and food manufacturers and allowed Chinese farmers to earn an additional US \$101 million in “quality” premiums.

Scientists also recently discovered that one of the varieties, known as Jimai 20, is the only Chinese wheat cultivar—and one of the few in the world—to show high resistance to a new and virulent strain of destructive wheat stem rust that originated in East Africa and has now spread to the Arabian peninsula. International wheat experts have been alarmed that most of the world’s wheat varieties appear susceptible to the disease, which can reduce harvests by as much 70 percent.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the disease could end up posing a threat to global food security. Wind models show it has the potential to spread to farms throughout the Middle East and South Asia, which collectively account for 25 percent of the global wheat harvest.

The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), established in 1971, is a strategic partnership of countries, international and regional organizations and private foundations supporting the work of 15 international agricultural research Centers. In collaboration with national agricultural research systems, civil society and the private sector, the CGIAR fosters sustainable agricultural growth through high-quality science aimed at benefiting the poor through stronger food security, better human nutrition and health, higher incomes and improved management of natural resources. www.cgiar.org.

###