

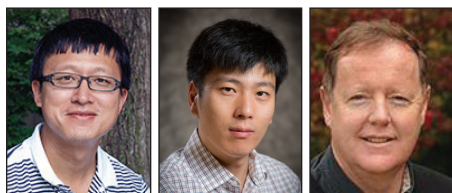
# Ag Decision Maker

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## China's new nationwide E10 ethanol mandate and its global implications

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In September 2017, the Chinese government announced a new nationwide ethanol mandate (National Energy Administration 2017) that expands the mandatory use of E10 fuel (gasoline containing 10 percent ethanol) from 11 trial provinces to the entire country by 2020. This measure would require the fuel ethanol consumption in China, the largest motor vehicle market in the world, to at least quadruple within the next three years. For U.S. producers, this recent development fuels interest in whether China is going to import ethanol and/or corn (the main feedstock for ethanol production in China) to meet the mandate.

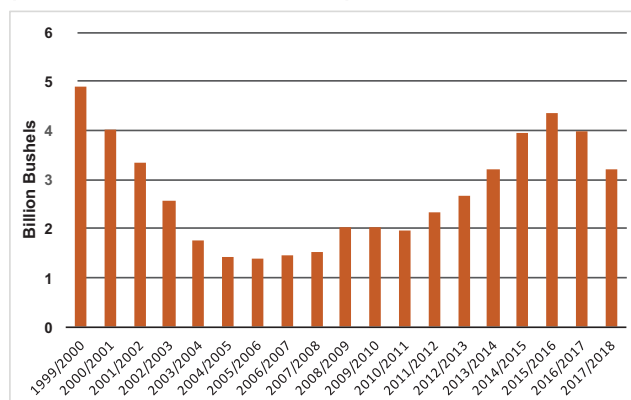
### Background

A key motivation for the E10 mandate is to reduce China's large corn stockpiles, which peaked in 2015 at over four billion bushels (Figure 1). This is about half of the world ending stocks and enough for China's domestic consumption for half a year (Wu

and Zhang 2016). The stockpile is the result of a corn price support

policy that was paying Chinese corn producers more than twice the international price level until 2016 (Wu and Zhang 2016). Burdened by high storage cost, food safety risks, and potential waste, China recently adopted multiple measures to cut supply and increase demand.

**Figure 1. China's end-of-year corn stock estimates (2017/2018 values forecasted)**



(Source: USDA FAS: world market and trade)

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### Handbook updates

For those of you subscribing to the handbook, the following updates are included.

**Cash Corn and Soybean Prices** – A2-11 (4 pages)

**Deductible Livestock Costs for Adjusting Income Tax Returns** – B1-15 (1 page)

Please add these files to your handbook and remove the out-of-date material.

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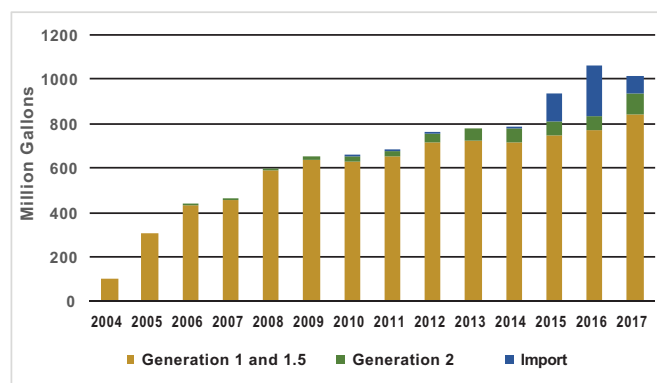
These measures include replacing the support price with a producer support based on area planted and financial assistance for corn processors. These measures have been effective—since 2015, China's corn consumption has caught up with production, the price for corn dropped to the lowest point in six years, and ending stock has been decreasing (USDA 2017b). The E10 mandate will further increase the demand for corn and speed up reduction of the stockpile.

Another important motivation for China's E10 mandate is to curb air pollution and Green House Gas (GHG) emissions created by China's 194 million cars. As a replacement for gasoline, ethanol has the potential to cut down CO<sub>2</sub>, particulate matter, and other pollutants. (However, the U.S. experience has revealed the potential unintended consequences from corn ethanol, such as land-use change induced by increased energy crop production [Wright et al. 2007] and water pollution from increased fertilizer use [New York Times, 2010], which might be at odds with China's efforts to cut corn acreage and improve water quality.) China views the recent E10 mandate as a step toward reducing smog and fulfilling its commitments to the Paris Climate Agreement (Center for Climate and Energy Solutions, 2015).

## Current situation of China's ethanol industry

In 2016, China was the fourth-largest ethanol producing country/region in the world, after the United States, Brazil, and the European Union. From 2004 to 2016, the average annual production growth rate was 16.8 percent.

**Figure 2. China's ethanol supply (2017 value forecasted)**



(Source: USDA: China biofuel annual, 2017)

Corn is China's main feedstock (called Generation 1, see Figure 1) for ethanol production, currently accounting for 64 percent of total output.<sup>1</sup> The four state-owned corn ethanol producers, located in corn producing regions in northern China (Figure 3), were established after the regional trial started in 2002, following a historical peak in corn stockpile. As the stockpile decreased and refineries started to use newly harvested corn for feedstock, the government stopped approving additional Generation 1 ethanol refineries in 2007 (CDRC 2007). By calling for "appropriate development of grain-based ethanol," the current national E10 mandate relaxes the government's previous stance against corn-based ethanol.

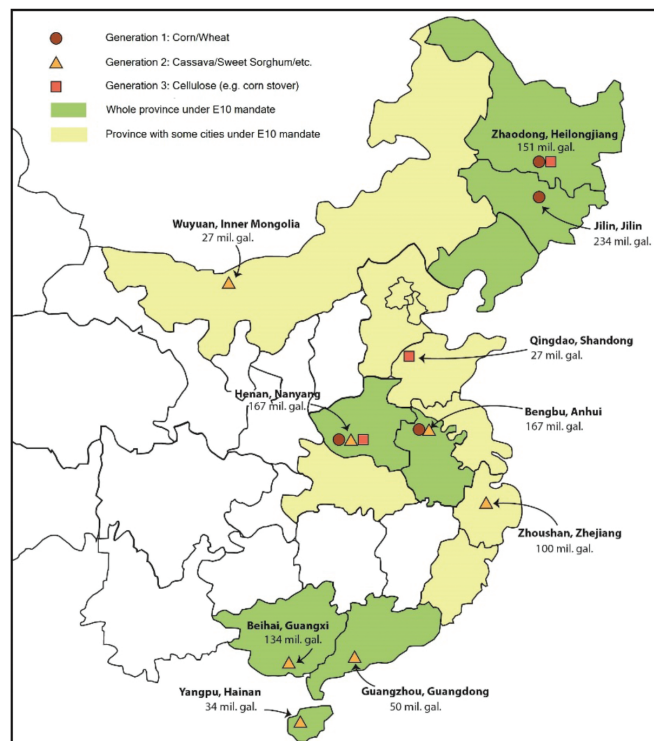
After China halted the development of Generation 1 ethanol in 2006, it shifted support to "Generation 1.5" feedstock, such as cassava and sweet sorghum. Cassava, a tuberous starchy root commonly grown in tropical and sub-tropical areas, became the second largest source of feedstock, currently accounting for 23 percent of total output. However, it is challenging to grow enough Generation 1.5 feedstock domestically, and cassava refineries in China still heavily rely on imports (IEA Bioenergy 2016). Cassava refineries are located in southern China, close to domestic and foreign cassava production regions (Figure 3). Recently, China has been encouraging ethanol production using cellulosic feedstock (called Generation 2). However, cellulosic ethanol production is not expected to reach large scale production until 2025 (NEA 2017).

The production and distribution of ethanol in China is integral to the regional E10 trial program. Trial areas, selected based on proximity to production, expanded from several cities in 2002 to six provinces and more than 30 cities today. State-approved ethanol refineries are exclusive suppliers in the nearby trial areas. They sell ethanol to designated state-owned fuel companies at 91.11 percent of market gasoline wholesale price. The fuel companies then blend ethanol with gasoline, and distribute the resulting E10 fuel in the trial areas where only E10 fuel is allowed to be sold.

<sup>1</sup> In 2016, Generation 1 and Generation 1.5 made up 92 percent of total output, while Generation 2 made up 8 percent (USDA 2017a, table 5). In the previous year, corn and cassava made up 70 percent and 25 percent of Gen 1 + Gen 1.5 output, respectively.

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**Figure 3. China's regional E10 mandate trial areas and ethanol refineries (annual production capacity is under location name)**



Since the ethanol price is proportional to the gasoline price, ethanol producers in China have suffered due to low oil prices. Before 2015, corn based ethanol producers also experienced high input price caused by the corn price support program. Moreover, China has gradually removed subsidies for ethanol refineries, especially those using first generation feed stocks. Although the policy details are not clear yet, the new national mandate is likely to be good news for the embattled ethanol industry.

China has been importing substantial quantities of ethanol in the past two years. Before 2015, even though the imported ethanol was much cheaper than domestic ethanol, very little ethanol was imported. This is due to the government forbidding distributors to handle imported ethanol in order to protect the domestic ethanol industry. Starting in 2015, imports rapidly increased and reached almost a quarter of total supply in 2016 (225 million gallons), with 95 percent from the United States. In that year, China was the third-largest export destination of US ethanol, encompassing 17 percent of total US ethanol exports. However, at the end of 2016, China increased the import tariff from five percent to the WTO bound rate of 30 percent, causing the 2017

import forecast to drop to only 35 percent of 2016 levels (USDA 2017a).

## Potential implications of China's national E10 mandate

Currently, China consumes 40 billion gallons of gasoline and one billion gallons of ethanol. Projections show that by 2020 gasoline consumption will reach 46 billion gallons (USDA 2017). Meeting the national E10 mandate would require an extra 3.6 billion gallons of ethanol, putting China ahead of the European Union to become the world's third-largest ethanol consumer.

Since details of the mandate have not been disclosed, it not yet clear how China will generate more than four-fold output growth within three years, assuming domestic production is to keep up with consumption. Currently, production capacity utilization rate is about 85 percent (USDA 2017), therefore a short-term production spur can be achieved with existing facilities. Beyond that, a dramatic increase in capacity is needed. Since it takes one to two years to build a large scale Generation 1 or 1.5 refinery in China, it is possible that China will be able to construct the physical facilities in time.

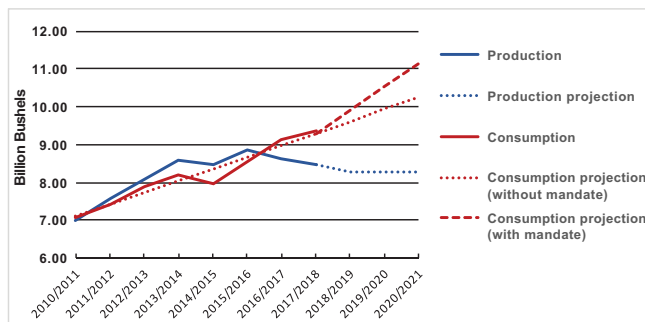
However, if the current trends in consumption and production continue, China's corn stock will fall quickly, opening up potential opportunities for more imports. If we assume that consumption growth follows the same trend it has shown since 2010, and that production decreases at its recent pace for one more year (to 2017/2018), and then stabilize (Figure 4), the ending stock will be used by the end of the 2020/2021 crop year, even in the absence of the ethanol mandate.

The ethanol mandate will further speed up the stockpile reduction. It will require between roughly 0.65 billion and 1.35 billion bushels of corn per year.<sup>2</sup> If we assume 0.9 billion bushels, (Figure 4), then the stockpile will be depleted by the end of 2019/2020 crop year. If China wants to maintain a stockpile of 1.39 billion bushels, the lowest in recent

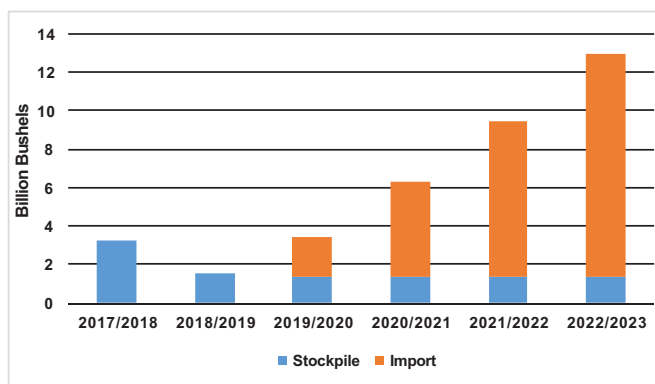
<sup>2</sup> Low estimate: assuming the current share of corn ethanol does not change. Currently, China's technology can convert 0.351 bushels of corn to one gallon of ethanol, Total increase in ethanol consumption \* domestic% \* corn% = 3.6 \* 75% \* 65% \* 0.376 = 0.65 billion bushels. High estimate, all increase in ethanol output comes from domestic corn-ethanol: 3.6 \* 0.376 = 1.36

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**Figure 4. China's corn production and consumption, history and projections (Source USDA FAS data)**



**Figure 5. Projected corn stockpile with ethanol mandate and import needed to maintain a minimum stockpile of 1.39 billion bushels**



history, it will need to import two billion bushels of corn by 2020–21 and much more after that. China may change its policies if it finds high levels of corn import unacceptable.

US corn exports to China resumed in 2017 after Syngenta's Duracade trait—used in the US against rootworms got Chinese approval in July 2017. So it is possible that if China increases corn imports that the United States will be a dominant source.

In the past, China has imported large quantities of ethanol when domestic production has fallen short of demand. If imports surge as a result of the E10 mandate, the United States, the top ethanol exporter to China, will benefit. In fact, as this report is being prepared, it is profitable for US producers to export to China, even with the 30 percent tariff (S&P Global Platts 2017).

Whether the ethanol mandate and other changes in China's corn policy will result in additional corn imports or additional ethanol imports remains to be seen.

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## Communication is key when cash flow is tight

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Cash flow management is becoming even more critical in row crop agriculture. While most lenders like to emphasize strong balance sheets, it's the ability to generate cash that pays the bills. Some farmers did a good job of forward contracting 2017 new crop bushels, hedging or buying put options and will avoid many cash flow concerns this late fall and winter. However, those farms holding large quantities of unpriced crops could see cash flow challenges and may want to focus on understanding other marketing strategies and tools rather than storing bushels unpriced.

Consider making cash sales of corn and soybeans, or delivering to a processor where better cash prices reflecting basis exist—do this as harvest wraps up and basis begins to improve. While basis should remain abnormally wide for December, most of the basis improvement for the winter months occur between mid-November and the first week of January.

### Don't wait too long to talk to your lender

If you know your cash flow is already going to be a problem, communicate early with your lender. Many lenders spent the past couple of winters restructuring existing farm debt to stretch out principal payments and free up depleted working capital. These same lenders could be reluctant to restructure loans anytime soon without commitment from the borrower to improve their cash flow management to meet existing debt obligations.

### Lenders more cautious on loaning money

Most cash flow problems will appear by late December and January. Expect some lenders to require the use of the USDA Farm Service Agency's (FSA) guaranteed loan program before advancing additional funds. Completing paperwork and getting necessary loan guarantee approval could take several months. Farms without access to typical farm operating loans should use caution before advancing family living and farm expenses on credit cards or higher interest-bearing debt.

FSA offers a low-interest, nine-month non-recourse marketing loan on harvested grain, but requires that the on-farm stored bushels be measured or the commercially-stored grain is under warehouse receipt. This marketing loan is limited to the county loan rates, which in Iowa are below the national loan rates of \$1.95 per bushel for corn and \$5 per bushel for soybeans. Thus, the marketing loan program is not a marketing strategy – just access to cheaper interest for up to nine months.

### Shop around for better cash price bids

It could take all winter and well into spring for corn futures prices to rebound along with significant basis improvement. Overcoming the higher costs of commercial drying, shrink and storage might not be realized in addition to the wider basis at a commercial storage facilities. The opportunity for better soybean cash prices could occur this winter should production concerns in South America emerge as they did each of the past two years.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of storing on-farm besides harvest efficiency is that it allows the farmer more time and improved chances to shop around for better cash prices reflected in basis. This will likely be true of processor bids, but not necessarily local elevators and co-op bids.

### Consider delivering bushels in December

With more farms facing cash flow constraints this fall, consider the delivery of bushels in December. By communicating with your grain merchandiser in advance, you can still “stay long in the deferred futures” using a basis contract or a minimum price contract.

Much of the actual cash price of the grain will be received upon delivery. Thus, you generate needed cash flow and eliminate storage costs, basis risk and accrued interest. You still have futures price risk in those deferred contract month – likely May or July 2018 futures. You'll need to work with your grain merchandiser to “short futures” before that futures contract goes into delivery in late April or late June.

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With large global ending stocks for corn, soybeans and even wheat hanging over the markets, expect this next year to bring continued struggles to manage production, financial and market price risks. The cost-price squeeze for many farm operations means tight crop profit margins and cash flow constraints.



Updates, continued from page 1

## Internet Updates

The following Information Files and Decision Tools have been updated on [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm).

Corn and Soybean Loan Rates – A1-34 (2 pages)

Condominium Grain Storage – A2-36 (3 pages)

Hay Storage Options: How do they stack up? – A2-37 (4 pages)

Hay Storage Cost Comparison – A2-37 (Decision Tool)

Improving Business Communications – C4-71 (3 pages)

## Current Profitability

The following tools have been updated on [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/outlook.html](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/outlook.html).

Corn Profitability – A1-85

Soybean Profitability – A1-86

Iowa Cash Corn and Soybean Prices – A2-11

Season Average Price Calculator – A2-15

Ethanol Profitability – D1-10

Biodiesel Profitability – D1-15

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