Influence of Fake News on Intention to Engage in Agriculture among Youths

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Abstract
Objective: The study examined the influence of fake news on youths' intentions to engage in agricultural activities in Nigeria.
Method: The study employed a survey research design. The sample size, which was determined using an online sample size calculator, was 333 respondents. Purposive and availability sampling techniques were used to obtain the views of the study's respondents. Mean, standard deviation, and simple frequency and percentage tables were used to analyse the obtained data.
Results: The study found that fake news about agriculture influences youths' understanding of agriculture, attitudes, and intention to go into agriculture.
Conclusion: Fake news can confuse and deceive people and negatively influence youths' perceptions of crop farming and other agricultural activities.
Keywords: Agriculture; youths; fake news; disinformation; misinformation

Introduction

All over the world, there is a serious problem of food insecurity, and it is a known fact that the agricultural sector is vital in tackling this issue (Olawale et al., 2023). However, this sector faces a monumental difficulty in making the youth create, develop and maintain a life-sustaining career in agriculture. That is why Gona (n.d.) noted that, in today's Nigeria, the agricultural sector is apparently among the most undervalued sectors in Nigeria, and that is because of the varied views and understandings most people (especially the young ones) have about the sector.

As at today, the most populous generation in human history are the youths and half of the world's population is made up of youths below the age of 30, while 1.7 billion persons are between the ages of 10-24 (USAID, 2012; in Brand and Galdava, 2019), and this youth population bulge is more evident in Sub-Saharan Africa, where there are 10 of the youngest countries in the world and where this population trajectory is expected to sporadically increase in the coming years (Brand and Galdava, 2019). Youths, while focusing more on what they perceive to be more beneficial careers and businesses, are increasingly drifting away from agriculture. Among the reasons for this is the kind of information they access about the nature and practice of agriculture. World Farmers' Organisation (2017) posit that the average age of farmers is rising and that the average age of farmers is about 60. These two facts, when brought together, limit the sustaining ability of agriculture in the world, especially in developing countries like Nigeria. Furthermore, these limiting factors can hinder the spread of innovative technologies and practices in the agricultural world (Brand and Galdava, 2019).

It is known that fake news is prevalent in the digital age, and every nook and cranny of our digital media adversely influences the youths' perception and understanding of agriculture and their intention to delve into it. In most cases, the phrase "fake news" is similar to a piece of

information concocted and disseminated to look like accurate news. This concept of fake news is often evident on social media posts and spreads rapidly there. There is more fake news on social media than on conventional media spaces. Fake news is not a new concept in the world of information dissemination. It can be dated back to when print media was the only form of mass communication (Ciboh & Ugondo, 2024). Oyedele and Omojunikanbi (2022) added that fake news is not a recent concept; however, the media of communication used in its dissemination makes it new. Propaganda has existed for centuries in mass media, and the Internet is the newest avenue for disseminating fake news (Ciboh & Ugando, 2024; Uguma et al., 2025). That is why Jefferson (1787); in Oyedele and Omojunikanbi (2022) posit that, "he who does not look into a newspaper is better informed than the man who reads them, as far as he knows nothing, he is closer to the truth than the person who has been filled with lies and blunder".

According to Alcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news is a deliberate and demonstrably false piece of information capable of confusing and deceiving a mass media audience or readers. It can also be those news stories meant to be "clickbait" written for economic incentives (whereby the writer makes profits on the number of people clicking on the story) (Desai & Oerhli, 2023). However, misinformation and disinformation are closely related to the term "fake news". Distinguishing between the two concepts, the British Broadcasting Corporation (2024) maintained that misinformation is a false piece of information produced and disseminated by mistake by a person who does not realize it is false. In contrast, disinformation is false news prepared and disseminated intentionally by someone who knows that such information borders on falsehood.

As it concerns agriculture, fake news can result in an unfavourable perception of farming and other agricultural activities. The ripple effect is a decline in youths' zeal and intent to go into agriculture in Nigeria and beyond. A study conducted by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in 2019 found that youths are increasingly getting detached from agricultural activities and that negative perceptions of agricultural activities aggravate this development (IFAD, 2019). In another study carried out by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2017, negative views of the agricultural sector among youths resulted in a decline in pursuing a career in agriculture (FAO, 2017).

Due to the fake news on agriculture, young people see the agricultural sector as weird. A sector with little or no ability to guarantee environmental sustainability and an individual's financial buoyancy (Munira et al., 2023). In the work of Gona (n.d.), some of the fake news on agriculture, influencing the youth's intention to go into agriculture, are as follows:

1. Farmers are not educated.
2. Agricultural practices are local, traditional and not a modern profession.
3. The presumption that organic farming is sustainable.
4. All agrochemicals and pesticides are harmful to humans.
5. Agricultural practices do not demand technology or social media use.
6. There is no future in agriculture.

Also, fake news, evident in Nigeria's online media, about the farmers-herders crisis, influences young people's intention to go into agriculture. In August, 2021, Adejumo Kabir, a journalist with HumAngle, wrote that in September, 2018, Jay Sekulow, a private attorney to the U.S. President, Donald Trump, during his first tenure as the U.S. President posted on Facebook that 60,000 Christians have been killed by Fulani Herdsmen in Nigeria, since 2001, and that this is done in the spirit of "Jihad" against Christian ethnic groups (Kabir, 2021). However, when AFP

fact-checked this information, it was revealed that there was no evidence of such genocidal killing by Fulani Herdsmen (Akinwotu, 2018).

The implication of such fake news on people, especially the youths, is that, even when it has been fact checked, the news is already out there and people they are sent to have formed their opinions based on the dictates of such false information. This scenario plays out when fake news on agriculture hits youths who may want to go into agriculture. To make sure they do not meet their untimely death, they jettison such intent.

Against this backdrop, this paper aimed to investigate the influence of fake news on youths' intentions to engage in agricultural activities.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) are the theoretical frameworks of this paper.

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Elaboration Likelihood Model is a theory that says that youths who get exposed to fake news on agriculture, which is capable of stopping them from engaging in agro-business, refuse to act on the dictates of such information, and are thinking and acting in the central route. The theory is also based on the idea that when youths are at the peripheral route of their minds, they are easily influenced by fake news on agriculture. This is because, at that state of their mind, they make little or no sense of the media messages they get exposed to, which is primarily due to their momentary emotional feelings. When they are in such a state of mind or mood, this fake news influences their intentions, resolve, and ability to enter the agricultural sector. In this way, the fake news on agriculture succeeds in stopping them from developing the intention to consider a career in agriculture.

This elaboration likelihood model is widely referred to as a theory of persuasion, which says that there exist two distinct ways individuals can be persuaded of something (Hopper, 2019). This theory was propounded by Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo in the 1980s; its objective is to clarify the divergent patterns of processing stimuli – the reason behind their usage and their possible results on behaviour change (Nickerson, 2023). According to the theory proponents, they aimed to supply a general structure for the organization, categorization and comprehension of the fundamental procedures surrounding the effectual nature of persuasive communication (Petty, Cacioppo, 1986; in Huang, 2022). The model creates two core ways (routes) to persuasion: the central route and the peripheral route (Vinney, 2024).

The Elaboration Likelihood Model is based on the view that multiple peculiar change processes exist on the "elaboration continuum," ranging from low to high. The moment the performing procedures at the high extreme of the continuum decide attitudes, persuasion follows the central route (Huang, 2022). According to the author, the central route is used when the information receiver is motivated and can think about the information and its title. When individuals process received messages centrally, the rational reactions or elaborations will be more appropriate to the message, while when processing peripherally, a person might depend on learning aids and other regulations of thumb when making sense out of information (Susmann et al., 2021). When individuals are at the high extreme of the elaboration continuum, they appraise pertinent messages relating to their structured mental framework and come to reasoned behaviour

supported by the message (Huang, 2022). Here, when fake news on agriculture negatively influences the youths' intentions to engage in agriculture, by making them see the agricultural sector as a sector for the uneducated, uncivilized and the poor, they (the youths) are at the high end of the elaboration continuum. Factors influencing motivation and capability to elaborate are the two factors influencing how and how people make sense of a persuasive piece of information (Susmann et al., 2021). The encouragement to process the information might be decided by a personal attraction to the core of the information, or personal factors, such as the need for mental attention (Huang, 2022). Nevertheless, when the information receiver is overwhelmed by a staunch negative attitude towards the stance of the information, a turnaround or fold effect is bound to take place. This means youths will likely feel the need to continue going into agriculture, irrespective of the fake news on agriculture in the media, when they view such information as false or a fallacy. In the words of Huang (2021), the youths will pay no mind to such false information and dissociate themselves from the tenets of such information. Behaviour changes which persist for a longer time and the predictability of attitudes instead of changes in the peripheral route are the two main positive sides of central routes (Susmann et al., 2021).

Peripheral routes come into play when the receiver of a message pays little or no attention to the message or has little or no capability to make sense of the information (Nickerson, 2023). When message receivers are at the low extreme of the elaboration continuum, they fail to go through the information critically (Huang, 2021). When the peripheral route is in play, message receivers are bound to depend on generalized impressions (Nickerson, 2023). That is, they will rely on how the information makes them feel. Moreover, the feelings that they attribute to the message might be their momentary emotional feelings, which make them susceptible to the tenets of the information.

Furthermore, because people do not always allow their analytical mindset to come into play or rack their brains to uncover the hidden truth in every message, they depend on the peripheral route to minimize mental analytical work when making meaning out of a message (Chaiken, 2014). When a person does not feel like exerting the needed mental work in processing a media message he comes across, the persuasive tenets of the message get a quick hold of him/her. The receiver of an information is likely going to retain the previously held attitudes and behaviours when the peripheral route of an information goes undetected, though, if not, the receiver of an information will change his attitude, though, in some cases, temporarily, however, the said attitude change may last for longer period. However, permanent change may not take place in the way it takes place in the central route (Chaiken, 2014).

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

The theory was propounded by Albert Bandura in a book titled "Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory." It proposes that youths' intention to go into agriculture or not to go into agriculture is the total of the interrelationship between personal convictions, environmental impacts and behavioural patterns. (Brinkmann, Hurst and Levitas, 2023; Nickerson, 2024). This means that the theory opines that a person's choice of behaviour is picked based on inward and outward factors like, the environment, role model selection and past experiences (such as the mental picture of farmers in the minds of youths and the kind of news about agriculture youths are exposed to) (Brinkmann et al., 2023). SCT is a broad-based theory emphasising learning through the social environment (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2023).

This theory has been a broad theoretical framework of human behaviour and is a vital addition to the social and behavioural sciences, advanced by Albert Bandura (Whithan, Sterling, Lin, & Wood, 2013). Social cognitive theory clarifies the psychosocial control of the triplex supplemental antecedents (Bandura, 1988). Social cognitive theory is based on various primary presumptions, according to Brinkmann et al. (2023). Listing them, he observed that first, these various presumptions say that individuals learns when they observe others. One who learns can develop new behaviours and knowledge by monitoring a model. In this context, a model is someone who exhibits behaviours another person finds emulative. This theory is indicative of the fact that fake news on agriculture, which has modelled a career in agriculture as meant for the uneducated, uncivilized, unsophisticated, people who do not appreciate their lives and people with no concrete life ambition in our society; has made youths to develop behaviours akin to the dictates of the fake news whenever they hear about agriculture. Since they observe the very nature and life of farmers in our contemporary societies, they conclude that agriculture is really for the uneducated, and the media is not found wanting when it comes to propagating this myth.

The second presumption says that learning is an inward procedure which may or may not result in a behaviour. Corollary to this statement, it means that learning may not immediately take place in this circumstance. The person who meets with the information may authenticate the expected new behaviour, but his/her learning may not be influenced until a later time or not influenced at all. This presumption is saying that the fake news on agriculture may or may not cause youths not to engage in agricultural activities. This means that this false information is most evident on our online media about agriculture, even when youths have learnt about it, it may cause them to detest a career in agriculture.

The third presumption of this theory is that individuals set objectives for themselves and channel their behaviour according to their objectives. These people are determined to achieve those objectives. In the study context, young ones are motivated not to engage in agriculture because they have been exposed to many lies about the agricultural sector. Because of this, they are determined not to create a career in agriculture (an erroneous conception, anyway), but to develop themselves in another human endeavour. After all, no one is ready to be a failure in life.

The fourth presumption of this theory posits that human behaviour finally turns self-guarded. Proponents of this theory firmly believe that individuals finally start to guard their learning and behaviour. Here, the SCT is saying that youths inundated with myriad fake news on agriculture have imbided that information and are using it to self-regulate themselves against getting involved in agriculture. This is because they have formed a faulty opinion about agro-business, mainly because the fake news, in most cases, appears to be accurate.

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

This theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) has been widely considered a cognitive theory (Brookes, 2023). This theory was propounded by Icek Ajzen in 1985 (Brookes, 2023), and he attempted to predict the behaviour of humans (Ajzen, 1991; in Asare, 2015). The theory proposes that one's resolve to engage in a particular action, like farming or not farming, can be foretold via their intention to engage in that action (Brookes, 2023). Discussing the Theory of Planned Behaviour, Steele (2025) posits that the theory explores the processes involved in human behaviour influenced by individual intentions.

According to this theory, which is also known as the Theory of Reasoned Action (Steele, 2025), human behaviours influenced by intentions are determined by three core convictions. These are: behavioural convictions, which can also be said to be attitudes towards behaviour, normative convictions, which are akin to observed attitudes of associates and revered persons towards the behaviour, and the last conviction is the control beliefs or perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 2005; Etheridge, Sinyard and Brindle, 2023). This theory emphasizes things beyond a person's control, which can influence behaviour.

The first conviction, which is termed attitudes towards behaviour, talks about a person's positive or negative assessment regarding going into a particular behaviour. Suppose an individual believes that his/her behaviour will transform into a commendatory result, that person is most likely to nurture a positive attitude towards that behaviour, which adds to their readiness to go into such behaviour (Steele, 2025). However, if not, the reverse will be the case here. For instance, if a person believes that walking to his place of work is healthier than driving to it, the person may be more inclined to walk to his place of work and vice versa. As it concerns this study, the first core conviction of this theory says that youths form a negative attitude towards agricultural practices due to the myriad fake news stories they come across on social media. That is why they likely will not nurture the intention to engage in agriculture.

The second conviction, called normative conviction or subjective norms (Brookes, 2023), also discusses the social drive to engage or not to engage in a specific behaviour, endeavour or career. In the words of Steele (2025), our composure, aspirations, prospects, and career are influenced by what we have come to believe others want to see in us. This can be the anticipations of our blood relatives, pals and even society. Take, for instance, a person who works in an establishment where almost all the co-workers are PhD holders; such a person will feel pressured to get his/her doctorate. The second conviction of this theory has it that the fake news (which ranges from- there is no promising future in agricultural practices, to farmers are not educated, and to agriculture is not a civilized profession) on agriculture, which young people are exposed to, mainly through the social media platforms, make them feel pressured to not engage in agricultural activities.

The third and last conviction of the Theory of Planned Behaviour, which is perceived behaviour control, is that this conviction is a vital aspect differentiating this theory from the Theory of Reasoned Action. This third conviction revolves around a person's view of how simple or complicated it can be to form or carry out a particular behaviour, considering their past encounters, expected difficulties and resources available (Brookes, 2023). This third conviction embodies both the outward aspects, like the presence of obstacles and resource persons and the inward aspects, like strong belief in one's capabilities (Steele, 2025). For example, suppose an individual is considering walking or driving to work. In that case, he/she might be more open to walking to their workplace when he/she realise that their vehicle is without PMS or that there have been a series of car accidents lately. These obstacles will make driving to work a herculean task. The third conviction of the theory also says that the young ones might decide not to engage in agriculture because of how fake news on agriculture, which they have been exposed to in the past, has conditioned their minds and views on the entirety of the concept of agriculture. These fake news stories, which have been telling them that a career in agriculture is a waste of time and full of obstacles, make them continually develop cold feet at the mention of a career in agriculture.

When put together, the three convictions of this theory form one's intention to engage or not to engage in agriculture, which will be the precursor of the actual behaviour imbibed. The firmer the intention not to engage in agriculture due to the fake news they are exposed to, the more likely youths will develop negative behaviour towards agriculture. Moreover, even though they have firm intentions to engage in agriculture, they must be fully convinced that they will surmount any obstacles that come their way. These surmountable obstacles are what fake news on agriculture will not allow youths to perceive as surmountable.

Research Hypothesis

H1: Exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' understanding of agriculture.

H2: Exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' intention to engage in agriculture.

H3: Exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' attitudes towards agriculture.

Methodology

This paper examined the possible influences of fake news on agriculture and the intention of youths to go into agriculture or see agriculture as a possible means of livelihood. It dwelt on the cognitive processes involved in youths' understanding of fake news in the agricultural sector. The paper used a sample survey method to elicit the views and responses of people on how false information on agriculture influences youths' intention to engage in agriculture. According to Williams (2014), the sample survey method is a strategy for obtaining data from or about a population so that conclusions about the whole population can be drawn from a subset or sample of the population members. The use of sample survey design in this paper is necessary because there is a need to gather the different views of the respondents as it relates to how fake news on agriculture influences youths' intentions to go into agriculture.

Data for the study were obtained from the entire population of undergraduate students of the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. A federal and public research university in Enugu state, in the eastern part of Nigeria. The Faculty of Agriculture is made up of 2487 undergraduate students. This is according to the university's Academic Planning Unit. The sample size of 333 respondents was determined through an online sample size calculator obtained from Qualtrics (2023).

333 respondents were carefully selected from the faculty using the purposive sampling technique. This technique was germane because the researcher wished to concentrate more on the faculty's third—and fourth-year students, who have the most advanced knowledge of agriculture and agricultural activities. The researcher used the availability sampling technique to administer his questionnaire to the selected respondents.

The data for this research were collected with the aid of a well-drafted questionnaire that is divided into two sections. Section "A" dealt with the demographics of the respondents, while Section "B" dealt with questions derived from the hypothesis of the study. The researcher constructed the questions in a simple way, devoid of ambiguous words and statements. The copies of the questionnaire were retrieved from the respondents through the researcher's research

assistant, who was appropriately briefed on the significance and purpose of the study. Dr. Gever, Verlumun Celestine of the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, validated the research instrument at face level. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot test using 50 Agricultural Science students of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra state, Nigeria. The result of the pilot test was almost the same as the result of the main test. Data obtained from the respondents were analyzed and presented using mean, standard deviation, frequency and percentage tables.

Results

Out of the 333 questionnaires sent out, 324 were completed and returned. It represents a 97 per cent response rate. The collected data were presented and analyzed using mean, standard deviation, frequency and simple percentages. A criterion mean of 2.5 was used as a benchmark for decision making for each item, since a four-point rating scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), was used for the study. Therefore, any item with a mean of 2.5 and above was considered accepted by the respondents, while any item with a mean below 2.5 was considered unacceptable. The data are hereby presented below:

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Data

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	223	69
	Female	101	31
	Total	**324**	**100**
Age	18-20	0	0
	21-23	174	54
	24-26	107	33
	27 and above	43	13
	Total	**324**	**100**
Marital Status	Single	259	80
	Married	65	20
	Total	**324**	**100**

Source: Field Work (2025)

The data in Table 1 indicates that most respondents are males (69%), while females are just 31%. More than half of the respondents are between the ages of 21 and 23 (54%). This is followed by those who are between the ages of 24 and 26 (33%). Furthermore, most respondents are single (80%), while just 20% are married. This demography indicates that the respondents of this study are mostly male students between the ages of 21 and 26 years and are mainly unmarried.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics

Mean Response of Respondents.

	SA	A	D	SD	Mean (X)	Std Dev.	N	Decision
Youths' Understanding	67	193	36	28	2.92	0.16	324	Accepted
Youths' Intention	98	111	68	47	2.80	0.15	324	Accepted
Youths' Attitude	126	83	77	38	2.91	0.16	324	Accepted

Source: Field Work (2025)

N.B. *SA (Strongly Agree), A (Agree), D (Disagree), SD (Strongly Disagree), Std. Dev. (Standard Deviation), N (Total Number of Responses).*

The information in Table 2 above indicates that fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' understanding of agriculture (X = 2.92; Std. Dev. = 0.16), youths' intention to engage in agriculture (X = 2.80; Std. Dev. = 0.15), and youths' attitude towards agriculture (X = 0.16; Std. Dev. = 0.16).

Discussion of Findings

From the foregoing, fake news about agriculture exerts much influence on youths' intention to go into agriculture or take the agricultural sector seriously. Based on the findings of this study, the three hypotheses generated were accepted by the study's respondents.

The first hypothetical statement of the study, which states that "exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' understanding of agriculture," was accepted because the mean result (2.92) shows that it is above 2.50, which is an acceptable outcome when using a four-point Likert scale. This indicates that fake news about agriculture negatively influences how youths understand the very nature of the agricultural sector. This finding is in line with the researcher's idea when he said that it is a known fact that fake news is prevalent in the digital age and is also in every nook and cranny of our digital media, adversely influencing the youths' perception and understanding of agriculture and the intention to delve into it.

The second hypothetical statement of the study which states that "exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' intention to engage in agriculture" was accepted too, and this is because the mean result (2.80) showed that it is also above 2.50, which is the benchmark for accepting hypothetical statements when using a four-point Likert scale. This also indicates that fake news on agriculture negatively influences youths' intention to engage in or entirely go into agricultural activities. This very particular finding of this study is in line with the suppositions of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) which says that the human behaviours which are influenced by intentions are determined by three core convictions, which are: behavioural convictions, which can also be said to be attitudes towards behaviour; normative convictions, which is akin to observed attitudes of associates and revered persons towards the behaviour and the control beliefs or perceived behavioural control which lays more emphasis on things beyond a person's control, which can influence intention and behaviour (Ajzen, 2005; Etheridge, Sinyard, & Brindle, 2023).

The third hypothetical statement of the study which says that "exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' attitude towards agriculture" was also accepted, and this is because the mean result (2.91) showed that it is also above 2.50, which is the benchmark figure for accepting hypothetical statements when using a four-point Likert scale. This shows that exposure to fake news about agriculture negatively influences youths' attitudes towards agricultural activities. This is in tandem with the thoughts of Munira et al. (2023), who posit that due to the fake news on agriculture, young people see the agricultural sector as a weird sector, a sector that has little or no ability to guarantee environmental sustainability and an individual's financial buoyancy.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The influence of fake news about agriculture on youths' intention to engage in agriculture cannot be spoken of enough. Because fake news is a deliberately and demonstrably false piece of information, capable of confusing and deceiving a mass media audience or readers, its effect in the agricultural sector is the youths' unfavourable perception of farming and other agricultural activities. Based on this study, it is evident that fake news about agriculture influences youths' understanding of agriculture, their intention to engage in agriculture and their attitude towards the agricultural sector.

However, it is necessary to have in place a professional body of experts in agriculture whose primary responsibility, among others, will be to dispel all kinds of fake news or false information about agriculture, aimed at projecting agriculture in a bad light before the eyes of the public, especially the youth. With agriculture being the only way global food insecurity will be effectively combated, and the media being a powerful tool for all development campaigns, the media should not just join the fight against fake news on agriculture. Still, they should also sensitize and educate the youth on the pressing need to engage in agricultural activities in order to successfully fight against food insecurity. Also, through its agricultural agencies, the government should motivate the existing farmers by adequately making available quality seeds, farmlands, animal feeds, pesticides, etc., among others, for farmers and pastoralists. This will help them succeed more, and it will eventually attract the attention of the youth to agriculture.

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