

First 365 Days: John Guojun Li on building business impact at the intersection of government and agriculture

With a career spanning government, technology and financial services, John Guojun Li has witnessed the evolution of government affairs from a support function into a strategic business capability. Now, as Head of Government and Regulatory Affairs, China at Corteva Agriscience, he shares his perspectives on building influence across the public and private sectors, demonstrating business value and developing the next generation of government affairs leaders.

Building a career between government and business

When John Guojun Li joined Corteva Agriscience in early 2026, he brought with him a career spanning government and corporations including Visa, AWS and Standard Chartered, as well as a deep understanding of how policy and business intersect. Appointed through a search led by Andrews Partnership, his move into the global agriculture sector represents a new chapter focused on innovation, food security, sustainability and stakeholder engagement. His role at Corteva also reflects a career built around understanding both sides of the relationship between government and business and the value created when they work together.

John's interest in government affairs was shaped early in his career while working within the Chinese government, where he observed first-hand the impact public policy can have on businesses and industries. At the same time, he recognised that governments also depend on business input to develop practical and effective policy.

That experience led him to view government affairs as a function that bridges two worlds. "Government affairs can help encourage more interactive and constructive communication," he explains. "That helps support policymaking and creates more opportunities for the private sector."

Throughout his career, that belief has remained a constant source of motivation. Whether engaging policymakers, supporting business leaders or shaping advocacy strategies, John has focused on helping create outcomes that benefit governments, businesses and society alike. Economic growth, job creation and social development are all strengthened when effective dialogue exists between the public and private sectors.

A move into agriculture at a pivotal moment

Corteva presented a unique opportunity to bring together his stakeholder engagement experience with a sector that is increasingly central to national and global priorities.

As a global pure-play agriculture company operating across seed technologies, crop protection and digital agriculture solutions, "Corteva is really at the intersection of technology, sustainability and food security," says John. The opportunity to contribute to an organisation whose purpose is helping farmers improve productivity and resilience was a major attraction.



He highlights seed innovation, food security, sustainable agriculture, rural development and improving farmer productivity as areas where Corteva's capabilities align closely with government priorities. Looking ahead, he sees more opportunities for collaboration with government departments, research institutions and local agricultural partners, by which Corteva can contribute to both industry advancement and broader national objectives. This broader role in connecting business priorities with public policy goals reflects the changing nature of government affairs itself.

The strategic evolution of government affairs

Over the course of his career, John has seen government affairs become increasingly influential within organisations.

The combination of geopolitical tensions, trade disputes, regulatory complexity and evolving public policy expectations has transformed the function from a traditional support role into a strategic business capability. Companies now recognise that stakeholder engagement can directly influence business outcomes, investment decisions and competitive positioning.

"I see government affairs becoming an institutional priority rather than a reactive supporting function," John says. "Many management teams now see government affairs as a strategic capability."

This shift requires leaders to think beyond traditional advocacy. Today's government affairs professionals must anticipate risks, identify opportunities and support strategic decision-making by providing greater visibility into the external environment.

Drawing on his experience across a rapidly changing landscape, John highlights three areas that will shape the future of government affairs and the capabilities leaders need to build successful careers in the profession.

1. Demonstrate value to the business

As the profession evolves, John believes government affairs leaders must become increasingly focused on demonstrating measurable impact.

While engagement and advocacy are not always easily quantified, he argues that effective teams should establish meaningful metrics to assess performance and demonstrate how their work contributes to broader business goals.

Equally important is the ability to speak the language of senior leadership. By framing stakeholder engagement through the lens of commercial outcomes, government affairs teams can more effectively communicate their value to management teams and boards.

"Try to see things from their perspective," says John. "Help them to figure out where there are business opportunities, cost savings or risk that needs to be managed. Try to be data-driven, fact-based and quantitative to the extent that it's possible to really show your contribution."

2. Bridge global and local priorities

Like many multinational leaders, John spends considerable time helping balance global business objectives with local market realities.

He believes successful organisations understand the capabilities and strategies that have driven their success globally, while remaining flexible enough to adapt to local conditions and expectations. Applying a one-size-fits-all approach rarely works in today's interconnected business environment.

"A local market may not just be a market for sales, but also for their supply chain, research and development, even talent development," he explains. "So you need a more holistic approach in terms of your local strategy while still playing to your core strengths and strategy to be successful globally."

Understanding this broader operating context is essential when building effective stakeholder engagement strategies.

3. Navigate geopolitical complexity through trust

Geopolitical uncertainty continues to shape the operating environment for businesses across the world, and John believes government affairs teams have an important role to play in helping organisations navigate change.

That requires close alignment between headquarters and local teams, robust monitoring of policy developments and the ability to provide early insights to executive leaders. However, despite the importance of intelligence and analysis, John sees trust as the foundation of effective stakeholder engagement.

"I always find it helpful for the global leadership team to directly engage with policymakers and government officials to get insights rather than just reading analysis reports," he advises. "It also helps to build trust with the policymakers in the market and grow your brand and profile."

Beyond helping businesses better understand policy priorities, direct engagement enables governments to better understand corporate objectives, investments and long-term commitments. Over time, these relationships build credibility and foster more constructive dialogue.

Leadership lessons learned along the way

Reflecting on his career, John points to the leadership principles that have consistently guided his approach.

Among the most important is commercial impact and ownership – the ability to think strategically, focus on long-term outcomes and take responsibility for delivering impact. "Position yourself as a growth enabler," he says. "Align your objectives with business opportunities and focus on impact. You need to really take ownership and don't view yourself only as a supporting function. Think from management's perspective and think longer term."

Equally important is investing in people. Over the years, John has built and developed teams across a range of organisations, and he considers talent development one of the most important responsibilities of leadership. Strong teams not only strengthen organisational performance but also create lasting impact long after a leader has moved on to a new role.

The future of government affairs leadership

As the government affairs profession continues to evolve, John believes future leaders will need to be increasingly strategic, commercially minded and proactive.

Rather than seeing themselves as support functions, they must position themselves as business enablers – helping organisations identify opportunities, navigate complexity and align external engagement with long-term growth ambitions.

For John, his transition to Corteva represents an opportunity to apply those principles in a sector that sits at the heart of some of the world's most important challenges. By strengthening the connections between government, business and society, he believes organisations can create value that extends far beyond commercial success alone.