

# Herbal tea may be just the medicine for Shanxi



Provincial leaders aim to make high-quality produce into a major source of revenues

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Authorities in North China's Shanxi province are planning to develop herbal tea into one of the local pillar industries.

Their confidence is based on the rich local resources in medical herbs and a long provincial history in producing herbal teas and other herb-related products.

According to a recent national survey, Shanxi is home to 1,788 varieties of medical herbs.

Herbs such as pilose asiabell, milkvetch, forsythia, chrysanthemum and sea buckthorn are widely used in the production of herbal teas in Shanxi due to their ready availability and high quality.

Lou Yangsheng, Party secretary of the province, and Shanxi Governor Lin Wu attended a promotional fair for local herbal teas in Taiyuan on March 20, where local products were showcased to consumers from home and abroad.

Lou, who calls himself a "branding envoy" for Shanxi's herbal teas, said: "The production of the teas is based on the selection of genuine medical herbs growing in Shanxi and time-honored techniques that require great human effort. And the preparation of the teas represents an art form that is similar to the traditional tea ceremony popular in China and Japan."

The Party chief said he is confident of the market potential of the tea products from Shanxi because of



**Clockwise from top:** Employees in a herbal tea company in Yuanqu county work at a forsythia tea production line. CUI SONGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY A worker in Hengshan Tea Industry Corp in Hunyuan county removes impurities from dried leaves as part of the producing process. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY A milkvetch farm in Hunyuan county. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

the heritage and their many health benefits.

"The history of Shanxi herbal teas can be traced back to the Red Emperor or Shennong, the legendary emperor who invented herbal drinks some 5,000 years ago," Lou said.

Wang Cheng, vice-governor of the province, said that in Shanxi herbal

teas have been brewed and consumed for thousands of years.

The production of herbal teas in Shanxi shares some similarity with traditional tea making in the rest of the country, including techniques such as drying, baking and fermenting.

However, unlike traditional teas

that use tea leaves as their ingredients, many parts of herbs, including leaves, fruits and roots, can be used for making herbal teas in Shanxi. Currently, there are nearly 300 invention patents related to herbal tea production, according to Wang.

Some herbal teas can help control body temperature and clear away

toxic substances, while others are good for immunity, sleep or digestion, according to herbal tea experts.

Due to its high quality and health benefits, herbal tea made from forsythia in Pingding county was gifted to the royal families throughout history.

According to records, Emperor

Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) called forsythia tea of Pingding "longevity tea".

According to the Shanxi Administration for Market Regulation, there are more than 100 enterprises engaged in the production of herbal teas, with more than 220 varieties and 92 brands sold both domestically and overseas.

However, due to a lack of effective branding, Shanxi's herbal teas are not very popular among consumers outside Shanxi, local officials said.

To solve this problem, the province has launched a new marketing campaign, which includes establishing an industrial alliance for promoting herbal teas and brand building.

The Shanxi Herbal Tea Alliance, a local trade association, recently launched the "Shanxi Herbal Tea" brand for local products with geographic indications.

This brand is expected to make Shanxi Herbal Tea a recognized name like Longjing Tea in Zhejiang, Pu'erh Tea in Yunnan and Wuyi Rock Tea in Fujian, according to Ju Zhen, chief of Shanxi Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

He said the herbal tea sector will become a new growth area in the province's rural development, alongside agricultural products with local geographic indications such as millet; mature vinegar; fragrant pear; walnut; sorghum; buckwheat and potato.

Ju said he hopes local businesses use all kinds of marketing channels, including trade shows, tourism festivals and online platforms, to improve the influence and market share of herbal teas.

While strengthening marketing efforts, Ju said it is crucial to foster a strong team of professionals for the research, development, production and sales of herbal tea products.

The official also called on local producers to develop strict standards for production and safety to ensure quality.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

## Alliance to build strong foundations for industry

By YUAN SHENGGAO

To promote Shanxi's herbal tea industry, the Shanxi Herbal Tea Alliance was established on April 21. It aims to represent the interests of the province's 100-plus herbal tea enterprises.

Responsible for the promotion of herbal tea products, drafting industrial standards and helping members register their trademarks and design corporate identities, the alliance has been hailed by businesspeople as a milestone for the industry.

Li Anping, secretary-general of the alliance and board chairman of

Zhending Health Industry Group based in Changzhi city, said the goal of the alliance is to help promote Shanxi's herbal tea products to the domestic and international markets with strengthened collaborations in research and development, branding and marketing.

One of the initial moves of the alliance is its cooperation with Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine in building a herbal tea institute.

"The institute will focus on the research of recipes and production techniques as well as products R&D, helping foster a herbal tea industrial cluster with core technologies and its

own intellectual property," Li said.

He noted that Shanxi is home to many unique medical herbs. However, the rich resources didn't bring much benefit to local farmers, producers and dealers in the past.

"In the past, most of the businesses in the field focused on selling herbs to medicine producers as raw materials for producing medicines," Li said, adding that there were only some small firms engaged in herbal production and sales.

He said the institute and the alliance will offer R&D services to producers, helping design "sought-after products" for consumers with better taste and better uses.

Like Li Anping, many producers in Shanxi are now attaching more importance to the teas' taste and uses.

Hu Pingping is an eighth-generation tea-making technique inheritor of the time-honored firm Hu's Rong Tea in Taiyuan, the provincial capital of Shanxi.

The veteran tea maker admitted that "most herbal teas don't taste as good as traditional teas".

"Only when we improve the taste, can the herbal teas with many health benefits become more popular among consumers," Hu said.

She noted that the R&D team of her company is planning to cooperate with the herbal tea institute to develop more "delicious teas".

In addition to the herbal tea institute, secretary-general Li said the alliance is planning to establish more partnerships with entities inside and outside the industry.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

## Local firms turn to star appeal online

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi's medical herbal tea businesses are turning to the internet to attract new customers, livestreaming products with famous faces.

A recent livestream was broadcast on May 8, hosted by renowned anchorwoman Mu Zimeng, on the Shanxi channel of people.cn, the website of national newspaper People's Daily.

Also present at the event were executives of four renowned local herbal tea businesses.

Mu started the livestream by telling the history of Shanxi's herbal teas.

"In Shanxi, Shennong — the legendary emperor who pioneered China's farming and medical industries — tasted more than 100 herbs to determine which can be used for curing illnesses.

"In this practice, he was poisoned by some toxic plants but his life was saved by drinking certain herbal teas," Mu said, citing local legends.

Mu later tasted some herbal teas brought by the four business leaders and asked questions about the characteristics of teas made of different ingredients.

Li Xiaofeng, chairman of Hengzong Milkvetch Tea Technology based in Datong city, introduced the milkvetch tea made by his company.

The businessman said milkvetch is an ingredient used in many traditional Chinese medicines.

The herbal tea made of milk-



Anchorwoman Mu Zimeng introduces Shanxi's herbal teas during a livestream on May 8. WANG FAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

vetch is also a health drink with benefits in improving sleep and digestion.

Zhang Yanfeng, general manager of Songjiagou Health Food based in Xinzhou city, introduced the sea buckthorn tea of his company.

He said sea buckthorn has rich amounts of vitamin c and antioxidants.

Mu drank a cup of sea buckthorn tea and said she was pleased with the refreshing and sour-sweet taste.

Meng Yi, chairman of Xinsheng Wild Plant Technology based in Daixian county, also brought sea buckthorn tea to the event.

The executive added the drink is good for reducing weight.

Zhang Huaijun, general manager

of Guanlin Agricultural technology based in Pingding county, introduced the forsythia tea.

He noted that the medical herb of forsythia was called by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) emperor Kangxi "longevity herb" as it had been used as gifts to the royal families in history.

Zhang demonstrated how to steep the teas. "You should use water of 80-85 C for steeping green forsythia tea and 90 C for red forsythia tea," he said.

The event was the first livestream for Shanxi's herbal teas, and attracted nearly 120,000 viewers.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Workers pack milkvetch tea at a plant in Hengshan Tea Corp in Hunyuan county. SONG RONGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## County preparing to take ancient trade to next level with expert research

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Yicheng, a county in the south of Shanxi province, is increasing its collaboration with research institutions and leading marketing companies in the province to develop its herbal tea industry.

On May 8, the Yicheng county government signed an agreement with Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine to improve the research and development capabilities of its herbal industry.

On that same day, the government inked deals with Taiyuan-based Huaxia Shangdao Trade Co and the Shanxi Tea Culture Research Institute for the promo-

tion and marketing of local herbal teas.

Wang Yuan, Party secretary of the county, said the two agreements will push Yicheng's herbal tea industry up to a new level as the local players can better share marketing resources and R&D that they used to lack.

According to Liu Feng, mayor of Yicheng, the county is home to more than 370 medical herbs, including more than 200 varieties that grow in the wild.

The county is famous for forsythia, which has the largest output among all medical herbs and is known for its high quality.

However, the county's farmers

mostly collect forsythia from the wild, which has a harvest area of about 3,000 hectares.

Due to a limited capacity in production and sales, annual output of local forsythia ingredients, including seeds, roots, stems and leaves, were only 60,000 metric tons in recent years. The annual revenue from the industry was about 600 million yuan (\$84.53 million), according to Wang.

"As Shanxi plans to develop the herbal tea sector into an economic pillar, I believe there is more growth potential for the industry in our county," the Party chief said.

He added that Shanxi's plan for the sector highlights cross-region

and cross-industry cooperation, which will help the sharing of advantageous resources.

He noted that Yicheng county's collaboration with Shanxi University of Chinese Medicine will offer crucial intelligence and technology support for the local herbal tea industry.

"As we foresee a substantial growth after our newly signed partnership agreements, we are planning to enlarge the capacity in planting and production," Wang said.

He revealed that county plans to develop more than 1,400 hectares of artificial plantations for forsythia.



Workers sort forsythia leaves at a factory in Yicheng before they are made into herbal teas. HU BO / FOR CHINA DAILY