

Day lily crops and vocational training encourage wealth to bloom in Shanxi

Service industry courses and profitable agriculture turning around fortunes of once-impo­verished county of Tianzhen



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Ahead of her journey to Beijing, where she will work as a nanny, Cao Guohua — a resident of Tianzhen county in the northeast of Shanxi province — was interviewed by a group of journalists from China’s major media outlets.

The journalists were in Shanxi between July 15-19, to report on how Shanxi’s poverty alleviation has progressed.

Cao told the reporters that she received an offer from a home service company in Beijing. It promised a monthly salary of 6,000 yuan (\$856) to serve a family there.

“I am from an impoverished family in Sanshilipu village in Tianzhen county. We used to earn about 10,000 yuan a year by farming,” Cao said.

She said a change took place in 2017, after she finished training in home service at a local school.

“I went to Beijing after the training course finished. Since then I have served three employers with annual pay between 50,000 and 60,000 yuan.

“The income helped my family escape poverty immediately,” Cao said.

Cao said she stayed at home in Tianzhen for about half a year due to the outbreak of COVID-19. She received the new offer of work in Beijing after it recently lowered its



Zhao Shuzhong (left), an official in Youyu county, tells journalists about the latest progress in poverty reduction and environmental protection. ZHANG YUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

level of emergency response to the outbreak.

Tianzhen is one of the least-developed counties in Shanxi province. Its farmland and other resources are limited and have been identified as major bottlenecks which hinder local development and residents’ income growth.

To solve the problem, the local government has cooperated with local businesses to establish a number of vocational schools. They offer

training courses for locals to learn professional skills and find jobs in and outside Shanxi.

After conducting research in some of China’s major cities, local officials found home service a promising sector for female laborers from rural areas. Therefore, training for the industry is a main feature in Tianzhen. The development strategy helped lift Tianzhen from its poverty status in February.

In Datong city in northern

Shanxi, the journalists learned that planting the edible herb of day lily is a major source for local farmers to increase their revenue. The city’s Yunzhou district is a key area for growing the herb.

According to Pang Youjun, chief of the agriculture and rural affairs bureau in Yunzhou, the planting area of the herb exceeded 10,000 hectares in the district. There are 109 villages, 95 plantation cooperatives and 15 processing enterpris-

es engaged in the cultivation and production of day lily products. Revenue from the industry reached 700 million yuan last year.

He said the government of Yunzhou has released a series of preferential policies to boost the sector’s growth. These include a subsidy of 15,000 yuan for each hectare of day lily crop; projects for improving the water supply, electricity and road facilities; and incentives in financing, insurance and technical instruction services.

In addition, the government has allocated a fund worth 400 million yuan to support the development of the day lily industry.

Wu Guofu is farmer in Jijiazhuang village in Yunzhou district. He told the reporters that he began to grow day lily three years ago and now has an annual income of more than 10,000 yuan from the output on his 0.13-hectare farm.

“I leased 3 hectares of farmland to a local cooperative for day lily planting and production, which adds another 20,000 yuan to my family revenue,” Wu said.

Li Zhifeng, head of the cooperative, said it currently grows day lily on farmland of about 50 hectares rented from local farmers.

“The harvest of the edible flowers can last more than four months from May to September. We estimate the per-hectare yield can amount to 150,000 yuan,” Li said.

He added that the cooperative benefits nearly 200 households in the village.

“Farmers’ revenues include rental of their land and payment for their work in the cooperative,” Li said.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Unique products attract interest at key trade fair

By YUAN SHENGGAO

During the 21st Qinghai Investment and Trade Fair for Green Development held between July 23-26 in Xining, the capital city of Qinghai province, exhibits from Shanxi were among the most eye-catching.

According to Zhang Baomin, deputy chief of the Shanxi Bureau for Investment Promotion, more than 300 products were displayed at the province’s pavilion.

“The Shanxi pavilion covered about 240 square meters, the largest display area for Shanxi in its 21-year presence at the fair,” Zhang said.

Shanxi’s exhibits included not only its famed produce like mature vinegar and herbal tea, but products from its cutting-edge industries.

These included recombinant human-originated collagen III protein, a crucial product for post-surgery recovery; broadsheet super-thin stainless-steel foil that can be used in the fields of aerospace, electronics and petrochemicals; augmented reality headgear; and bio-based polyamide clothing.

Also on show were videos and photos of Shanxi’s latest development, key industries and business environment.

Zheng Yanfeng, board chairman of the Shanxi-based Songjiagou Healthy Food Co, said it was the first time for Shanxi’s herbal tea products to be exhibited at the show.

The company mainly produces herbal tea with sea buckthorn fruit as an ingredient. Sea buckthorn tea is only one kind of Shanxi’s herbal tea products, which also use a variety of herbs including goji, milk-



A woman representing a vinegar company in Shanxi talks to local buyers during the Qinghai Investment and Trade Fair for Green Development. CAI JINFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

vetch, chrysanthemum and forsythia as main ingredients.

The production of herbal teas in Shanxi province is similar to traditional tea-making in the rest of the country. This includes techniques such as drying, baking and fer-

menting, according to Zheng.

However, unlike traditional teas that use leaves as their ingredients, many parts of herbs — including leaves, fruits and roots — can be used to make herbal teas in Shanxi. Currently, there are nearly 300

invention patents related to herbal tea production.

Authorities in Shanxi expect to develop herbal tea into a local pillar industry and aim to promote the products throughout China and the rest of the world.

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

Shanxi’s entrepreneurs also used the Qinghai Investment and Trade Fair for Green Development as a platform to expand the market presence in Qinghai for established Shanxi food products.

Li Xinyi, general manager of Raotian Agriculture, one of Shanxi’s leading vinegar producers, said his company signed cooperative agreements with several dealers in Qinghai.

“The partners include some supermarket chains in Xining and other cities in Qinghai,” Li said.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Oasis of calm with commanding view draws visitors from afar

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Summer is the best season for Lishan Mountain Scenic Area, in Yuanqu county in the south of Shanxi province, when it welcomes tourists with variety of blossoming flowers.

Pang Yanzhi, a tourist from Jincheng city, sees the mountain a perfect place to escape the summer heat. The temperature there is more than 10 degrees Celsius lower than its surrounding areas.

“This is my third time visiting the mountain. Every time I visit Lishan, I see various sights and get a different experience,” Pang said. She added that she intended to visit the scenic areas again.

Zhao Xuanjie is a high-school graduate who has just finished his *gaokao* — or university entrance — exams. He came to Lishan with his schoolmates to see the sunrise.

“Seeing the sun jumping out from the east, I felt a poetic nature to life. It gave me relief from the worries and anxiety that accompanied me for years in preparing for the exams,” Zhao said.

He added that he loves standing on the Shunwangping mountaintop



Left: Shunwangping in Lishan Mountain Scenic Area is the highest mountaintop grassland in North China. Right: Mihouyuan Valley is the largest wild monkey habitat in North China. PHOTOS BY YAO PUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

grassland to get a panoramic view of faraway mountains, rivers and farmlands.

“You just feel the world is broad and there are unlimited possibilities ahead,” Zhao said.

Covering more than 300 hectares, Shunwangping is the highest mountaintop grassland in North China. Standing at an altitude of 2,358

meters above sea level, it is also the main peak of Lishan Mountain.

Shunwangping is so named because legends have it that it was the place where Emperor Shun, a leader of the Chinese nation some 3,000 years ago, farmed and herded cattle.

The second-highest peak of the area is the 2,143-meter Huanggu-man. Its landscape is in contrast to



Shunwangping as 98 percent of it is forested.

Another major attraction of the area is the 10-square-kilometer Mihouyuan Valley. The valley is said to be the largest wild monkey habitat in North China, with more than 1,000 such animals discovered. Rare amphibians like giant salamanders were also spot-

ted in streams in the valley.

Because of its healthy environment and the excellent air quality as a result of its high forest and grass coverage, the scenic area was listed as a national recreational destination in June by the State’s tourism authorities.

Li Yali contributed to this story.

Facing death with dignity ultimate aim

By ERIC MILLER

I sit by the bed, holding his withered hand while the old man tells stories in a thick accent I partly understand. He talks, I listen.

I have come to China to work with people I cannot save; they are dying. Some are surprised and happy to have a stranger from afar visit them.



For some, treatment might extend their

life for weeks or months, but there is no cure. Medicine can ease pain but the hospice team can help patients face death.

I work with Yangquan You’ai Hospital in Shanxi province. It is a private, not-for-profit hospital founded by a local couple.

My wife, Li Ruoxia, is a native of Shanxi and she set up the hospice care program at the hospital. I have assisted with the program and worked to improve care at the hospital.

When it seems medicine has failed, we do not give up on patients while they live. These final moments are precious.

At first, people said the Chinese would not accept hospice. But later the government declared hospice work necessary and important.

Hospice is a practice around the world. We know how to do the work. Westerners, too, were reluctant to accept hospice care. It is hard to accept that death is inevitable and give up on finding a cure.

I have received a warm welcome in China. Many officials are supportive of our work. Patients and families are grateful. Many family members come back to volunteer with us.

When I see a patient in pain, a family struggling to make the right decisions alone or a doctor pushing for unneeded treatment, I wish the progress would be quicker.

We are working to make hospices work within Chinese culture. The goal is not to replace families in caring for the dying, but to support the families and help them to provide the best care they can, to be children for a dying parent.

We would like to provide home care, but policies do not support that yet. It would save money, be better for many families and fit well with Chinese filial piety.

The Chinese medical system has developed and improved quickly. It is natural that a system should first treat infectious diseases and then provide acute care.

The time has come to advance in other areas, including hospice. Our hospital also works in preventive care. When foreign doctors visit our patients, it is painful for them to see patients who could have received treatment if diagnosed earlier. Lives and money could have been saved with targeted cancer screenings. People are working on this; I hope that progress can be made quickly.

Some wonder why I am in Shanxi doing this work. My wife is from here and some Americans came here and opened the first hospitals more than 100 years ago. But another reason is that the people of Shanxi matter. The people of Yangquan matter. Small places matter, not just the big cities.

Life needs to improve all over China. Big cities have better care and more resources, so we have come to a small place to do what we can to make things a little better for the people here.

It is a privilege for me to be welcomed to Shanxi, to You’ai Hospital, to the homes of people here and to the sides of the sick and dying. I hope that I am worthy of the friendship of the Chinese people.

The writer is a member of the hospice care program at Yangquan You’ai Hospital in Yangquan city.