

Villagers reminisce on profitable year

Environmental and economic improvements bring smiles to local faces



By YUAN SHENGGAO

Sharing stories of the past and expectations for the future are how many Chinese people celebrate New Year.

This is the case in North China's Shanxi province, where locals remain excited about the positive changes that have happened in the past year.

In the village of Macun in Wuxiang county, local residents said they were happy with the improvements in their living environment and livelihoods resulting from the campaign of rural revitalization.

Located in the heart of the Taihang Mountains in the east of Shanxi, Macun is now a beautiful village with new houses, tidy streets, green gardens and parks.

"Things were totally different several years ago," said Wei Guoxiu, a local resident. "Garbage was littered everywhere, the unpaved

roads were muddy on rainy days and dusty on sunny days, and where today's gardens are, were overgrown ditches."

Thanks to an environmental improvement campaign launched several years ago, everything has changed for the better, Wei said. "We now have a better environment with paved and cement roads, cleaner air and water and renovated residences."

Wei Dengwen, Party secretary of the village, said Macun's transformation is not limited to the beautified living environment, but can also be seen in the improvement of people's livelihoods.

He said the village founded a company called Yingma Husbandry with an investment of 1.69 million yuan (\$266,000) to help local residents increase their incomes.

The company is a rural farming cooperative with a 4-hectare farm for raising black-haired goats.

"Before the founding of the company a year ago, there were about 100 such goats in the village," the official said. "And now the number has increased to more than 200, which means an increase of 90,000 yuan in villagers' combined annual income."

Wei Dengwen noted that the improved environment has helped to boost the husbandry industry.

"Our mutton now has a better quality and taste than before as the goats live on cleaner water and increasing varieties of herbs," the official said. "The meat is well sought-after in the market."

He said the village will continue to improve its environment and find more opportunities for revenue growth in the years to come.

Zhang Dongbin, a resident of the village of Huayuan in Yanggao county, said 2021 was the happiest year in his life. His family moved to a home in a new community designed for residents from areas with adverse living environments.

Zhang's five-member family, including three school-age children, used to live in an area with a harsh natural environment.

"We lived on farming on a half-hectare of infertile land," Zhang said. "The yield could hardly support our livelihood, let alone the education of our three children."

Zhang's family was relocated to the new settlement in Huayuan and was offered a three-bedroom house and a greenhouse to grow vegetables, all of which was free.



Villagers in Songjiagou in Kelan county perform a folk dance to entertain tourists. SUN RUISHENG / CHINA DAILY

"With a safe dwelling and a stable source for income, our lives are changing for the better," Zhang said.

He recalled that when he started to operate the greenhouse, he had no experience in vegetable growing. "But I quickly mastered the skills with the help of agronomists assigned by the county government. And in a couple of months, the yield of and the incomes from growing vegetables were beyond my expectations."

The initial success prompted him to rent another five greenhouses to grow a larger variety of vegetables. He estimated that his whole-year net income in 2021 would surpass 60,000 yuan.

"I even hired six workers to help with the farming during the busy seasons," Zhang said. "And their monthly payment was about 2,700 yuan per person."

The farmer added that he recently rented another two greenhouses with heating systems for winter farming.

"I estimate that the output of vegetables in the two greenhouse will surpass 5 metric tons," Zhang said. "And the net income from the yield is expected to surpass the whole-year figure of 2021 considering the price hikes on winter-farmed produce."

Zhang's success has inspired his fellow villagers to follow suit. Two of his neighbors, Li Fuquan and Zhao

Jiang, for instance, have also rented additional greenhouses to grow vegetables.

Zhang, who has rapidly grown into a farming expert, has shared his knowledge and experience with his neighbors on how to grow vegetables better.

Zhang and his wife put paper-cut crafts and spring couplets on the gate and doors to his house in early 2022. "We did this because the festive atmosphere is already here considering the fortune we made in the past year."

Kang Meixiang contributed to this story.

Fruit-producing city hails sweet success

By YUAN SHENGGAO

While satisfying domestic demand, fruits produced in the city of Yuncheng have been exported to overseas markets in recent years, helping the top fruit producer in Shanxi province earn international recognition.

Yuncheng-produced fruits began to vigorously expand in the international market in 2015. Since then, the number of export destinations has increased from 46 to 68 countries and regions and the export volume has grown from 117,000 metric tons to 293,000 tons at present.

According to Ding Xiaoqiang, Party secretary of the city, Yuncheng is one of the important fruit production bases not only in Shanxi but in China. It boasts 116,000 hectares of fruit farms, with an annual output of about 6 million tons in recent years.

"I should tell you the fact that of every 10 apples produced in Shanxi, seven are from Yuncheng," Ding said at the sixth Shanxi (Yuncheng) International Fruits Expo on Oct 15. "The city also accounts for 10 percent of China's output of apples."

Pinglu, a county administered by Yuncheng, is the city's major export base for apples.

"Our company has nearly 7,000 hectares of apple orchards dedicated to exports, with an annual export volume of more than 10,000 tons," said Zhao Hailiang, an executive at local enterprise Jintong Fruit. "Our apples have been exported to more than 10 countries and regions including the United States, the Philippines and Bangladesh."

The executive noted that the company is a rural farming cooperative with local farmers as stakeholders. "So the booming exports of the company have benefited more than 2,700 rural households."

Zhao said export was almost impossible in the past when the farms were operated by individual farmers, who lacked the channels for exports and the ability to improve product quality according to international standards.

"Now with the help of farming cooperatives, farmers have training opportunities to master better skills," Zhao said. "Companies like Jintong can mobilize all their resources to expand in international markets and improve product quality through standardized management and continuous investment in research and development."

The Yuncheng International Fruits Expo attracted the participation of a number of overseas



Foreign business representatives praise the quality of Yuncheng's produce during the Yuncheng International Fruits Expo on Oct 15.

WEI QING / FOR CHINA DAILY

business representatives and foreign diplomats, who praised the quality of Yuncheng's fruits.

Mohamed Chadi Blout, first secretary at the Tunisian embassy in China, attended the expo and had a tour of local apple orchards. He said he was impressed with Yuncheng's practice of using the latest technologies to improve both the quantity and quality of fruits.

"The fruit industry in Yuncheng has reached a very high level in terms of technology and operation," Blout said. "I believe the industry here has a very bright future."

The city of Yuncheng is a leading agricultural production base in Shanxi. With its grain output accounting for more than a half of

the provincial total, Yuncheng has been long known as the "granary of Shanxi".

Building on its strength in agriculture, Yuncheng has made efforts to diversify its farming industry in recent years. It aims to grow the three sectors of wheat (flour), fruits and vegetables into pillar industries.

For this purpose, the city has applied for geographical indications for products in the three sectors and used unified branding strategies to promote such products to both domestic and international markets, according to local officials.

Li Shu contributed to this story.

Vocational skills contest resulting in greater opportunities for workers

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Nearly 2,400 workers are attending the third Shanxi Professional Skills Competition, which started on Dec 20, showing the province's recent achievements in vocational education.

The event, set to last about 100 days, is being held in seven venues across five cities in Shanxi. The contestants will compete in 47 programs in various industries. Winners in 34 programs will be eligible to attend Workskills Shanghai 2022, a global professional skills contest event to be held in Shanghai from Oct 12-17.

This year's Shanxi professional contest event highlights skills relating to emerging industries including network cabling, drone operation and intelligent equipment manufacturing.

Gao Jun, an official at the Shanxi Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security, which is one of the organizers of the contest, said the event has constantly grown in scale since its debut in 2019.



A contestant takes part in the third Shanxi Professional Skills Competition.

WU JIA / FOR CHINA DAILY

"We designed 30 programs in six industrial categories for participants to compete in 2019," Gao said. "And now the numbers have increased to 47 programs in seven categories."

Drone operation is a newly added program at this session of the event.

The contest includes multiple landings on fixed spots, hurdle-circling flying and crossing continuous rings with a diameter of 1 meter, according to Hou Yongfei, secretary-general of the Shanxi Association of Drones.

The official said drones have been widely used in various scenarios in Shanxi in recent years, including firefighting, farming, electricity grid monitoring and emergency rescue. "This means there will be a substantial increase in the number of drone operating workers."

Gao said the event is one of the efforts made by Shanxi's authorities in promoting vocational training as a means to boost industrial and economic development.

The Shanxi provincial government released a five-year plan for vocational training in 2017, aiming to offer training to about 1 million people each year during the period from 2018-22.

Seeing the number of trainees grow every year, the government has lifted its target, planning to train 2 million people in 2021 by investing

about 2 billion yuan (\$315 million) in various training programs.

From January to November 2021, about 2.2 million people had been trained in the province and more than 410,000 trainees had been employed, according to the Shanxi Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security.

At present, there are 5.02 million people holding various skill certificates after training, accounting for 29 percent of Shanxi's total workforce.

Vocational training has helped many people realize their dreams in career development.

Chen Rui, a 27-year-old young man in the city of Changzhi, is one of the beneficiaries of vocational training.

"I used to be a part-time worker in home decoration," Chen said. "My life changed after I attended a training school to learn how to drive excavators."

"Later, I became a teacher at the Changzhi Huasen Vocational School after I won the first prize at the 2019 Shanxi Professional Skills Competition."

Recognized as an outstanding professional by the government, Chen said he has also been granted a subsidy of 10,000 yuan a year since 2019.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Industrial campaign in Shanxi creating new drivers for growth

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A smart power plant operated by Shanxi's coal-mining and power giant Jinneng Holding Group was put into operation in December 2021, marking an important milestone for the company to contribute to the province's economic transformation.

Over the past several years, the North China province of Shanxi has implemented an economic transformation campaign that reduces reliance on coal mining and other heavy industries, upgrades traditional industries with high technologies and fosters emerging industries as new drivers for economic growth.

The new smart power plant of Tashan Power Generation, a subsidiary of Jinneng Holding, is a perfect representation of how local businesses are using cutting-edge technologies to upgrade their traditional industries.

At the power plant, a robot is used for in-plant inspections, monitoring the operations of a variety of equipment and taking a record of all the data.

"This is one of the most advanced patrolling robots in the country," said Li Qinghua, an executive of Jinneng Holding. "One such robot can take the place of two to three human inspectors and features an even higher efficiency and accuracy."

Other cutting-edge technologies that the power plant is equipped with include big data, cloud computing, the internet of things, artificial intelligence and 5G communications, according to Li.

"The application of such technologies has greatly improved the operational efficiency at our plant," Li said. "And for a power plant, improved efficiency means conservation of resources and reduction of emissions."

He took the automatically con-

trolled boiler as an example, saying that it has combustion efficiency 0.5 percent higher than the conventional ones.

"People might think 0.5 percent is an insignificant figure," Li said. "However, such a slight rise in efficiency can lead to a saving of 6 million yuan (\$946,000) worth of coal a year. And we're continuing our efforts to improve efficiency."

While using high technologies to upgrade traditional industries, Shanxi is developing 14 emerging industries as new growth engines.

General aviation is one such industry. It has recently developed into a complete industry chain ranging from manufacturing to flight services.

Standing upstream of the industrial chain are aircraft manufacturers like Datong Light Aircraft. Founded in 2017, the company was Shanxi's first to be granted a license by the Civil Aviation Administration of China to manufacture aircraft.

With an annual production capacity of 400 light aircraft, Datong Light Aircraft secured orders of more than 100 units last year, according to Shen Dinglong, board chairman of Sino-German Light Aircraft, the parent of Datong Light Aircraft.

The latest development in the sector is a helicopter development and manufacturing project established in Taiyuan on Jan 1.

With a total investment of 2.01 billion yuan, the project is scheduled to be operational in 2024, with a production capacity of 1,200 helicopters a year.

According to Shanxi's plan for the industry, the scale of the province's general aviation sector is expected to reach 10 billion yuan by 2025. And the figure is projected to reach 50 billion yuan by 2035.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Engineers assemble a plane at Datong Light Aircraft's plant.

WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY