

CHINA

'Earrings' help to foil cattle rustlers

Tagging animals and stepping up police operations are preventing thefts in one rural community

By **YANG JUN** in Guiyang and **ZHAO YIMENG** in Beijing

Farmer Wang Mingfu noticed his ox was missing when he woke on a chilly October morning in his village in Pu'an county, Guizhou province.

Wang and the animal live close together in the farm compound, and checking its enclosure is part of his morning routine. Worth 10,000 yuan (\$1,422), the animal is a prized farm asset.

However, Wang had taken precautions against the ox's theft by having a microchip embedded in its ears, which allows the "earring" to be tracked via satellite. He called the police who, with the help of a mobile tracking device, located the animal in woodland about 5 kilometers from Wang's home.

In Pu'an county, at least 17 cases of cattle theft since January have triggered panic among farmers. Police achieved some success in stopping the thefts, recovering 32 stolen animals since August.

The government of Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, where Pu'an is located, recently stepped up efforts to stop the cattle rustling by issuing "peace cards" to impoverished households and farmers who live close to livestock. The cards provide a hotline number to police who promise to deal quickly with cattle thefts. It also explains to farmers how to apply for subsidies if their case is not solved within 30 days.

Wang Zhixian, an officer at Qingshan police station in Pu'an, said inserting the chips into the cattle population was time-consuming, but worth the effort.

"The process is slow because farmers are dispersed across a wide area. Police officers have to organize a group of villagers to gather the cattle and help them insert the earrings in all of them," he said.

Wang Zhixian said farmers get the card and the chip, which is worth 80 yuan, for free.

"It was the public security bureau of the prefecture that sponsored the project initially.



A farmer shows his ox with a microchip "earring" to a police officer in Pu'an county, Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture in Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

1,109 oxen

have microchips embedded in their ears in Pu'an county.

The county government also gave financial support to help solve the problem," he said.

A total of 10,666 households have 23,048 livestock in Pu'an. Of those, 4,471 households with 8,368 livestock are living in poverty, according to a report released by Pu'an.

Chen Kairong, a 70-year-old farmer in Hama village, bought two

cattle with government subsidies for impoverished farmers, which produced two calves.

"I used to lock my cattle in the compound and get up five or six times at night to check if they had been stolen," he said.

Chen said that after getting the card, he and his wife had stopped living so close to the oxen.

"We are no longer worried about losing the cattle. Now we keep them outside the compound. Thieves are also aware of the police's firm action against theft, which scares them away," Chen said.

Chen Zhongyue, a 52-year-old farmer in the same village, spent a lot of time taking care of his two oxen and a horse. After getting the card, he installed a camera to monitor his livestock, which freed him up for other farmwork.

"We have benefited a lot from the card. I am no longer in fear of losing our livestock, and I've borrowed 50,000 yuan to buy three more oxen," he said.

Liu Wenxin, Party secretary of the prefecture, said he asked the government to implement the card program in five pilot townships and villages in late August after gather-

ing information on livestock theft from police stations.

In September, the program was promoted across the county.

By the end of October, the county government, which spent 20 million yuan on the program, had handed out 5,712 cards and helped embed chips in 1,109 oxen.

A total of 407 tracking stations were also built, covering 94 percent of the county.

Wang Jin contributed to this story.

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Frozen saline water may improve barren soil

BELJING — Chinese researchers have discovered that saline land may be reclaimed by freezing saline water over the soil in winter. In addition, they found that the desalination depth of saline ice meltwater in saline-alkali soil was greater than that of salt-free ice, according to a recent study published in the European Journal of Soil Science.

China has about 100 million hectares of saline-alkali land that lacks adequate freshwater resources. This type of land restricts agricultural production and plant growth. Scientists have been trying to figure out how to turn barren, salty soil into arable land.

Researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Center for Agricultural Resources Research, Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology evaluated infiltration and soil desalination after saline ice melted into saline soil. They found that saline ice meltwater went deeper into the saline soil than fresh ice meltwater.

Previously, the researchers developed a saltwater irrigation method to improve cotton yields in saline soils, based on the separation of saline and freshwater by melting saline ice. They used salty water with a concentration of less than 15 grams per liter to irrigate the saline-alkali land in winter. The saline water was frozen on the top of the soil. When spring came, the saline ice melted and gradually infiltrated into the saline soil.

The continuous infiltration of the meltwater with higher salinity was followed by meltwater with lower salinity. The following rainwater washed the soil salt further, allowing the crop roots to avoid the influence of the salt.

A great desalination effect was observed in coastal saline soil with soil salt content reduced to less than 0.3 percent during the entire season, and the cotton yield reaching 200 kilogram per 667 square meters.

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From left: Rouhieh Tabibzadegan poses with students she volunteers to teach in Kunming, Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Tabibzadegan talks with a Chinese teacher. DUAN ZIYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

'Canadian mom' teaches virtue of volunteer work

By **LI YINGQING** in Kunming and **ZOU SHUO** in Beijing

Rouhieh Tabibzadegan is known as "Canadian mom" among her students at Yunnan University of Finance and Economics.

Having taught English at the university in Kunming, Yunnan province, for 14 years, Tabibzadegan is single and views China as her husband and the students as her children. "I came to China to serve," she said. "I did not come here to have fun. I receive fun from what I see and what I learn," she said. "To serve means to sacrifice, and my sacrifice is my marriage. Because I have no child, I view all my students as my children. They call me 'Canadian mom' and I have to live up to their trust."

Apart from teaching, Tabibzadegan has organized three English corners at the university to help students practice their spoken English. She has also arranged speaking and singing contests in English.

"I think of myself as a candle which is burning, but gives its life away drop by drop. I can serve, I can give, and I don't want to waste my time," she said.

One of her work colleagues, Pan Dongxue, said: "I am impressed



I did not come here (China) to have fun. I receive fun from what I see and what I learn."

Rouhieh Tabibzadegan, Canadian teacher at Yunnan University of Finance and Economics

with her dedication to work. She is always energetic and passionate."

Besides working at the university, Tabibzadegan also does volunteer teaching at 24 primary schools for children of migrant workers in Kunming and nearby villages.

Many of the schools cannot afford to hire foreign teachers and the students cannot afford tutoring classes, she said.

After learning about Tabibzadegan's volunteer work, the university rescheduled her classes for Monday, Tuesday and Friday so she can meet her other teaching obligations on Wednesday, Thursday and the weekend.

"For me they are very special," she



said. "Being away from home, they have to move around constantly. They have to change schools constantly, and it's difficult to make friends and to get used to classes. I want to do something to improve their English level and change their lives."

Tabibzadegan contacted most of the primary schools herself. She usually goes to a new school and tells the principal, with a combination of her poor Chinese and hand gestures, that she wants to teach the students English for free.

She said even though many come from poor circumstances, they are all very smart and happy. "They are enthusiastic and I love encouraging them. Every time I go to a school, the students give me warm hugs."

Tabibzadegan has also encouraged her university students to do volunteer teaching. With the support of university administrators, about 500 students have taught at the primary schools.

Many of them want to become teachers, and volunteering is a good way to gain experience, Tabibzadegan said.

"For me, coming to China was a great gift and I want to make the best efforts to contribute to the country," she said. "I want to become the 'friendship ambassador' of Canada in China and contribute to the friendship of the two countries."

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Hearing-impaired baristas enjoy their daily perks

GUANGZHOU — Pouring a fine layer of foam into a cup of espresso, Lan Liping deftly "drew" a tulip on top of the latte.

The scene at a Starbucks outlet in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, is no different from other coffee shops, except for the fact that this shop is staffed with hearing-impaired baristas like Lan.

Born in Fujian province, Lan sustained permanent partial hearing loss at the age of 5 after a fever.

Two years ago, while working at an advertising company, Lan came across coffee making and immediately fell in love with it. He decided to make coffee his new career.

However, due to his hearing impairment Lan encountered more difficulties than he had expected while learning to make coffee, and later in his daily work.

"Baristas need to talk face-to-face with customers and understand their demands, which requires me to read their lips," Lan said.

"Even with a hearing aid, many times I couldn't immediately respond to customers and sometimes even misunderstood what they wanted," he said, adding that luckily most of the customers were understanding.

After painstaking practice, Lan can now handle all kinds of situations at work by himself, and makes about 100 coffees every day. When it comes to latte art, he has mastered complicated patterns such as a tulip or a swan.

His co-workers also lend a helping hand. At the cafe where Lan works, 16 staff members with normal hearing and skilled at sign language work side by side with 12 hearing-impaired baristas.

The Starbucks outlet, the first one in the Chinese mainland with hearing-impaired baristas, also allows people to order by writing on pads or using paper menus.

In addition, all the drinks and snacks are numbered to facilitate

easy ordering, and customers can also write down their specific needs.

Lan also serves as an ambassador for coffee culture, trying to give coffee tips to his customers. He has gradually built up a fan base.

"Hand drip coffees made by different baristas taste quite different," he said. "Regular customers always ask me to make coffee for them, which makes me very happy."

In making coffee with a creative flourish, Lan is also meeting his artistic impulses.

"Creating latte art bears many similarities with design, which was my former career, as they both require a high degree of creativity," he said.

Being a barista has also made Lan more confident and optimistic about the future.

In a national vocational skills competition for people with disabilities held last month, Lan took part in the coffee-making competition with 23 other contestants and finished sixth. "I believe that in the future, more people with disabilities like me can find things they have a deep love for," he said.

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A barista with a hearing impairment (second from left) shares his experience with his colleagues using sign language at a Starbucks outlet in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. DENG HUA / XINHUA