



FARMERS GROW WAY TO PROSPERITY

Government efforts to raise the living standards of poor people have focused on using modern agricultural techniques to kick-start China's vast rural economies

“The approach is enlightening, which I have never seen anywhere else and Guizhou's experience is worth learning around the world.”

Jim Yong Kim, former president of the World Bank Group

6.43
million

people in Guizhou province were lifted out of poverty from 2012 to 2017

By CHEN HONG
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An agricultural revolution is pulling millions of people out of poverty in Southwest China's Guizhou province.

Long Jiayi, 33, is a beneficiary of the government campaign that encourages farmers to grow cash crops on the land they cultivated with traditional crops for generations.

Two years ago, with the support of the village's governing body, his family started to grow sphagnum, a kind of natural moss with a high economic value. It can be used in potted plants to replace the soil.

“We planted 11 mu (0.73 hectares) of sphagnum and can harvest nearly 3,000 kilograms in total, which can be sold for roughly 60,000 yuan (\$8,961) a year,” Long said.

Just a decade ago, his family grew corn and rice in their 0.27 hectares of land, which made just 3,000 yuan annually.

“My village is in the mountainous area and we have limited land. We had no choice at that time but to grow the crops, or let the land lie. Young people went outside to find jobs,” Long recalled.

However, Zilinshan village, where Long lives, was suitable for sphagnum. This is due to the cool and humid weather, said Qu Jia, an officer with the National Forestry and Grassland Administration who led the poverty-relief mission there in August 2017.

“It's an ideal place for the growth of moss. The villagers just need to sow

seeds, guarantee the water supply and sometimes weed. The mosses can grow very well,” said Qu, adding that the villagers now have time to take temporary jobs in the town for extra money.

He also invited experts from the administration and universities to guide the farmers and raised funds to improve planting and processing skills and equipment.

Statistics show that 266.7 hectares of sphagnum was planted at Zilinshan village as of the beginning of 2019. It could make 12 million yuan a year, up 12.5 percent from a year ago.

Nearly 500 families, or 80 percent of village households, joined the program, which can earn them each more than 20,000 yuan annually. Some 307 people in 78 families in the village got out of poverty in 2018.

Over the years, Guizhou has been trying to lift people out of poverty by agricultural revolution, relocation and road building, as well as assistance and subsidies in education, medical care and housing.

“Our efforts aim to write a miraculous chapter in China's poverty-relief history and to provide a case study for the rest of the world,” said Sun Zhigang, Party secretary of Guizhou.

The province's poor population was cut from 9.23 million in 2012 to 2.8 million in 2017. It was the biggest reduction in the country during that period, according to official figures.

Li Jian, deputy secretary-general of Guizhou provincial Party committee, director of the Poverty Alleviation and Development Office of



A farmer dries sphagnum in the sun. Dried sphagnum will be sold in the flower market. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Guizhou province and a deputy to the National People's Congress, said: “Our aim is to ease all the people and counties out of poverty by 2020. To solve regional poverty, basic principles include increasing their income, access to housing and clothing, as well as access to education and medical resources.”

Sun reiterated the importance of the agricultural revolution, which will change the rural industry's structure and help farmers out of poverty.

Meng Pinghong, a researcher at the Guizhou Academy of Agricultural Sciences and a deputy to the National People's Congress, said Guizhou has little flat land.

“To make good use of agricultural resources, we have to change the traditional farming system, adjust planting structures and adopt multiple



A farmer dries sphagnum in the sun. Dried sphagnum will be sold in the flower market. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

crops — to increase farmers' income by improving efficiency and economic benefits of the land.”

The government will help farmers to choose the right sector — vegetables, tea, poultry, fungi, herbs and other economic crops — to replace traditional corn and rice, and help them acquire techniques, funds, management and marketing skills.

Another program is to relocate people from areas unsuitable for living. Villages with fewer than 50 households and 50 percent of its population in poverty are moved to new government-built residential areas.

The government designs the residential areas to keep cultural characteristics and develop a local economy so residents have job opportunities.

Official figures show that about 500,000 relocated people were

employed or started their own business — on average 1.78 persons in every household — in 2018.

Started in 2016, it is expected that a total of 1.88 million people will be relocated by the end of June 2019, according to the government.

Hu Guozhen, vice-governor of the Qiongnan Miao and Dong autonomous prefecture and a member of the standing committee of the 12th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said relocation of families is an important method in poverty alleviation.

However, the limited time and various difficulties make it a challenge. It's important to help them live and work after relocation, Hu said.

“To guarantee their livelihood, industries should be developed and a long-term mechanism should be taken into consideration.”

Sun said that 2019 is a critical year to beat poverty.

He noted that more resources will be allocated to the most impoverished villages to fulfill the target this year.

Jim Yong Kim, former president of the World Bank Group, spoke highly of Guizhou's mode of developing the e-commerce to promote production and expand local markets in rural areas.

“The approach is enlightening, which I have never seen anywhere else and Guizhou's experience is worth learning around the world,” he said.

Li Hanyu contributed to this story.



Local women remove stems and impurities from fresh tea. XIAO YUYE / FOR CHINA DAILY



‘King of tea’ enriches rural workers

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Guizhou province has the largest area of tea gardens in China, making it a key production center for tea. Through tea planting, processing and selling, the income of local people has seen a significant increase, as part of Guizhou's efforts to relieve poverty.

A dark tea, produced from 1,000-year-old trees in Guizhou, amazed experts from around the world at the 12th International Premium Tea Competition held in Denmark last year. The tea, from Yanhe Qian Nian Gu Cha, won the title “the king of tea” at the event.

The leaves, found in the mountains of Guizhou, were rubbed one by one before fermentation and exposed to sunlight and shade several times. Only this way can the dark tea get its special aroma and taste, according to Xiao Shimei, founder of the company.

Xiao is known as the “mother of ancient tea” among locals. Last year, the company produced 300 kilograms of dark tea. It is expected to reach 4,000 kg annually by 2020.

Guizhou is a major production center for tea with its high altitude, little sunshine and little pollution, which is good for the growth of the trees.

Xiao started her business at the age of 40. At the time, her father was ill, so she studied medical books.

“Many books said drinking tea is good for health; that's when I began to grow an interest in it, fell for it and made it a business,” she said.

In the first year, the company pro-

duced 28.5 kg of tea, but only 5 kg were sold. The next year, 240 kg of tea were in stock till autumn.

To find the reason, Xiao brought about 10 bags of dark tea to the Guizhou Tea Research Institute.

Lei Ruiyong, an expert at the institute, said the tea was precious, but the shape and aroma not so attractive due to poor processing.

To promote sales, Xiao decided to build a processing factory. However, few shareholders agreed to invest more and some withdrew their shares due to poor business performance before.

“I tried to borrow money from about 10 friends or relatives. Some said they didn't have the money and some urged me to give up,” said Xiao.

Finally, a nephew helped Xiao using his demolition compensation of 100,000 yuan (\$14,876). With the money, her kingdom of tea gradually took shape.

The company now has 80 hectares of tea gardens and more than 20,000 tea trees. She researched the tea market, invited technical advisers and sent employees to learn production methods in Chongqing and Sichuan.

The tea won the golden award at the 10th International Tea Award in 2014. The products can be found in many cities, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

Her business brought jobs to 1,003 families, including 522 poor people.

Yanhe Tujia autonomous county, where the company is located, has more than 50,000 ancient tea trees and 22 tea gardens. In 2007, the

362,000
metric tons

production volume of tea in Guizhou province in 2018

8,641
yuan

annual income of tea farmers in Guizhou

county promoted industrial structure transformation to help local farmers out of poverty, and tea was the key industry.

He Zhigang, head of the county, said the area of tea production grew from 900 hectares to 15,800 hectares. It has 78 tea companies, 42 cooperatives and four provincial-level enterprises. Production has reached 9,800 metric tons with output of 1 billion yuan every year. The industry employs 65,800 people from 156 villages, helping to increase the annual income of tea farmers to 8,500 yuan per capita.

By 2018, tea became a pillar industry for 43 counties in Guizhou, employing 498,500 poor people. The annual income of tea farmers reached 8,641 yuan per capita on average.

Guizhou has 501,333 hectares of tea gardens, ranked largest in the country for six consecutive years. Zunyi, Tongren and Qiannan Buoyei

and Miao autonomous prefecture of Guizhou are key production areas for Chinese green tea. The number of tea processing enterprises and cooperatives reached 5,000. In 2018, the total production volume of tea was 362,000 tons, with output value reaching 39.4 billion yuan.

Zhou Shaojun, director of the Datun village committee in Shiqian county and a deputy to the National People's Congress, is involved in the tea industry. For years, he and other villagers have built a modern ecological tea park, based on a mountain. Production reached 670 square meters per family per year on average.

Now the tea is a major brand of Shiqian county. The tea won nationwide fame and is one of the top three teas in Guizhou.

“The poverty alleviation policy has brought more opportunities. We aim to make the tea industry bigger and stronger,” Zhou said.

The tea industry will become key to promoting ecological development, poverty-relief and rural revitalization in Guizhou, with an improved scale, quality and business profit, according to a recent document from the local government.

Better policies will guide capital, technologies and human resources to the tea industry, it said.

Yu Liufen, Party chief of Yanbo village in Panzhou city and a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said industrial development laid the basis for poverty alleviation.

“Every village is different, suited for specific industries. Industry brings jobs and makes poverty relief move at a stable pace,” she said.

In January, Shen Yiqin, governor of Guizhou province, said in the government work report that the province will cultivate 10 agricultural industries with an area of 66,667 hectares each. It will promote the upgrading of tea gardens and build national-level tea garden centers.

Wang Qing, head of the China Tea Marketing Association, said the tea industry in Guizhou is entering a new era. The industry can bring wealth to people and benefit the environment.

Che Weiwei contributed to this story.

Poverty alleviation efforts bear fruit in Guizhou town

By SONG MENGXING
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The Xinxing community in Guizhou province is home to several new dwellings for people who have moved here from impoverished areas. Among them is 36-year-old Zhu Fumin.

Zhu was a local villager and due to the poor living environment, her family could not live on their earnings from agriculture. She had to find a job in a distant region.

Her husband had a severe stomach illness and her mother had mental health problem. Zhu's 16-year-old son had been living in a relative's home, which made it easier for him to go to school.

But life has been looking up since June, when Zhu's family was allocated an 80-square-meter new house in the Xinxing community.

“I had worked in Shanghai for 11 years to support the family and went back home after knowing we were allocated a house,” Zhu said, adding they had lived in a dilapidated wooden house and never imagined they could own a new house in the county.

With the help of the community, she found a packaging job in a local biotechnology company. Her commute to work is less than 20 minutes, via an electric bicycle.

“My basic salary is more than 2,000 yuan (\$299) and I also have overtime wage,” Zhu said. “I speak Putonghua (the standard Mandarin) well and may be promoted to packaging team leader.” Her husband



A worker picks edible mushrooms at a local factory. ZHAO YANDI / CHINA DAILY

band, meanwhile, found a security guard job with a monthly salary of 2,400 yuan and her mother made several friends in the community.

The community is located in Daozhen Gelaio and Miao autonomous county, a poor region in Guizhou and near Chongqing. In 2016, the county began to help about 15,000 impoverished farmers in 14 villages and counties to move.

Zhu's family is representative of the successful poverty alleviation campaign in Guizhou. The province plans to move 1.88 million people during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20).

Luo Yinghe, Party chief of the Xinmin community in Huihui county and a deputy to the National People's Congress, is one of the relocated people in Guizhou. He said the policy brought wealth and happiness to many families.

The county of Daozhen rebuilt and expanded three schools for relocation sites and arrangements have been made so all the 1,800-plus school-age children can study in nearby schools.

Plans are in the works to build nine industrial parks for poverty alleviation, mainly planting edible mushrooms and vegetables. The parks will help more than 1,100 relocated households to work in the neighborhood. Two of the parks have begun construction and the other seven will start construction in the near future.

Daozhen also organized several job fairs and offered skill training. By the end of 2018, 6,854 people had found a stable job.

Sun Zhigang, Party chief of Guizhou, said at a work conference in late February that the current work is changing from relocation to settlement. The efforts should bring real wealth to those people in a stable and sustainable way, he said.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.