

Shanxi seeking more support for its green energy transformation

Province hopes to share experience, expertise and benefits of coal-bed methane production with a range of companies across the country



By YUAN SHENGGAO

During the annual two sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, delegates and deputies from North China's Shanxi province proposed to include key provincial development initiatives into national plans. They aim to boost provincial socioeconomic development and share some of its best practices with the nation.

The two sessions of the NPC and CPPCC National Committee are held on March 4-11. Their agendas include hearing and reviewing work reports delivered by national government, legislative, judicial and procuratorate bodies; and hearing proposals and suggestions from delegates and deputies.

One of the proposals put forward by Shanxi asks for more national authorities' support for its economic transformation and energy revolution programs, and including its pilot coal-bed methane development program into the national plan.

Shanxi is implementing an economic transformation initiative that aims to reduce reliance on coal mining and other heavy industries. It plans to foster strategic emerging industries as new growth engines, as well as an initiative for an energy revolution that features developing cleaner energy resources like wind, solar and coal-bed methane and improving the efficiency of coal mining.

As coal-bed methane development is an important link in Shanxi's economic transformation and energy revolution, the province's NPC deputies and CPPCC National Committee members suggested a pilot coal-bed program in the Shanxi city of Jincheng be included into the National Energy Administration's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for Coal-Mining Industrial Development.

Coal-bed methane is a form of natural gas. Its thermal value is one to four times higher than coal of the same weight. Almost no exhaust gases are produced after coal-bed methane combustion, according to industry insiders.

However, coal-bed methane presents a danger inside coal mines. It can explode if the concentration of the gas reaches 5-16 percent.

The gas can naturally emit from mines and reach the surface. If it enters the atmosphere, its green-

house effect is 20 times more than that of carbon dioxide.

Safe extraction of the gas can help avoid coal-mine accidents by reducing its concentration. The extracted coal-bed methane can then be used as a clean energy resource, according to industry insiders.

Shanxi is one of the provinces in China with rich coal-bed methane resources and is a pioneer for the safe use of the gas. The city of Jincheng in the southeast of Shanxi is among those to use safe extraction to produce and apply coal-bed methane as fuel for power plants and households.

Dong Lin, an NPC deputy and a technician from Jincheng-based Du'erping Coal Mine, a subsidiary of Shanxi Coking Coal Group, said the city is now designated by Shanxi's authorities as a demonstration base for coal-bed methane development thanks to its growing industrial scale, research and development capability and a range of applications.

"Jincheng has one of the richest reserves of coal-bed methane in China," Dong said. "It is also in the forefront of the nation in terms of industrial basis, R&D strength, human resources and applications."

The NPC deputy said if Jincheng's pilot coal-bed methane base program can be included into



Delegates and deputies from Shanxi province review the Government Work Report during the two sessions in Beijing. LI LIANJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

a national energy industry plan, its experience in this area will be better shared nationwide.

"In Jincheng, coal-bed methane exploration goes along with the intelligent operation of coal mines and mining upgrades for better environmental protection," Dong said. "So its practice in this sector is of great significance to boosting production safety and efficiency, as well as improving the environment."

Other proposals from Shanxi's delegations include listing its latest city cluster development program into a national plan.

The deputies and delegates suggested the fledgling Taiyuan-Xinzhou integration program gain support from national authorities to an extent similar with the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone. Located between the provincial capital of Taiyuan and the city of

Jinzhou to its south, the transformation zone was recognized by the State Council in December 2020 as China's first national pilot zone for industrial transformation.

Li Zhiqiang, an NPC deputy from Shanxi, said: "The integration of Taiyuan and Xinzhou can foster a 'northern engine' for Shanxi's growth, just like what the Shanxi Transformation and Comprehensive Reform Demonstration Zone has done over the past decade.

"The three cities of Taiyuan, Xinzhou and Jinzhong can form a larger city cluster, which can drive development of a larger area of neighboring cities with their own industrial strengths and advantages."

Li added that the cities' integration program will not only exert its influence on the province, but become a new part of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei integration pro-

gram by hosting industries from the three regions.

According to Lin Wu, Party secretary of Shanxi and head of the Shanxi NPC delegation, the Taiyuan-Xinzhou integration program aims to foster a modern industrial system for Shanxi by using both cities' advantages in advanced equipment manufacturing.

While asking national authorities' support, deputies and delegates from Shanxi also promised their own endeavors to promote the province's high-quality growth and contribute to the nation's sustainable development.

Lin said Shanxi will continue its efforts in balancing economic growth and environmental protection, building itself into a demonstration zone for ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River drainage basin.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.

Poverty alleviation takes next revitalization step

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After Shanxi announced its elimination of absolute poverty in 2021, officials and residents in the vast rural areas in the province have used multiple measures to consolidate their poverty-relief achievements and boost rural revitalization over the past years.

One example is Songmiao village in the county of Lingchuan, which is using a companies-plus-households operational model to drive its rural tourism business and help residents increase income.

When recalling the lives of locals six years ago, Su Qiufa, Party secretary of the village, said 78 of its 137 households were on the poverty list in 2016.

"There were neither industries nor business and job opportunities in the village," Su said, "People had to work outside to support their families."

The change took place in 2020, with the establishment of a rural tourism industrial chain that includes rural sightseeing, recrea-

tion, catering and accommodation with investment from an agricultural investment company in the county.

A range of tourism facilities, including lodges, paths for cycling and walking and roads to connect the village and its neighboring areas, were completed in August 2020, marking the beginning of Songmiao's tourism industry.

The industry is operated by a village cooperative, which has all the households as its stakeholders. "That offered a steady stream of revenue to all the families, allowing the village to be delisted from poverty in the same year," Su said.

In addition to the cooperative, the rural official said villagers are also encouraged to start and operate their own tourism-related businesses.

Wang Wenqing, who had been working outside Songmiao for more than two decades, returned to his home village in 2020 and established his own bed-and-breakfast business in the same year, with a low-interest loan from a local bank.



The village of Songmiao is now one of the renowned rural tourism destinations in Lingchuan county. WANG JIANJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

To Wang's delight, he earned a net income of more than 100,000 yuan (\$15,830) after only half a year's operation.

The county of Fangshan has adopted a similar approach to helping rural residents get rich. The local cattle farming industry has got a strong boost with agricultural companies teaming up with farmers to expand and modernize operations.

Local companies have set up a number of farming cooperatives in rural Fangshan, offering farmers technical support while purchasing cattle from them.

Gao Jianqiang, a resident in the village of Zhoujiagou, said his family earned more than 200,000 yuan in net income by selling cattle to a local cooperative over the past two decades.

There are multiple solutions offered by various regions in Shanxi for rural revitalization, including the nanny training industry in Lyuliang and day lily farming in Datong, as well as the burgeoning e-commerce operations throughout the province.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Innovation answer to baijiu brand's longevity

By YUAN SHENGGAO

When startup businesses are longing to sustain their development to become time-honored brands, those old companies should resort to constant innovation to keep them young and vigorous.

This is the consensus of the executives at Xinghuacun Fenjiu, a renowned white liquor producer based in the city of Fenyang in Shanxi province. And they agreed innovation is the secret behind its sustained growth over the centuries.

When talking about the past of the white liquor, or *baijiu*, producer, Yuan Qingmao, board chairman of Xinghuacun Fenjiu, said its glorious and long history is the pride and strength of the company.

The executive said the brand has a proven history of more than 800 years, with its old distilling mill established in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) viewed by many as the source of Shanxi's *baijiu* industry.

But the history of alcoholic beverage production there is much longer. Archaeologists found an ancient alcoholic beverage production site at the location of Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group. Unearthed production utensils revealed that the site has a history of about 6,000 years.

The first reference of the brand name of Fenjiu was made by an emperor during the Northern Qi Dynasty (550-577), according to a history book. And the first reference of Xinghuacun was made by

Tang Dynasty poet Du Mu who said in his poem that he wanted to drown his dismay during the Tomb Sweeping Day with cups of liquor produced in Xinghuacun, or apricot flower village.

Over the centuries, Yuan said Xinghuacun Fenjiu has maintained its glory up to the modern era based on its constant innovations.

The company won a gold medal during the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, the United States, according to Yuan, who added that it has since expanded to the international market.

The company was the first *baijiu* producer in China to release a set of food safety standards in 2015 according to international markets' requirements.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu launched its Silk Road edition in Hong Kong in June 2019. It is tailored to not only Hong Kong but also overseas markets.

Its recent globalization moves also include opening outlets and offices in the US, Singapore, Thailand and Germany, as well as hosting customer experience events in dozens of countries and regions.

On Jan 25, the company released its estimated performance report for 2021, which said its net profit attributable to shareholders would be between 5.23 billion yuan (\$828 million) and 5.54 billion yuan, growing 70-80 percent from 2020.

Li Shu contributed to this story.



A huge advert of Fenjiu is prominent in Times Square in New York during Spring Festival. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tree planting and river revamp paying dividends

By YUAN SHENGGAO

With a vision of "green mountains and clear waters meaning mountains of gold and silver", Shanxi province announced remarkable achievements in balanced environmental and economic development last year.

Statistics show that Shanxi added 34,700 hectares of forests and tackled 38,400 hectares of water-eroded land in 2021.

The Shanxi Bureau of Forest and Grassland said with growing efforts in greening Shanxi, the province's forests and grasslands generated a total revenue of 56 billion yuan (\$8.86 billion) last year, translating into a steady increase of income for the farmers involved.

In Shanxi, the revenue from the forestry industry is not mainly from logging, but from carbon trading and the forest-related tourism industry.

Carbon trading is the buying and selling of credits that permit a company or other entity to emit a certain amount of carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases.

In China, carbon trading was



Yuncheng is one of the cities in Shanxi benefiting from greening and water environment improvement efforts in recent years. WANG PEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

made possible with the operation of the China Carbon Emission Trade Exchange in July 2021.

In addition, a total of 96 recreational tourism destinations have been opened in Shanxi's various forest farms.

The greening effort complemented soil erosion-control initiatives in Shanxi. When more trees and grasses

were planted, a number of engineering measures had been implemented to prevent soil from being washed away by water.

In the drainage basin of the Fenhe River, the second-longest in Shanxi, nearly 200 kilometers of sections were improved last year with 18 erosion-control and ecological-restoration projects. The improvements led

to a substantial decrease of silt content in the water and a steady increase of river runoff volume.

The river's improvement was augmented by controlling discharges of industrial waste and the construction of more sewage treatment facilities. The Shanxi Ecology and Environment Department's statistics show that more than 71.3 percent of Shanxi's surface water reached the nation's excellent or good quality standards last year.

To raise local government's sense of responsibility in environmental protection, Shanxi started appointing chiefs for each river several years ago.

A river chief is usually the head of the local government according to each section of the river. It can be the head of a township, county, city or provincial government. Shanxi's waterways are now taken care of by 17,675 river chiefs.

In addition, Shanxi's forests are looked after by nearly 18,000 forest chiefs.

Han Linfang contributed to this story.