

Improvements on way across many socioeconomic fronts



'Spirit' of Government Work Report to be rolled out in Shanxi

By YUAN SHENGGAO

After attending the annual sessions of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which were held in Beijing from March 4-11, deputies and delegates from Shanxi province are harnessing the spirit of the two sessions to guide their work on various socioeconomic fronts.

Most of the deputies and delegates returned to their home province on March 12.

Zhang Hongxiang, an NPC deputy from the Shanxi county of Youyu, said the Government Work Report's proposal on agriculture and rural affairs is the most inspiring for him.

Zhang operates an intelligent animal husbandry business in Youyu.

He said that boosting agricultural production and promoting all-around rural revitalization remain the highlights of this year's Government Work Report.

"The report requires the redoubling of efforts to develop and apply scientific and technological breakthroughs in agriculture, and to upgrade agricultural machinery and equipment," Zhang said. "This is exactly what we are doing on our farms and we will continue our efforts in this field."

Zhang, who had worked outside Youyu for many years, returned to his home village of Zhangqianhuling in 2012. He founded his animal husbandry business in the same year, focusing on raising sheep.

"Sheep farming is a traditional industry in Youyu," Zhang said. "In my childhood memories, almost every household in the village herded sheep, but people couldn't make much money from that back then."

Zhang, who is now the village chief of Zhangqianhuling, said he later realized the lack of modern farming technologies and management models was the major bottleneck hindering the industry's development.

"We are now equipping our local farmers with modern technologies and new operating ideas."



Sheep graze on a pasture in the county of Youyu in Shanxi province. WANG PEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhang said that his own business has brought almost the entire industrial chain all under one roof, from growing grass, raising sheep, butchery, sales and catering. He added that such modes of operation have created considerable added value for farmers.

"One of our modern, organic farms in the village, which covers about 1,200 hectares, has an annual output of 20,000 sheep and can generate 100 million yuan (\$15.67 million) a year in revenue," Zhang said.

Zhang's solutions for modernizing local farms include a digital-controlled irrigation system for pastures, satellite positioning devices for sheep, science-based nutritional feed, automated meat processing and sales through e-commerce.

The company he operates is an agricultural cooperative in nature, involving the participation of more than 1,000 households.

Wang Yue, 71, said he and his wife have worked for the company for about eight years. Their annual net income is about 60,000 yuan per person.

According to Zhang, the average income of families in the village of Zhangqianhuling has increased by four or five times over the years since the company's establishment.

Zhang has ambitious plans for the future, which include expanding his farmland to nearly 15,000 hectares, building a massive spray irrigation system, greening the land in the neighborhood, building solar farms and developing a sightseeing and recreational tourism destination.

Zhang's views on modernizing the

local agricultural industry are in tune with those of Hao Xu, another NPC deputy.

Board chairman of Landun Xumei Food, based in Taiyuan, Hao said farming modernization and expanding the industrial chain are crucial solutions for agricultural development and rural revitalization.

Landun Xumei is engaged in the potato industry. Its extensive industrial chain ranges from seedling cultivation, plantation, processing and logistics to sales and marketing.

According to Hao, one of the company's recent moves has been to tap into the deep processing of potatoes.

"We are developing medicines, skin care and health products by extracting multiple and high-purity ingredients from potatoes," Hao said.

Xu Xiaohong, another NPC deputy from Shanxi, is the president of Shanxi Normal University.

As a deputy from the education sector, she is promoting educational equity and the improvement of the quality of education.

"The Government Work Report promises to improve the fairness and quality of education, and promotes high-quality, well-balanced development and the urban-rural integration of compulsory education," Xu said.

The deputy said Shanxi Normal University is expected to play a role in these regards by providing more assistance to students from rural and low-income families, and mobilizing all possible resources to build

the school into one of the first-class normal universities in China.

In addition to NPC deputies and CPPCC National Committee members, residents and officials in Shanxi have shown keen interest in the Government Work Report.

Guo Jianping, an official at Shanxi Agricultural University, said his school can play a role in promoting rural revitalization.

"We are making and will continue to make contributions to rural revitalization by training farmers in modern skills and offering technological support for agricultural development," Guo said.

Li Xin, an executive at Changzhi Power Generation, a subsidiary of Shanxi's coal-mining and energy giant Jinneng Holding Group, said he feels encouraged by the Government Work Report's proposal on the core competitiveness of manufacturing and the digital economy.

"The report promises to advance the digitalization of industries, and build smart cities and digital villages," Li said. "We are proud that our company and our parent company Jinneng Holding are among those in Shanxi promoting 5G-connected and intelligent operations."

Tashan Coal Mine, another subsidiary of Jinneng Holding Group, was one of the earliest mining companies in Shanxi to develop smart mining. The company's operations, ranging from coal cutting to conveying, are now fully automated with the help of various digital devices, according to company executives.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.

Rural commerce gets digital tech upgrade

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The internet and digital technologies are bringing fundamental changes to the agricultural industry and lives in rural Shanxi, said a resident in the county of Pingshun in the southeast of the province.

Wang Yani, who is in her 20s, used to be a teacher in a vocational school in Shanxi. She returned to her home village of Nanpo in Pingshun county several years ago to run an online store selling farm produce. One of her methods of promoting goods is by livestreaming outdoors in the fields.

Along with the rapid growth of her online business, Wang later founded a farming cooperative. Incorporating more than 120 households across five villages as stakeholders, the cooperative has contributed to boosting local development, according to officials of the villages.

Fang Liang and Liu Jing, a married couple in the village of Shenlongwan in Pingshun county, have been in online operations even longer than Wang. They began e-commerce sales and livestreaming eight years ago.

"We had more than 5,000 views a day during the harvest seasons," Fang said. "Through livestreaming, our produce has been sold to many regions in the country."

Located at the heart of the Taihang Mountains, Pingshun used to be a landlocked county with poor connectivity — in terms of transport and communications — with the outside world.

As roads and telecoms to the county improved in recent years, local officials decided to use

e-commerce to boost rural development. In 2019, the county began to hire e-commerce experts to train its farmers.

In that year, more than 3,500 residents took part in various training courses. As a result, the number of online stores increased from about 30 to nearly 400. Online sales amounted to 80 million yuan (\$12.58 million).

According to Liu Linsong, head of the county government, Pingshun is now one of the pilot counties of rural e-commerce development in China. He added that Pingshun's online sales volume of farm produce reached 276 million yuan in 2021.

Farmers' livestreams have also made Pingshun's natural attractions better known to tourists and have promoted rural tourism.

Shenlongwan village, for instance, is an enticing locale with rising cliffs, deep valleys and dense forests, according to Zhang Pu, a local official.

"As the scenic views have been frequently used as the backdrop of livestreaming shows, Shenlongwan has attracted the attention of mountaineers and sightseers," the official said. "We have welcomed growing numbers of visitors over the past several years."

Pingshun county is only one example of Shanxi's booming development in rural e-commerce.

According to the Shanxi Rural Revitalization Bureau, a total of 59 counties in Shanxi had launched demonstration programs for rural e-commerce by the end of 2021.

Guo Yanjie contributed to this story.



Rural workers stage a livestreaming show on a farm in Shanxi province. SUN RONGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Fortunes of Datong's flower industry bloom

By YUAN SHENGGAO

A sending-off ceremony was held for the very first overseas shipment of fresh daylily flowers from the county of Tianzhen in the northern Shanxi city of Datong to Canada in late February.

A total of 3.73 metric tons of daylilies were sent to Canada, and officials hope that trading overseas will become more commonplace for daylily growers located in and around the city of Datong — a historical hub of the daylily industry.

Daylilies, which are also known as yellow flowers or golden needle vegetables in China, are a popular food ingredient nationally. It is also sought after in Chinese communities in regions like North America and Europe.

Datong has a history of growing daylilies that dates back 600 years. It is among the top four production bases for the herb in China. According to the Datong government, the city's planting area of the crop now accounts for about one-fourth of the country's total.

The daylily products from the city are renowned for their quality, thanks to local farmers' experience and the unique soil, sunlight and irrigation conditions.

Yunzhou district is the most important daylily industry base in Datong. It has an extended daylily-related industrial chain that covers

plantation, processing, logistics, sales and farming-themed sightseeing.

In recent years, the local daylily industry has expanded substantially due to authorities' efforts to drive modernization, promote branding and increase planting areas.

Local statistics show that the total planting area of daylilies in Datong reached nearly 18,000 hectares last year, and had an annual output of 141,000 tons. In comparison, the growing area was only about 1,000 hectares in 2010.

The entire industrial chain, ranging from farming and processing to sales, generated a total revenue of 3.03 billion yuan (\$476.3 million) in 2021, ranking first in China.

The city has 175 companies in the daylily industry. The companies have developed more than 100 product varieties from daylily flowers, including food ingredients, beverages, health food and cosmetics.

Local officials predicted that total annual revenue of the city's daylily industrial chain is expected to reach 10 billion yuan by 2025. To help to realize this target, a modern, national-level daylily industrial park is under construction to attract enterprises in farming, processing, research and development, sales and logistics.

Han Linfang contributed to this story.



Tourists pose for a picture on a daylily farm in Yunzhou district in Datong. WANG ZHONGXUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Dancing into spring

A resident of Taiyuan, Shanxi's provincial capital, performs a dragon dance in Xuefu Park, with blooming forsythia flowers in the foreground. In Shanxi, forsythias are among the first plants to bloom and mark the coming spring tourism season when people like to go out to enjoy and relax in nature. Forsythia is a cash crop. Its flowers, stems and roots can be used to make medicines and healthy beverages. In spring, farms and mountain slopes covered in the bright yellow flowers are a favorite among tourists.

WANG RUIRUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Solar terms first mapped out 4,000 years ago

By YUAN SHENGGAO

At the opening ceremony of the Beijing 2022 Olympic Winter Games, a countdown featuring 24 solar terms drew the attention of the global audience and gave a glimpse of the ancient Chinese almanac science.

The establishment of 24 solar terms is believed to be an outstanding contribution to the world made by ancient Chinese almanac scientists. The system, used by Chinese people in both ancient and modern times to guide farming activities, was recognized as an intangible cultural heritage item by UNESCO in 2016.

An archaeological excavation in

2003 pointed to the theory that the village of Taosi in the Shanxi county of Xiangfen might be the source of the 24 solar terms and the Chinese astronomical and almanac sciences.

An archaeological discovery in the village of Taosi proved that the system was in place some 4,000 years ago.

Excavation of the Taosi site started in the 1950s and the process has continued to this day.

One of the most important discoveries were 13 columns of compressed earth found in 2003.

The function of the columns was unknown to archaeologists at first. After years of watching the columns' projection under the sun, researchers realized this was an

ancient observatory. The columns were used to measure sunbeam angles and determine the 24 solar terms of a year, according to researchers working with the site.

There were other breakthroughs in the study of the remains, which made researchers think that the site might be the capital of the nation governed by the legendary emperors of Yao and Shun more than 3,000 years ago.

One milestone discovery were pottery relics with pictographs including the character of Yao. Archaeologists believe this was an ancient writing system more than 500 years older than the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC) oracles written on bones and

turtle shells, which were discovered in Anyang city, Henan province.

There was also a set of musical instruments discovered at the site. Among these, a bronze bell was identified as being made 4,000 years ago. It is said to be the earliest musical instrument found in China.

Excavation of the site is still underway. Gao Jiangtao, head of the archaeological team, said excavations to date had covered less than 1 percent of the site.

In October 2021, the Taosi site was included on the list of "China's major archaeological discoveries in a century".

Peng Ke'er contributed to this story.