

Modernization drive boosts development of farming across Shanxi

Improvements in agricultural technologies and techniques to ensure sector's overall growth highlighted by government research projects



By YUAN SHENGGAO

As an old Chinese proverb goes, "one year's plan lies in spring". With this in mind, farmers and rural officials in North China's Shanxi province are busy preparing for this year's farming activities.

Sun Jingmin, head of the Shanxi Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said this year's farming plan will focus on agricultural modernization, including the use of farming machines and new techniques for improving operational efficiency.

Sun made the remarks at a work conference for Shanxi's spring farming operations on Feb 6.

"We are requiring agricultural officials at various levels to make field surveys on the conditions of farms and the status of existing farming machines to ensure smooth farming

operations," the official said.

In the county of Ruicheng, officials deem that preparing for an anticipated drought, improving soil moisture and nutrition, and preventing crop diseases resulting from drought and pests are crucial for this year's harvest.

Li Fengchao, an official at the Ruicheng agriculture and rural affairs bureau, said: "Drought is commonly seen in spring in Shanxi where there is less precipitation than in other seasons, and this year is no exception."

He added that drought can result in the loss of moisture and nutrition in soil, as well as the rampant growth of pests.

"We are dispatching agricultural technicians to crop fields in order to study the soil conditions, the growth of pests and to offer guidance for preventing potential risks," Li said.

The official said that one solution his bureau offers to farmers is the simultaneous irrigation and fertilizing technique.

"Our researchers find that irrigation and fertilizing are not techniques where the method of 'the

more the better' can be applied," Li said. "So we have developed the simultaneous irrigation and fertilizing technique to use the right proportion and amount of water and fertilizers to ensure a better soil condition and a better environment for crops' growth."

The county of Ruicheng currently has more than 32,700 hectares of winter-sowed wheat. "We are glad to see that the crops are in good condition," Li said.

The official said there are a total of 190 large crop-care machines in place to ensure the crop's better growth.

In addition, the county's 230-plus farming supplies outlets have set aside 14,135 metric tons of fertilizers, 120 tons of pesticides and 343 tons of crop seeds for this year's farming activities.

The official added that the county's farming modernization drive is also supported by 3,200-plus farming machines, including 1,200 large and medium-sized tractors and more than 1,800 plowing and sowing machines.

Machine-aided farming is now popular throughout rural Shanxi.



Tractors spray water and fertilizers on one of the wheat farms in the county of Ruicheng.

YAN XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

In the village of Dongping in Datong city's Yunzhou district, farmer Ma Yuchang got up early on the morning of Feb 2 to test his tractor that has been sitting idle for about two months.

"Despite the fact that it has been in 'hibernation' for two months, it is still in good condition because of our constant care," Ma said.

Ma's plan for this year is to grow cash crops like daylily and chilli, as well as coarse cereals.

Wang Meizhen, Party secretary of Dongping, said the village is planning to develop itself into a base for daylily, chilli and cereals.

Daylily is a popular food ingredient nationwide and Datong is a major production base of the crop nationally with a planting history of hundreds of years.

Datong is also a major grain producer in Shanxi. It plans to grow 335,600 hectares of crops this year, including 281,300 hectares of grains.

To ensure a bumper harvest, Datong's agricultural authorities are offering comprehensive services to farmers, including developing a smooth supply channel of farming machines and materials, holding training sessions for farmers on how to use the machines and master new techniques, as well as granting subsidies to farmers for buying farming machines.

Mechanized farming is also popular in the city of Linfen. The city is now home to nearly 55,000 farming tractors and 111,700 other modern farming tools. Local mechanics are busy taking care of the machines to make sure that most of them can be used for farming in the coming spring, according to officials at the city's agricultural and rural affairs bureau.

Pingshun, a county in the south-east of Shanxi, is a traditional producer of hairy asiabell, a medical herb. Despite its large planting area and

good quality, the industry still suffers from low efficiency due to the lack of adequate farming machines.

But local officials are now trying to solve this problem.

On Feb 2-3, a delegation of Pingshun's agricultural officials and technicians paid a visit to a farming machine manufacturer in Shangqiu, a city in neighboring Henan province.

"We were informed that this company is producing and supplying farming machines for medical herbs like hairy asiabell," said Shen Lifang, a Pingshun official. "The company's demonstration of the machine shows that it can improve efficiency by five to eight times."

The delegation signed a letter of intention with the company and the machines are expected to be used in Pingshun in the near future, according to Shen.

Wang Xiujuan contributed to this story.

Characteristic industry helps township thrive

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Amid a morning snow on Feb 9, Han Xueyao, Party secretary of the Xinghua Economic and Technological Development Zone in the Shanxi city of Fenyang, paid a visit to Yuan Qingmao, board chairman of Xinghua Fenjiu Group, to discuss a project to develop Xinghua township. The project in Xinghua, where the zone and company are located, aims to build the township into a characteristic town for the white liquor industry.

In January, Han and Yuan had met almost every day.

Building towns with characteristic industries is a new strategy in Shanxi, which aims to develop new carriers for accelerating industrial growth. In September, the province announced its first batch of 10 provincial-level characteristic towns and Xinghua was on the list.

The township of Xinghua, as well as the city of Fenyang, has a history of about 6,000 years in producing alcoholic beverages. This is according to an archaeological discovery made

at the premises of today's Xinghua Fenjiu Group.

One of the remarkable findings was a waving spindle-shaped bottle with a distinctive feature of Yangshao Culture, an ancient civilization between 5,000 and 7,000 years ago. Researchers believe this is the earliest alcoholic beverage-making utensil found in China.

The long history and the quality of local produce have made Xinghua a renowned white liquor — or *baijiu* — town in China.

After Xinghua was given the status of a characteristic town, the city of Fenyang immediately released a three-year plan for the town's development, aiming for it to become an industrial cluster with an annual output value of more than 50 billion yuan (\$7.26 billion) in the future.

Xinghua Economic and Technological Development Zone will be a major part of the characteristic town. It is already an industrial base for sectors such as liquor production, packaging, storage, logistics, marketing and liquor-related cultural tourism.

Han said that over the past few



The township of Xinghua is an important hub for white liquor production and related cultural tourism in Shanxi province.

YAN ZHONGXING / FOR CHINA DAILY

months, the development zone has witnessed an investment boom by attracting 63 new projects.

Among the projects, the international white liquor transaction center became operational. Several others are in trial operation.

Yuan said Xinghua Fenjiu, as one of the renowned white liquor producers in China, will play a leading role in the town's development. He promised that the group will help to cultivate an extended industrial chain that can benefit more businesses.

Lan Fo'an, secretary of the Shanxi Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China, paid a visit to Xinghua township on Jan 30. During his trip, he required the

characteristic town to grow stronger through high-standard planning, high-quality development, extending its industrial chain and more support from the local government.

The city of Fenyang is home to four famous white liquor brands in China — Fenjiu, Zhuyeqing, Xinghua and Fenjiuwang.

In 2022, the city's white liquor output reached 177,000 liters, accounting for four-fifths of Shanxi's total and one-fifth of national total. The industry's combined revenue reached 20.15 billion yuan (\$2.92 billion) that year.

Yan Zhongxing contributed to this story.

Pedestrian streets pick up pace of recovery

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Nine pedestrian streets in Shanxi's seven cities, the major hubs of the province's shopping and dining industries, reported rapid increases in visitor numbers and business revenue during the Spring Festival holiday, showing a strong recovery from the economic slowdown that arose from the three-year COVID-19 pandemic.

Statistics from the Shanxi Department of Commerce show that the streets received 744 million visits during the period spanning from Spring Festival on Jan 22 to Lantern Festival on Feb 5. Their combined business revenue was 520 million yuan (\$75.45 million). Both figures have reached the levels of the same period in 2019.

Many industry insiders in Shanxi, especially those in the retail, catering, automobile sales and household appliances sales sectors, said the recovery began even before the end of 2022, when the government announced optimized measures in pandemic control and prevention. And the local government's supportive measures for business resumption contributed to the recovery.

The insiders' feeling corresponds to figures released by various governmental institutions in Shanxi.

In the automobile sales industry, for instance, the Shanxi Department of Commerce said it granted a subsidy worth 649 million yuan for the sales of vehicles in 2022, which resulted in total sales revenue of 16.06 billion yuan. As the majority of the subsidy went to the sale of new energy vehicles, the sector reported a combined sales revenue of 9.94 billion yuan for 2022, increasing 96.7 percent year-on-year.

For the entire retail industry, with a focus on automobiles,

household appliances and home decorations, the government issued digital consumption coupons worth 2.51 billion yuan, which led to total sales revenue of 26.84 billion yuan.

Other measures taken by the government to stimulate the consumer market in the past year also included fostering the nighttime economy, promoting e-commerce and cultivating and strengthening renowned local brands.

The selection of nine pedestrian streets was part of Shanxi's efforts in developing the nighttime economy. To date, there are a total of 18 locales for the nighttime economy in Shanxi.

The catering industry has also benefited from a provincial branding campaign. In the past year, the provincial authorities released a list of Shanxi's top 10 dishes, top 10 noodle varieties and top 50 snacks, aiming to help increase recognition of Shanxi's catering brands throughout the country.

The government has encouraged local retail businesses to use various e-commerce platforms to expand their sales channels. Now the majority of Shanxi's supermarkets have operated online shopping apps, making door-to-door delivery possible.

When talking about the consumer markets in 2023, officials at the provincial department of commerce said that there is still room for further growth.

"To make this possible, we will highlight the initiatives from the supply side," said an official at the department. "We are encouraging businesses to create new consumption scenarios, improving the consumer experience and cultivating new models of consumption."

Yan Jie contributed to this story.

Investment boom follows Spring Festival holiday

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Shanxi is seeing an investment boom in the wake of Spring Festival, showing that investors have increasing confidence in the province.

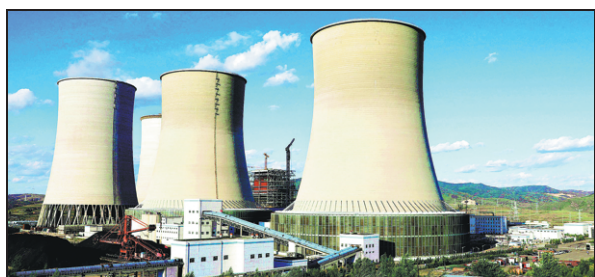
The city of Jinzhong, for instance, held an investment promotional fair on Feb 3. A total of 15 large projects were signed at the event, with pledged investment totaling 34.68 billion yuan (\$5.03 billion).

These projects include a 1.8-billion-yuan intelligent technologies park in the Jinzhong Development Zone, a 1.65-billion yuan graphite material project in Pingyao county and a 3-billion-yuan complex for wind-solar power generation and electricity storage in Xiyang county.

The largest of all is a steel processing industrial park in Jiexiu. An executive in charge of the project said that this will be an environmentally friendly facility that aims for "zero-carbon" steel production.

Officials responsible for Jinzhong's investment promotion said that almost all of the projects are related to the strategic emerging industries in Jinzhong. They added that the projects will play a crucial role in driving the city's high-quality development.

Investor representatives said the reason why they're selecting Jinzhong as the destination for their projects is that the resilience of the local economy and improving business environ-



A part of the Pinglu Economic and Technological Development Zone in Shuozhou city. REN YONGLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ment provide them with confidence.

Shanxi Aotai Sciences and Industries is an investor that signed up for a smart coal-mining equipment manufacturing project in Jinzhong.

"In our contacts with local businesspeople and government officials, we were impressed with their sense of responsibility and inclusiveness," said the company's board chairman Li Qianbao. "And the city's solid industrial foundation can help us easily identify a supply chain."

Jinzhong has seen steady growth in its industrial strength in recent years, with its GDP surpassing the 210-billion-yuan mark in 2022. It has developed into a provincial leader in emerging industries like new energy vehicles, methanol fuel production and advanced manufacturing.

Thanks to standardized services, streamlined business approval procedures and full-process assistance offered by local government officials, Jinzhong has ranked at the forefront of Shanxi for business environment over the past few years.

In Shanxi, the success stories of many local businesses have proven to be a draw to investors from elsewhere.

Hongsheng Kewei Mining Materials based in Jincheng city, for instance, secured its first order of the new lunar year on Jan 28.

"This is an order for mining shaft supporting materials, worth about 7 million yuan," said Liu Panpan, an executive of the company.

To fulfill this order and the new ones to follow, Liu said her company

is gearing up to full capacity. She added that the growing number of orders showed that the company's operations have fully resumed after the three-year COVID-19 pandemic, and she is more optimistic about the company's future growth potential.

Even amid the pandemic in 2022, China Coal Pingshuo Energy and Chemical, a company based in the Pinglu Economic and Technological Development Zone in Shuozhou city, didn't see a halt in its expansion.

"Our company realized a sales revenue of 1.95 billion yuan and a profit of 610 million yuan in 2022," said Ao Yadong, an executive in charge of the company's production management. "Both figures set records in our history."

He said the company's growth was mainly driven by synthetic ammonia made from lower-quality coal.

"Low-quality coal usually sells at low prices," Ao said. "Turning it into ammonia now can generate an added value of 600 yuan per metric ton."

Based on businesses' predictions, authorities of the Pinglu zone projected that its total industrial added value might grow 15 percent year-on-year in 2023. They also expected a 30 percent increase in investment.

Ren Yongliang and Bai Jihong contributed to this story.



Bell Tower Street, one of the pedestrian streets in Taiyuan city, is crowded with visitors during the Spring Festival holiday.

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