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## Food: Domestic market seizes new opportunities

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Antonios Vassatis, the company's general manager, who is Greek, said: "In the past few years, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on demand for Dolma internationally, and our orders have fluctuated. Europe has become a new market, which has given us fresh business opportunities."

"Many Chinese consumers are not used to the taste of grape leaves, but Greeks have been enjoying them for hundreds of years. They are a typical pre-meal snack for residents in the Middle East, where they are regarded as a staple food in some countries. The rice our company uses is non-genetically modified, and we have our own professional cooperatives and planting areas."

Last year, China exported 3.13 million metric tons of canned food, a 12 percent rise year-on-year. The value of such exports in the nation reached \$6.89 billion, up by 22 percent on the figure for 2021, with both the export volume and value hitting record highs in recent years, the China Canned Food Industry Association said.

The association added that last year, canned food exports to the United States rose by 19 percent year-on-year, to Russia by 23 percent, and to Hong Kong by 63 percent.

Vassatis said that to better satisfy preferences in different countries and regions, the company has broadened the range of flavors it offers. In addition to Dolma, which tastes of tomatoes, lemons and pomegranates, it introduced flavors such as pepper and parsley.

The company also improved the design of its packaging — introducing a new wrapper that makes it easier to recognize the brand, and which has helped the company boost its reputation abroad and increase its market share.

In 2011, the head of Heze Palexpo found there were abundant grape leaves in the western part of China, and had the idea of building a factory to manufacture Dolma. Vassatis then traveled to the country to choose a site and set up the new business.

The company has received orders from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Greece and other European countries. Its annual export value exceeds \$11 million, while the number of its employees has grown to more than 400.

Heze Palexpo has also obtained certification to produce vegetarian, halal and kosher food. A comprehensive quality control system has enabled the company to gain strong market competitiveness in global trade.

With growing demand for canned food overseas, enterprises in China have expanded their production capacity, and the export categories and total export volumes for such food are expected to continue rising.

Early last month, 18 tons of canned apples were shipped to Japan from Yantai, Shandong. The cans were produced by Yantai Shenglong Food Co. In the first quarter, the company exported 629 tons of canned fruit, more than double the volume compared with the same period last year.

Guo Yijia, the company's trade manager, said: "This year, we have seen booming sales and growing overseas orders for our canned apples and pears in syrup. Canned food is convenient to eat, has a long quality guarantee period, and is relatively cheap. We are continuing to develop new products, markets and customers, and have expanded our overseas market share."



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Guo Yijia, trade manager of Yantai Shenglong Food Co in Yantai, Shandong province, which exported 629 metric tons of canned fruit in the first quarter of this year



Top: Canned oranges are produced at a factory in Zigui, Hubei province. WANG GANG / XINHUA Above: Workers make canned meat at a factory in Suining, Sichuan province. ZHONG MIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: Dolma, a type of canned food, is produced at Heze Palexpo Food Co in Heze, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY Right: A customer inspects a jar of peaches at a supermarket in Jilin, Jilin province. SHI HONGYU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Most Chinese consumers consider the shelf life of canned food to be relatively long, but that such food contains a large amount of preservatives, which could be harmful to health. As

a result, they feel that eating fresh food is a healthier option.

Unlike the Chinese market, canned food is a typical choice for many consumers in Europe and the US.

Although there is low enthusiasm for such food among consumers in China, the domestic canned food industry has established a solid foundation and has developed rapidly.

In the 1950s, China exported canned food for the first time, starting with a small volume of fruit. Later, the export varieties and quantity increased gradually each year.

Contact the writers at [zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Shandong clothing company thrives on orders from the Middle East

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing and ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan

Employees at a clothing company in Juye county, Heze, Shandong province, have been busy making Arabic pants, with the business receiving its fourth such order this year valued at more than 10 million yuan (\$1.45 million) from customers in the Middle East.

In the first quarter, Heze Zijin Clothing Co exported more than 260,000 items of clothing, a year-on-year rise of 30 percent. Based on demand, its number of orders this year is expected to surpass expectations, the company said.

Chen Li, deputy general manager, said: "The steady growth in our

orders is partly due to the combined impact of a series of export policies in China, such as optimized tax refunds. By making our deliveries on time, we have also won the trust of many overseas customers."

Originally established as a poverty alleviation workshop, the company has provided jobs for more than 3,000 workers in the region, with an average monthly salary of more than 4,500 yuan. Every day, these workers make some 35,000 woven pants, with all the products exported to the Middle East.

One of those to benefit from the company's success is Wang Zhenzhen, who used to be a farmer earning an income mainly from traditional crop planting. Since the



Workers make clothing for customers in the Middle East at a company in Juye county, Heze. ZANG DONGMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

clothing company was established near her home, she has become a sewing machine operator.

After two years of learning and training, Wang became a group leader, with a monthly income of more than 6,000 yuan.

"Many women in my village start working at the factory after a short period of training. The work provides opportunities for us to make more money, and the flexible hours enable us to take care of the elderly and children," Wang said.

The company, founded in 2018, and other 11 clothing companies in the county mainly produce *abaya* (full-length garments worn by some Muslim women), woven pants and underwear.

Their products are exported to more than 20 countries and regions, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Jordan.

The companies' business has not been affected greatly by fluctuations in the international market, or the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has built a long-term stable strategic partnership with customers in the Middle East.

Their clothing exports account for 65 percent to 70 percent of the market share in the Middle East, where the company enjoys a stable leading market share in Saudi Arabia.

Contact the writers at [zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn)