

Shanxi's grain production hits a record high

Officials dispatch more than 14,000 agronomists across province during wheat growing season to apply scientific methods



By YUAN SHENGGAO

The North China province of Shanxi registered a record output of grains produced in 2023, showing a continued trend of stabilization in agriculture.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Dec 11 showed that Shanxi's total grain output reached 14.78 million metric tons and its per-hectare yield hit 4.68 tons. Both figures are records in the province.

Shanxi produced 14.5 million tons and 14 million tons of grains in 2022 and 2021 respectively. But local officials said this year's growing output is a hard-won achievement considering the adverse weather conditions.

An agricultural official in Shanxi said that rains fell throughout April and May, posing a serious threat to the growth, harvest and storage of wheat. In July, heavy rains caused by Typhoon Doksuri flooded many farmlands in Shanxi and washed away some newly planted crops.

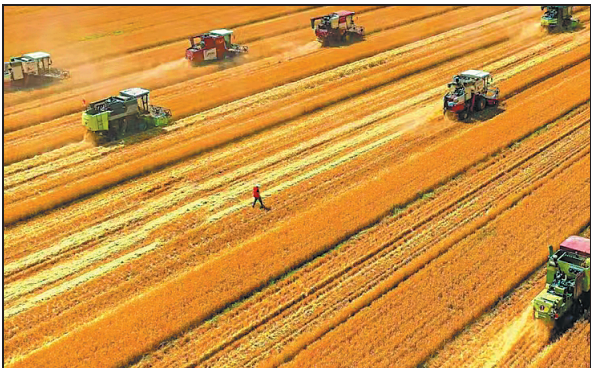
"Despite all these unfavorable conditions, we still have a better-than-expected harvest for this year," the official said. "It was the good policies, technological advancements and better government services that ensured the growth in output."

The official said the government's favorable policies for farming this year include subsidies for farmland soil improvement, farming machine fuels and fertilizers. There are also government-funded insurances for staple crops such as wheat, corn, potato and soybean.

According to the requirements of the central government, Shanxi planned to develop 123,000 hectares of high-standard farmlands for this year. Under this move, farmers could receive a subsidy of 34,500 yuan (\$4,837) for developing one hectare of high-standard farmland.

By Dec 8, Shanxi province had more than 140,000 hectares modified into high-standard farmlands, surpassing its annual target.

To date, Shanxi has a total of 1.65



Clockwise from top: Sorghum is harvested on a farm in Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A combine harvester empties corn into a vehicle in Xijia township, Xiangfen county. CHAI XINMING / FOR CHINA DAILY The mass use of modern farming machines has boosted the efficiency of wheat harvesting in early summer in Shanxi. CHAI XINMING / FOR CHINA DAILY



million hectares of high-standard farmlands, which feature high-efficiency, water-conserving irrigation and improved soil conditions.

Along with farmland improvement, Shanxi has used advanced technologies and modernized operations to improve farming efficiency, output and quality.

Local agronomists are contributing their efforts to cultivating advantageous crop varieties, which are conducive to better yield and quality.

According to the Shanxi Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the province currently has 40 breeding and demonstration bases for new crop varieties. These bases have promoted more than 2,400 new, advantageous crop varieties to farmers throughout Shanxi. As a result, about 97 percent of the crops grown in Shanxi fall into the advantageous crop variety categories.

In addition, crop scientists in Shanxi have devoted their energy to

field research and technical services, helping farmers grasp new skills for modern operations.

Gao Zhiqiang, a researcher from Shanxi Agricultural University, for instance, has led a team of agronomists from his university to offer technological services to farmers in the county of Yicheng.

During the summer wheat harvest season this year, a farm in Yicheng's Dongguan village — which his team took care of — reported a per-hectare yield of 12.39

tons, breaking the record for wheat farming in Shanxi province.

Gao said the team's bid to improve output is based on data analysis. The scientist said the most effective way to increase output and improve quality is the proper use of water and fertilizers. This can be calculated according to the conditions of the farm, such as soil moisture and the level of nutrition in soil, as well as light and heat exposure.

Dongguan village's record was achieved after wheat growth was

affected by such adverse weather conditions as lower temperatures during sowing and continuous rains during the grouting period.

"This shows that a scientific approach to farming can help offset the negative influence of natural uncertainties by working out remedies against such disasters as flood, drought and cold weather," Gao said.

According to Wang Yuanrong, an official at the Shanxi Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, the province dispatched more than 14,000 agronomists to the countryside during this year's wheat growing season, offering technical services to farmers.

The use of modern farming machines is also crucial in ensuring stable farming operations. This was especially true for wheat farming this year, which has featured challenging weather.

The biggest challenge wheat farmers faced was continuous rain during the harvesting season, according to Wang.

"During that critical period for harvesting, weather and efficiency were crucial," Wang said.

He explained that the province became rainy in late May, a time when wheat turns mature and is ready for harvest.

Due to the weather, greater efficiency is needed during harvesting to prevent the grains from going moldy or germinating.

The official said the extensive use of farming machines has played a crucial role in improving efficiency and stabilizing output.

According to Wang, Shanxi has mobilized more than 15,000 combine harvesters and 60,000 tractors for harvesting wheat, with a mechanized harvesting ratio reaching 99.4 percent.

When recalling the summer harvest, Li Guoqiang, a manager of a farming machine cooperative in Yanhu district in the city of Yuncheng, said that it was the extensive use of machines that helped farmers to win "the race against time."

"Our cooperative put all the 27 combine harvesters into operation," Li said. "Those machines worked at an amazing efficiency — completing the harvest of more than 200 hectares on a daily basis."

Wang Xiujuan contributed to this story.



Workers package sea buckthorn beverages at a company in Kelan county. ZHAO WENJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Specialty produce raises incomes of rural workers

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Farmers in the northwestern Shanxi county of Kelan have enjoyed steady growth in revenue thanks to a transition from traditional farming to cultivating specialty produce.

According to Cui Yueping, head of the Kelan bureau of agriculture and rural affairs, the per capita net income of Kelan's farmers was 8,820 yuan (\$1,236), 9,746 yuan and 10,457 yuan in 2020, 2021 and 2022, representing an increase of 9.9 percent, 10.5 percent and 7.3 percent.

He said that such growth momentum is a result of farming cashmere goat, kidney beans, morel mushrooms and sea buckthorn.

Kelan used to be a traditional agricultural economy with a focus on conventional crops such as wheat and corn. However, the county's hilly topography and scarce precipitation are not favorable for such crops. As a result, the county's authorities have been trying to convert the farming economy for a long time.

After much research and trials, they finally decided to cultivate farming operations based on four key types of produce in 2020, which proved to be the right choice for local

farmers in the years to follow, according to Cui.

Lyuxiangyuan Ecological Agriculture is a company in Kelan engaged in the processing and sales of kidney bean products.

Lyu Jie, general manager of the company, said canned kidney bean products are popular in markets like Beijing and Shanghai.

"This is because of its rich content of protein and amino acids, which are helpful for the growth of children," the executive said.

Cui said that Kelan now has more than 6,600 hectares of land dedicated to kidney bean farming. The total sales volume of kidney bean products now reaches 15,000 metric tons a year, accounting for roughly one-third of the nation's total.

Ma Xiping is an official of Guanzhuang village in Kelan. He said a family in the village can garner revenue between 30,000 and 40,000 yuan from kidney bean farming, thanks to improvements in both output and quality as a result of breeding research by local agronomists.

"Several years ago, the per-hectare output of kidney beans was about 1,500 kilograms," Ma said. "But the output surpassed 3,000 kilos this year,

thanks to the use of new seedlings."

Cashmere goats in Kelan are another example of local produce that is winning market popularity through the efforts of breeding researchers.

"In Kelan, researchers have developed a unique variety of goat, which features great market value in terms of down, fur, hide and meat," said Zhang Xianming, head of the animal husbandry center of Kelan county.

He said by raising the cashmere goats under the geographical indication of "Jinlan" — which literally means Kelan, Shanxi — the county is able to produce 3,000 tons of meat, 200,000 hides and 300-plus tons of cashmere annually.

In 2022, animal farming in Kelan generated a total output value of 460 million yuan, accounting for nearly half the total agricultural output value. The farming of cashmere goat yielded total revenue of 280 million yuan and contributed 26.2 percent of per capita disposable income to rural residents, according to Zhang.

Sea buckthorn, a native shrub that is used to curb desertification and soil erosion, is now yielding additional economic benefits in Kelan thanks to healthy food and beverages developed from its fruit and leaves.

Songjiagou Functional Food is a producer of sea buckthorn products in Kelan. Its sales of food and beverages based on the plant are expected to surpass 21 million yuan this year, according to Zhang Yanfeng, general manager of the company.

"We have signed purchase contracts with local farmers," Zhang Yanfeng said. "A farmer can earn revenue between 20,000 and 30,000 yuan by selling to us the sea buckthorn fruit and leaves."

The farming of morel mushrooms is an emerging industry in Kelan. It now has 68 greenhouses for their cultivation. The average net profit generated from a greenhouse is nearly 80,000 yuan a year, according to a local official.

Wang Liqiang contributed to this story.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu makes foray into Chilean market at cultural event

By YUAN SHENGGAO

The South American country of Chile is renowned for its red wine, while China is known throughout the world for its white liquor — or *baijiu*. The two alcoholic beverage varieties met in Beijing last month during a gourmet gala held at the Chilean embassy in China.

The embassy hosted a cultural exchange event — the Chilean Week — in the middle of last month, and the gala, named the Ambassador's Gourmet Parlor, held on Nov 16 was a part of the event. Xinghuacun Fenjiu, a famed *baijiu* distillery company from North China's Shanxi province, attended the gala.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu's executives said its participation in the gala was aimed at entering the South American country and the wider continent.

The company's representatives presented a bottle of the Silk Road edition of Fenjiu-branded white liquor to Mauricio Hurtado, the Chilean ambassador to China.

Hurtado said he was impressed with the gift as soon as he saw it, as the bottle was colorfully decorated with Silk Road elements such as silk ribbons, camel caravans and sailing boats, as well as the flying immortals of Dunhuang — a hub of the ancient Silk Road and a city boasting the well-known UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site of the Mogao Grottoes.

"We want to use these unique Silk Road elements to tell the stories of China and about the brand with rich cultural connotations," said an executive from Xinghuacun Fenjiu.

The executive talked about the history and culture of the brand. She said Xinghuacun Fenjiu pro-

“We want to use these unique Silk Road elements to tell the stories of China and about the brand with rich cultural connotations.”

An executive of Xinghuacun Fenjiu Group

vides unique products from the township of Xinghuacun in Fenyang, Shanxi province, which might be the original source of China's alcoholic beverages.

She explained that an archaeological discovery in the company's premises in Xinghuacun township in 1983 has offered material evidence for the long history of China's alcoholic beverages, which might date back 6,000 years.

She added that ancient techniques for making Xinghuacun

Fenjiu's white liquor were included in China's national list of intangible cultural heritage items in 2006.

The company is also one of the pioneering white liquor companies in China to go global. It is now among the top three exporters in China's white liquor industry.

At the gourmet gala, Fenjiu liquor was served to guests along with red wines from Chile, as well as seafood shipped from the country.

Ambassador Hurtado said that Chileans like to combine red wine and sea food for meals. And this time he found Fenjiu liquor and sea food were also a perfect match. He hoped the Fenjiu liquor could reach the dining tables of Chileans someday.

China has been Chile's largest trade partner for more than 10 years — being the largest destination for Chilean exports and the largest source of Chilean imports, the ambassador said, adding that he is optimistic that the bilateral ties can further rise to new heights.

Wu Jia contributed to this story.



A Xinghuacun Fenjiu executive (left) shares stories about the company's white liquor with a Chilean diplomat during the Chilean Week. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY