

SPOTLIGHT

From Barren to Bountiful: A Green Revolution in the Desert

By Zhao Yu

At the northern edge of the Taklimakan Desert, in Kuqa City, Xinjiang, a quiet transformation is taking place.

In Yongkutongxin Village—once known for barren land and poor crop yields—a high-tech greenhouse is now producing fresh vegetables, supplying parts of southern Xinjiang.

"We couldn't get much to grow in the sand or soil, so we decided to try growing without it," said a technician at the greenhouse.

When Anwar Ismayil first heard about plans to build a soilless cultivation facility in 2023, he was skeptical. "We haven't figured out how to grow things in the ground, and now we're trying to grow them without it?" he recalled.

The idea came from a visit by officials responsible for paired assistance from Ningbo. Yongkutongxin Village had long depended on traditional agriculture, but harsh environmental conditions left little room for progress. Seeking a breakthrough, the officials brought in Ningbo Weilan Zhigu Intelligent Equipment Co., Ltd. to build the "Tongxin Common Prosperity Workshop", a smart agriculture facility.

Phase one—a 6,912-square-meter (74,400-square-foot) glass greenhouse—is now fully operational, producing leafy greens and strawberries. In the first half of this year alone, the facility yielded 22 tons of vegetables and five strawberry harvests totaling 9.2 tons, generating 1.24 million yuan in revenue.

Inside, rows of water spinach, Batavia lettuce, Chinese cabbage and spinach grow under tightly controlled



High-tech greenhouse is now producing fresh vegetables. [Photo by Shen Li]



conditions. Anwar now works full-time at the facility, inspecting the seedlings he once doubted would grow.

Last May, watching the construction and seeing a steady stream of officials and engineers, Anwar decided to leave his unstable job selling beverages and try something closer to home.

"It was the right choice. The work environment is better, the pay is better, and

I'm home every evening with my family," he said. He now earns 4,000 yuan a month.

Many other villagers have joined the team.

"We've hired more than 20 local workers, and during harvest season we bring in temporary help too," said facility manager Li Songsong. "We also plan to hire from nearby villages like Langan."

The facility operates under a co-ownership model. The village collective holds equity and earns dividends. Yongkutongxin receives 249,600 yuan in annual rent and 30% of net profits.

But job creation is only

the beginning. Li hopes that with training and hands-on experience, villagers will become skilled in modern agriculture. When Anwar first joined, he didn't know how to grow seedlings in trays, use fertigation equipment, or manage temperature and humidity. After three months of training, he's now proficient in soilless cultivation techniques, managing light, CO₂, and climate systems in the greenhouse.

Thanks to automated systems and shallow liquid hydroponics (which involves growing plants with their roots submerged in a shallow, constantly flowing stream of nutrient-rich water), the work is less physically demanding, and the quality of the produce is significantly higher. The facility can support 18 to 20 crop cycles per year, and leafy veg-

etable yields reach over 150 tons per hectare—eight to ten times higher than conventional methods. All produce is free of pesticides, heavy metals, and growth hormones.

The project is now seen as a model of collaboration between government, businesses, and local farmers.

"The Yongkutongxin facility is a milestone in the Ningbo-Kuqa cooperation," said an official from the Ningbo Paired Assistance Command. "It's become a flagship project, delivering both economic value and social benefits for Kuqa."

With the Tianshan Mountains in the distance and the desert all around, a patch of green is changing lives. For Anwar and his neighbors, the future is growing—in many ways than one.

Bringing the Village to Market: A Young Entrepreneur's Journey Home

By Jin Yuhan

"Lulu, do you still have any rapeseed oil? We're out at home!"

Early one July morning, Auntie Wang from Lanxi Village in Lubu Town, Yuyao, trotted into the "Lanxi Fengwu" Lubu Specialty Exhibition and Sales Center in the town center.

"It's been selling like crazy—it's all gone!" replied Chen Lu, the center's manager. "I'll put your name on the list and let you know as soon as a new shipment arrives."

Occupying about 180 square meters, the "Lanxi Fengwu" center has a local produce display area and a livestreaming studio. Its neatly arranged shelves are stocked with regional specialties such as dried bamboo shoots, crispy soybean candy, and colorful rice cakes.

Today, Chen Lu speaks confidently about the center's offerings. But just a year ago, she was shy, even hesitant to speak with fellow villagers. In June 2024, Chen graduated from university. At the time, she was preparing to study abroad, with everything already in place. But a trip home changed her plans.

The Dazhangdian Intangible Cultural Heritage Center in Lubu was nearing completion, and some of its spaces were available for public leasing. The blend of ancient architecture with modern cultural displays struck a chord with her. "It felt like an old friend in new clothes," she said—familiar, yet full of new possibilities.

Having spent her childhood in Lubu, she understood that the challenge mountain villages facing wasn't a lack of quality products, but the absence of good ways to bring them to market.

After serious consideration, Chen decided to give up her plans for overseas study. With her parents' support, she took on the role of manager at "Lanxi Fengwu".

At first, she spent hours each day traveling between Lubu and surrounding villages, introducing herself, building relationships with farmers, and sitting down with village officials to share her ideas. Gradually, people warmed to this young woman and began to understand the value of her efforts.

Today, all products sold at "Lanxi Fengwu" are sourced directly from local farmers at prices equal to or higher than the market average. After being processed and packaged, they're sold to visitors, boosting local incomes. Along the way, Chen Lu has grown more outgoing and capable, and she's found a growing circle of peers equally passionate about promoting Lubu's local goods throughout Ningbo.

"As the village grows, I grow too," Chen said with a smile. "It's an amazing feeling, to move forward in step with the place I call home."

Chief Adviser: Zhao Qingchuan
Proofreader: Jin Yuhan

Rafting Rush Makes Waves in Ningbo

By Jin Lu

As summer temperatures soar, Tingshi Stream in Chengyang Village, Dongqian Lake Town, Yinzhou District has reopened for its signature whitewater rafting season. Stretching 2.8 kilometers with a dramatic 168-meter drop, the stream offers both adrenaline-pumping excitement and scenic charm. In just two weeks, it has attracted more than 15,000 visitors, quickly emerging as a new hotspot for those looking for a splash of fun.

Tingshi is just one example of Ningbo's growing "rafting craze".

Once plagued by frequent natural disasters and severe soil erosion, the Tingshi watershed has been

transformed through restoration efforts led by the Yinzhou District Water Conservancy Bureau and the Dongqian Lake Town government. Thanks to these improvements, a once-troubled stream has become a popular destination for nature lovers and thrill-seekers alike.

"Our site is one of the closest rafting spots to downtown Ningbo," said a representative from Ningbo Chengyang Tourism Development Co., Ltd. "We have over 1,000 rafts and can accommodate more than 3,000 visitors per day."

The whitewater rafting business is booming. On weekends, rafting sites across the city are packed.

At Yantou Ancient Village in Fenghua, cars line



The whitewater rafting business is booming. [Photo provided to Ningbo Times]

the roads from the parking lot to the village entrance. Locals shuttle back and forth on tricycles delivering bottled water, with empty bottles quickly stacking up in tall heaps.

In Xiangshan's Longxi Valley, rafting has become a favorite among families with

children. Kids in yellow life jackets frolic happily on the riverbank, while parents race after them with phones in hand, eager to capture the fun.

At the Banzhu rafting spot in Xikou, the air rings with laughter as visitors speed down the stream in

rubber boats.

This rafting boom has become more than just a refreshing way to escape the summer heat—it's fueling a thriving rural economy, creating jobs, attracting tourists, and transforming natural assets into shared prosperity.

