

Business of fragrance blooms in rural villages, enhancing profits and lifestyle

Wang Yong

For 72-year-old Zhu Mao-yun, a new life begins after retirement.

"In addition to my rural pension, I now earn 100 yuan (US\$15) a day, all year round, by tending the 'blossom sea,'" he said with a smug smile. "That's more than enough for me."

The "blossom sea" he mentioned is part of a 40-hectare ecological park converted from a former low-yield cropland in Daijing Village in southern Shanghai's Jinshan District.

Since its opening in 2016, the flower-themed Huakai Haishang Ecological Park has helped many local farmers like Zhu increase their incomes with its tourism revenue. Huakai Haishang literally means "flowers blooming by the sea" in Chinese.

'Town of fragrance'

Zhu was plowing the flower land with a forked hoe when

I met him by chance on February 3, one day before *lichun* (spring begins), a solar term in the Chinese lunar calendar. It's usually a time to prepare the farmland for spring crops.

"We just till the land, keeping the ridges in shape and loosening their soil, and then other people will come and sow flower seeds," Zhu explained to me.

"I drove one hour non-stop on the highway," I said. "I decided to come here because I had just read a news report saying a 'town of fragrance' is taking shape on the basis of your ecological park, which is to be modeled upon France's Grasse."

"I've heard of that," he nodded. "I don't know about the details, but our flower business will certainly be expanded. It's good for us."

"How good is it?" I asked curiously.

Resting his left arm on the tip of the hoe handle, he explained: "In this time of the

year, I mainly till the land. In warmer seasons, when many flowers are in full blossom, I tend them with irrigation, pruning and weeding. I already have pension to cover my basic life in retirement, but thanks to our expanding floral business, I still work all year round and get additional pay."

"And it's not just about money," he added. "I get up at 5am and start to work in the field at 8am. I call it a day at sunset. It's a healthy way of life, and even now I can easily shoulder 100 kilograms. To think I'm already 72 years old."

Zhu isn't the only local farmer who has benefited from the booming floral business. In an earlier report, People's Daily said more than 100 local villagers, old and young, work in the ecological park and get additional pay, on top of their regular income.

From poverty to prosperity

The floral story dates back to 2015, when Daijing Village, tucked away in the westernmost part of Zhujing Town, Jinshan District, decided to turn some of its low-lying and low-yield cropland into an ecological park based on various flower farms, to attract urban visitors, while sprucing up the rural landscape.

From 2016 when it first opened to the public to 2020, before COVID-19 broke out, the park attracted more than 1 million tourists, People's Daily reported.



Flowers link city and countryside

While Daijing Village thrives as a floral business center, mainly because of its rustic environment conducive to ecological diversity, Yangjiazhuang Village in Qingpu District, about 50 kilometers to the north of Daijing, stands to become a "flower valley," owing largely to its geographic advantage. It's close to one of the city's leading business areas — Hongqiao International Central Business District. Hongqiao Transportation Hub, a domestic and international traffic artery, is also nearby.

When the 6.25-square-kilometer Daijing Village built a flower-themed ecological park in 2016, Yangjiazhuang, which spans about 5 square km, set aside a piece of land for the growth and trade of flowers and trees in the same year. About 120 families, more than half of which are local, have been involved in tending the 20-hectare land of various flowers and trees.

Local official sources reveal that, after a few years of development, Yangjiazhuang's annual floral business turnover has surpassed 100 million yuan. That's a rare achievement for an average village.

Building on this momentum, the village plans to expand its current floral business to become a major flower trade



A photo shows the "blossom sea" in Daijing Village when flowers are in full blossom.