

《Buzz Word Focus: Entrepreneurial mindset boosts regional dev》

As entrepreneurship and public innovation sweep across China, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region—a developing inland province in the northwest—is keeping pace by creating more opportunities for young talents.

With enormous confidence in Ningxia's environment for employment and start-ups, Xiang Zongxi, CPPCC member and former chairman of CPPCC Ningxia Regional Committee, says that the region is undergoing industrial transformation and upgrading. Xiang believes this is leading to significant breakthroughs in attracting rising number of local-born professionals and promising entrepreneurs educated elsewhere to return home.

"Ningxia is doing no worse job than average level in employment rate. Fast development results in the urgent need of a large number of talents in certain fields. The coal and chemical industry is one of these cases; demand for technical personnel in the area always exceeds the supply," Xiang said.

Over the past six decades, Ningxia has transitioned from an agriculture and animal husbandry based region to one on the path of industrialization. This has led to an increasing number of graduates who studied in first-tier cities returning home, which has accelerated growth. But Ningxia still lags behind in terms of diversity of employment.

"Of course, a gap exists in comparison with developed areas in terms of capital resources and infrastructure, but Ningxia couldn't be a better place for people with entrepreneurial ambitions, for one is able to grow faster by filling the gaps with one's own fiddled of business," Xiang said.

"To encourage more people to realize their business dreams, Yinchuan, capital city of Ningxia, has built many industrial parks and incubators, large and small, as well as introduced many favorable incentives for young entrepreneurs."

Aware of Ningxia's momentum and keen to continue working as a village official, Chen Ying found her own path by creating a vegetable logistics network with the help of an e-commerce platform and social media application WeChat .

"My interest in growing plants and vegetables never fades, not even after graduating with a master's degree in facility agriculture in 2011," Chen said.



File photo: Chen Ying works in her vegetable greenhouse.

"Having worked in Xinping village, Helan county, for almost two years, I kept a good relationship with villagers. And with the valuable vegetable seed resources from my teacher in university, I sensed the time was right to do something."

Chen bought four vegetable greenhouses with 360,000 RMB that she secured from her family and immediately began planting newly breeds of vegetables. Though the produce tasted good, sales were not particularly good, because consumers were put off by the high prices, which were necessary to offset the high costs of buying seeds and breeding vegetables. But then came a turning point.

"Tracing back to 2015, I was inspired to sell agricultural products, mainly wolfberries, through online shops, but it didn't go well, given fierce competition and lack of particular product advantages," Chen said.

A new business opportunity emerged as WeChat became a wide-reaching tool offering online to offline (O2O) services. Chen realized that the vegetables she grew could be sold in this way. Hotel kitchens, hot-pot restaurants and individual households became target customers. Chen set up her own logistics team distributing vegetables ordered by customers through WeChat. The system is cost-saving and guarantees the freshness of the produce.

"The turnover has already reached over 100,000 RMB since we started the vegetable distributing business just with hotels. I believe it is not out of the question to reach 1 million RMB within a year. Now, we are able to make ends meet," Chen said.

As the O2O vegetable business develops, another project is also drawing to completion. Together with several other partners, Chen bought about 5 hectares of land to develop a leisure farm providing countryside tourism.

Chen has a three-point plan for the future: expand the vegetable delivery network from Helan county to Yinchuan city; open the leisure farm; and establish a local internet community in which young people share food preferences, which will allow the company to keep up with consumer trends.

"The innovative mindset of the internet must continue to play its full role in our business expansion," Chen said.

