

《Belt & Road Initiative ep3: Oasis city hopes to become r》

Gansu province was a key hub along China's ancient Silk Road. Oases dot the province's largely dry and barren landscape. People are investing in one town's thriving agriculture sector as the region gears up for the trade route's revival.

It's an unlikely place to see so many plants and trees and so much water. Zhangye is an oasis located in the middle of the dry and arid Gansu province. Plants and animals here enjoy abundant water and a favorable climate. Some 20 million people visited this wetland park in 2015 to get a glimpse of Zhangye's natural riches.

The number of tourists to this park has been increasing every year, but this is more than just a tourist attraction. It is the city's means of protecting its environment and wildlife, as well as providing a source of water for agriculture -- the region's top industry.

China's Heihe River flows through the wetlands creating a source of irrigation for farms. Zhangye has more than a quarter of a million hectares of arable land. Zhangye farmers produce grains, fruits, and vegetables. The city has become an important stopover for merchants and pilgrims along the ancient Silk Road. Local businesses hope to make Zhangye the main agricultural center of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

"We export products mainly to Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. We are exporting 500,000 tons of fruits and vegetables this year," Wang Yannian, deputy general manager of Luhan Agricultural Products Co., Ltd., said.

Zhangye's agricultural products are exempted from taxes, and farmers have access to cheap loans. As the sector enters the international market, quality is a top priority.

"From the selection of seeds and planting to the final production, we are very strict during the inspection process to ensure our products meet the highest quality standards," Wang said.

Among the forces powering Zhangye's agriculture sector is its homegrown seed production industry, which yields more than 100 million kilograms of mostly corn seeds every year.

Seeds produced here account for more than half of China's seed supply. The government has invested more than 3 billion yuan or 450 million dollars to build a seed industrial park in Linze county.

"Now we have built a planting, producing, and processing center for the seed industry. The infrastructure and processing equipment are already in place, and we have 13 local brands that are gaining a good reputation in the domestic market," Head of Linze Seed Management Bureau Jia Duoying said.

From sowing seeds to reaping the harvest, Zhangye hopes to take advantages of the opportunities that the new Silk Road will bring.