

《Family explores farming model to survive urbanization》

China's urbanization over the past three decades has sent 260 million rural residents to cities to help support the country's rapid economic growth. But not all farmers are able to give up their land to become city dwellers. China still has more than 200 million working farmers.

Since farming barely generates sufficient income nowadays, can rural families still live on their land without having to migrate to cities? In the second episode of our Rural Recovery series, one young man and his family in a village in Sichuan province give it a try.

This is a scene Tang Liang had been dreaming about for his entire childhood. Family members eating together, talking and laughing, never have to be separated.

Growing up in this village, Tang is one of the few young faces you can still find nowadays.

"When I was little, my village was quite bustling. But later many residents started to leave for cities, because their land couldn't feed a family. The village became shabby and lost its vitality. Almost all the young people have left," Tang said.

Tang's parents were forced to join the trend, too. For 12 years, his mother had to work 16 hours a day at a shoe factory in south China's Guangdong province, saving money for her sons' tuition fees. She hadn't returned home for six years. Even now she still remembers the day she rejoined her children.

"Tang Liang held me up and swirled me around. I just couldn't hold my tears. But I didn't want to make him cry, so I turned my back and took out some shoes I made at the factory and some snacks from my bag. I couldn't even recognize my younger son," said mother Liu Xiaolan.

Tang Liang's brother and sister-in-law had worked at factories in Guangdong for many years as well. Their combined monthly wages of 6,000 yuan tightened considerably when they had a baby.

"I was hoping to find a way, where an ordinary rural family can support itself through cultivation on their own land," said Tang.

As the only university graduate in the family, Tang quit a well-paying office job in a metropolis and returned to his village in 2013. He persuaded his family members scattered all over the country to join him, starting a family farm.

He rented some land his neighbors had given up, making their farm six times larger than the household average in

the area. He estimates that this would be the amount of land owned by a Chinese rural family in 20 years.

Each morning, Tang's father and brother Tang Jin work in the field. At noon, Tang Jin and his wife clean and dry the ginger, getting them ready for delivery.

In the afternoon, he packages the products for their customers all over China. Since the products are all pollution-free, they can be sold at higher prices.

Tang Liang is in charge of management, accounting and customer service. Since the family farm sells its products directly through online shops, it can save some intermediate costs.

Tang Liang's family is the only one in the village that still lives on farming and where the family isn't separated. A third of the families in this forty-house village still grow crops on their small stakes of land. But because each family's land is no larger than six basketball courts, their yields can barely provide a living.

"based on the current urbanization rate, in 20 years one third of China's population will still be rural residents, which will be about 100 million rural families. But cities will never be able to take in as many people. So, where can they go? Are they all going to work for several gigantic farms as employees, or can some of them live independently and decently by operating a farm?" Tang said.

Many young farmers from neighboring areas often come to visit Tang Liang's family farm. They are hoping to make their villages home again, too.