

《Donkeys become cash cows in Xinjiang》

URUMQI, May 8 (Xinhua) -- In the Chinese animation "The Tales of Effendi", a cute donkey from Kashgar in northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region becomes famous as he carries his master around.

In reality, donkeys don't usually have such noteworthy lives. They mostly plod around carrying heavy loads and doing tedious chores. But in Kashgar's Yopurga County, farmer Abdul Kerim has turned the braying beast of burden into a cash cow.

"I had been doing various jobs to support my family since I was laid off ten years ago," he said. "Last year, I decided to go into the donkey business after hearing that donkey milk could be very profitable."

Kerim and four of his neighbors poured almost all of their savings into setting up a cooperative last year. They bought 38 Xinjiang "Jiangyue" donkeys - a cross-breed between the region's native donkeys and those from northwest China's Shaanxi Province. They built stables and stockpiled bales of hay.

Donkey aficionados say Jiangyue are among the most beautiful breeds. They are long-legged, with white markings around their eyes and on the bridges to their noses.

After a year of hard work, the biggest donkey milk processing company in the region bought the cooperative's first batch of milk for 28 yuan (4 U.S. dollars) per kilogram.

"I am very, very happy with the business," Kerim said.

Yopurga is a poor county, but donkey farms are now springing up everywhere. about 27,000 donkeys are being raised for their milk, which is expected to generate an annual revenue of 250 million yuan.

Donkeys are easy to raise and are very hardy, but to ensuring the quality of their milk requires strict management. Regular checks must be conducted to make sure the animals are not lacking any nutrients. The donkeys are milked twice a day - morning and evening with 12 hours in between.

"We need to monitor the health of the donkeys carefully," Kerim said.

The cooperative earned more than 300,000 yuan during the first year. Kerim said that they plan to expand and have already hired two employees.

Seeing the potential for growth, processing companies have opened in the county, with a variety of products from milk powder and meat to hides, milk-based soaps and face masks.

Naman Nazim is another farmer reaping the benefits of donkey farming.

With traditional skills passed down from his father, Nazim has raised award-winning donkeys, including one that earned the title "King of the Donkeys" and a 3,000 yuan prize at a local competition.

"Someone offered to buy my donkey for 110,000 yuan, but I turned down the offer," Nazim said.

Naman raises donkeys for stud, and can earn about 30,000 yuan a year from stud fees.

"These donkeys have truly transformed the fortunes of the county," he said.

