

Plan promotes rural construction

Infrastructure development is key to improving people's lives in countryside

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China has released an action plan on rural construction, aiming to improve people's livelihoods in countryside areas and boost the nation's vitalization efforts.

The plan, jointly issued by the general offices of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, proposed boosting infrastructure construction while preventing unsuitable investment and development.

Construction projects will cover roads, water supply, energy, logistics, informatization, rural housing, comprehensive services and the living environment, with a goal to make notable progress by 2025.

Though China has made progress in improving rural infrastructure and public services, a gap remains between villagers' current living conditions and their dreams of a better life.

According to a circular released by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, one of the basic goals of rural construction is to improve grain production and living conditions in rural areas.

Though standards may vary from village to village, the focus of the projects is to ensure all villagers' basic needs are met and to solve key problems, the circular said.

China should implement projects to build digital villages and promote the deep integration of digital technologies with grain production and life in rural areas, according to the joint plan.

Some villages have been exploring digital techniques to improve rural governance. With the help of Xiaoshan city, Zhejiang province, Wangcang county in Sichuan province launched a digital village platform to facilitate government services, saving villagers' time.

"Rural construction includes not only infrastructure in rural areas, but also better rural governance, the sustainable development of rural industries and public services and the building of better rural societies," Li Xiaoyun, a chair professor at China Agricultural University, told Xinhua News Agency.

Rural construction should be farmer-oriented, the plan said.

Local authorities should motivate and guide farmers to participate in rural construction while protecting their rights, it said.

Farmers are the main drivers of rural production and life. The key to rural construction is to mobilize them and establish a bottom-up participation mechanism, an official with the leading group said.

Yu Fawen, a researcher at the Rural Development Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the greater involvement of villagers in construction projects, such as the renovation of rural toilets and greening the environment, will be the next focus.



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“The rural environment has improved a lot, with better air and water quality. Life in the countryside is even better now because it is accompanied by singing birds and the scent of flowers.”

Yong Jinkun, 90-year-old in Qingxi village, Hunan province

Although sanitary toilets are now available in about 70 percent of China's rural areas, Yu said that without knowing the usage rate of these facilities, it's difficult to determine if they meet villagers' needs.

The plan stipulates that local authorities must not arbitrarily merge villages to create larger communities or carry out large-scale demolition and construction against farmers' wishes.

The official with the leading group said construction goals and tasks should be set in line with local economic development efforts and take into account local culture.

The plan said governments should protect traditional village

dwellings and unique customs. Instead of builders copying urban construction models in their work, architectural styles with local characteristics are expected to be preserved, it added.

Great changes have been taking place in Qingxi village, Hunan province, as rural residents operate homestays and participate in the development of local tourism.

For example, a study area was renovated on the first floor of a resident's house and now features the works of Zhou Libo (1908-79), a novelist and translator who was born in the village.

The study, also a library and bookstore, provides villagers and visitors with a reading environment and a place to learn about

the local culture. The dwelling combines rural literature appreciation with a homestay, while also promoting local tea products and intangible cultural heritage.

Yong Jinkun, a 90-year-old resident, said he never imagined the village would experience such big changes. The infrastructure has greatly improved compared with when he was a child, he said, citing the fact that all buildings are now equipped with air conditioners as an example.

"The rural environment has improved a lot, with better air and water quality," the senior said. "Life in the countryside is even better now because it is accompanied by singing birds and the scent of flowers."

Litchi industry seeing success with smart agriculture efforts

By ZHAO YIMENG

China released an action plan on rural construction in May, highlighting the use of big data in the industrial chains of key agriculture products.

E-commerce should be used to boost smart agriculture development and to ship related products to urban areas, the plan said.

This summer, Lingshan county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, has taken advantage of the technology to move its products. Boxes of litchis were sent from the region to areas all over the country after taking part in a digital journey in which tech was used to grow, sort and package the fruit.

Wu Duoce, a digital agriculture technician, has been tracking the whole production process.

Last year, Wu and his team went to Lingshan, one of the largest litchi-

producing areas in the country, to assist in the digital upgrading of the industry there.

Wu used digital devices to track and control the growth of the litchis. The process begins once trees begin to bear fruit.

Pest monitoring lamps help protect fruits from insects and diseases, and automatic irrigation systems enable growers to better control the amount of water and fertilizer used. Both devices can be operated remotely by smartphone apps, greatly improving efficiency and reducing labor costs.

"Usually the litchis grow naturally, but when tasks such as watering, fertilization and pest inspection are required, I will show up with my phone," Wu said.

Once the litchis ripen, they are sent to an intelligent sorting line, where a scanner can quantify the shape, size, sugar content, peel color and cracks

in each fruit. Based on the information the scanner provides, the litchis are classified into five levels of quality and priced accordingly.

Previously, the litchis were sorted by workers without precise standards and could not be sold at their best prices. This year, the first-class litchi variety was sold at between 60 and 80 yuan (\$8.90 to \$11.90) per kilogram, Wu said.

After automatic weighing and preliminary packaging on the sorting line, the perishable fruits are sent to cold storage until their temperature drops to between 8 and 13 C. The litchis then go through secondary packaging to stay fresh and intact on their way to dining tables.

The Lingshan litchi industry has realized comprehensive digitalization throughout the whole process from production to sales. The digital program helped the industry pro-

duce high-quality fruit and become a regional brand.

"It's sweeter for me to help the locals earn more money than to eat a basket of litchis," said Wu, who has been working in tech giant Alibaba's rural department for five years.

"I started with boosting the capacity of rural e-commerce and gradually began working in the overall digital construction in rural areas."

In the past two years, Wu has visited more than 20 counties in Hainan province and Guangxi to gain a profound understanding of county-level industries, especially agriculture, and their needs to achieve digital transformation.

Wu now calls himself a digital agriculture technician, one of the 18 new professions recognized by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security on June 14.

A digital agriculture technician is a

person who is engaged in the use, promotion and services of digital technologies applied in agricultural production and rural life, the ministry said.

The new profession reflects the digital transformation of agriculture in China, it added.

Like Wu, other digital agriculture technicians are playing important roles in digital construction in rural areas, where digital technologies have a broader application beyond agriculture.

Wu's future plans include using such technologies to combine agriculture and other industries.

"I have been thinking about how to build a digital countryside in part by integrating agriculture and rural tourism in a digital way," he said.

Zhu Yongling contributed to this story.

Policy Digest

State Council cancels, reduces fines for acts

The State Council, China's Cabinet, has announced plans to cancel or reduce fines on more than 50 types of behaviors that are being levied by public security, transport and market regulation authorities to further promote the reform of government functions and improve the nation's business climate.

For example, freight drivers may be fined for not having their road transportation permits in their vehicles in case of inspection, even though transportation authorities can look them up online.

Such fines are unreasonable, the State Council said in a statement published on Friday, asking its departments to finish revising or revoking related regulations within 60 days.

The decision was drafted by the Ministry of Justice and other departments and was approved at the State Council's executive meeting on July 21.

The ministry will see to it that related regulations are revised or revoked in a timely manner, an official of the ministry said, urging administrative organizations to strictly adhere to the new regulations and make sure companies and the public benefit from the change.

South declares level-four drought emergencies

The central government declared level-four drought emergencies in Chongqing municipality and the provinces of Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi and Anhui on Thursday, as heat wave continues to ravage the southern part of the country.

Authorities in the regions should strengthen their management of water resources to ensure drinking water supplies, according to the State Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters, which sent work units to Sichuan, Chongqing, Anhui and Jiangxi to deal with drought.

Jiangxi's Poyang Lake, the largest freshwater lake in China, has seen its water levels drop to a point rarely seen at this time of year.

Meanwhile, the headquarters asked the northern part of the country to stay vigilant, be prepared for another round of heavy rainfall and endeavor to prevent possible flooding.

Health authorities seek better *fangcang* design

The National Health Commission and two other ministerial-level departments have issued detailed guidance for provinces to improve the design of *fangcang*, or makeshift hospitals, where mild and asymptomatic COVID-19 cases are treated.

Fangcang should be designed for not only an emergency response but also daily use, the guidance said, asking local authorities to come up with reasonable plans and make full use of existing equipment to renovate or construct such hospitals to ensure their efficient operation.

The guidance, which listed specific suggestions for the hospitals' locations, layouts and operations, suggested they separate patients into sections and put up partitions between the sections to better protect patients' privacy. It also encouraged them to equip every bed with no fewer than three power outlets.

Provincial regions to get more pocket parks

The nation aims to build at least 1,000 pocket parks this year to increase space for outdoor activities, according to a notice issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development.

Each province, autonomous region and municipality, except for the Xinjiang Uygur and Tibet autonomous regions, is required to build 40 or more pocket parks this year.

Local authorities should make their own plans for pocket park construction, including the number, location and size of the parks that will be built and the funds that will be allocated for their construction, the ministry said.

When choosing sites for the parks, the authorities should give priority to urban areas that lack green space and design the parks to meet the needs of children and seniors, the ministry added.

WANG QINGYUN