

HOLIDAY PEOPLE



Since April 2025, Meng Deli and his team have been in Maldrogungkar county, Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, building an agricultural base covering over 40 hectares. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A new harvest on the plateau

Adapted techniques turn winter scarcity into year-round abundance

By **GUO YANQI** and **PALDEN NYIMA** in Lhasa

Inside a greenhouse in Maldrogungkar county, Lhasa, Meng Deli runs his hand over a row of crops, stopping to check leaves, moisture, and temperatures. Around him, fruit and vegetables grow in lines—a far cry from the winters when the locals lived largely on cabbage, radish, and potatoes.

Meng is a senior agronomist from Shouguang, Shandong province. He was first invited to help improve vegetable production in the Xizang autonomous region in 2016 after years of agricultural work in northern China.

He arrived with 60,000 yuan (about \$8,700) and five workers, and decided to stay. Nearly a decade later, his team's work has become part of a bigger story, expanding the range of produce grown at altitude while passing on techniques that are gradually taking root.

The project did not begin smoothly. The team had to work through altitude sickness, a shortage of supplies for building greenhouses, language barriers, and harsh weather. Meng recalled a time when the team was helping to build the region's first large greenhouse of its kind in Panam county, Shigatse. A sudden Force 12 gale hit the newly-built structure, injuring three workers.

"That night I really thought about giving up," Meng said. But after three days of trying to work out what had gone wrong, the team started again. To cope with plateau conditions, they

narrowed the spacing of greenhouse film from two meters to 90 centimeters, developed ultraviolet-resistant plastic that could last years, and introduced double-layer film, insulation quilts, and automatic rolling systems.

That trial-and-error process helps explain what Meng and his colleagues call the "Shouguang model". The team introduces a complete greenhouse farming system with seedling cultivation, pest control, temperature management, crop timing, and irrigation and fertilizer planning. They adjust the process to local soil, wind, and ultraviolet exposure.

If Meng sets the overall direction, Zhang Yuxiang, a lead technician, helps turn that system into daily practice. Zhang said much of his work was hands-on, such as showing local workers when to ventilate, when to water, how to spot seedling problems, and how to manage crops through changing temperatures. Seedlings were often donated free of charge.

"We teach the local farmers on-site because of language barriers," said Zhang. "Repeated demonstrations in the greenhouses were often more effective than explanation alone." He also said he continued to guide growers in other places by phone and video calls.

The impact becomes clearer in the voices of residents.

Wangmo, who works at the Maldrogungkar base, said people in the area had once grown mainly potatoes and radishes. "Now, through



From above: Meng Deli, the senior agronomist from Shouguang in Shandong province who has been aiding Xizang since 2016, checks the growth of plants in the greenhouse. Meng and his team have grown massive pumpkins at the modern agriculture demonstration park in Maldrogungkar county, Lhasa. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

working in the greenhouses, we learned how to grow more vegetables, including Chinese cabbage and green peppers," she said.

"Vegetables used to be scarce in local diets," said Samtan, another local worker. "Now, you can eat whatever you want."

The changes are also visible in the scale of local production and the base they have built.

According to Meng, the team has introduced more than 100 varieties of fruit and vegetables to the plateau, including strawberries, cherries, wax apples, and passion fruit, most of which were rare in local markets.

At the Maldrogungkar base, local manager Konchok Lhadze said winter vegetable production had continued, and annual output had reached more than 1,200 metric tons, with local supermarkets now seeking cooperation.

Meng and his team's journey sits within a longer history of Shandong's aid to Xizang. According to People's Daily, Shandong's first group of aid cadres brought vegetable seeds to Xizang in 1995, and by mid 2025, the province had sent 657 cadres and professionals to the region.

More broadly, counterpart aid to Xizang has expanded into a nationwide system since 1994, when the country made it a policy to develop the region. Seventeen provinces and municipalities, along with relevant central enterprises and central financial institutions, have provided counterpart aid to all 74 county-level areas across the autonomous region, with

11 rounds sent to work there, China Ethnic News reported in January.

The aid to Xizang has expanded its focus beyond infrastructure and funding to longer-term work in fields such as industry, technology, education, healthcare, and skills training, leaving the local community to continue to grow and develop.

For Meng, the long-term goal is straightforward. He hopes that the Shouguang model can eventually be taught in every county in Xizang with greenhouse farming so that local people can grow and manage crops on their own. His personal ambition goes even higher: to grow Shouguang fruit and vegetables above 5,000 meters on the plateau.

Meng and his team are preparing to experiment at an altitude of about 4,500 meters. They plan to introduce and cultivate edible roses in the rocky, arid terrain of the Gobi Desert.

"This edible rose thriving on the snowy plateau, at an altitude of 4,500 meters, in such low temperatures, is truly a miracle. It can be used both for ornamental and greening purposes. We look forward to building a large-scale rose industry," said Dorje Phuntsok, an employee of the agricultural base.

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Bringing change to the roof of the world

By **DAQIONG** in Lhasa and **ZHENG JINRAN** in Beijing

Zhang Junzhou had barely settled into his new post when the altitude began to take its toll. Shortly after arriving in Amdo county in July 2025, the official from Shenyang, Liaoning province, experienced dizziness, a rapid heartbeat, and shortness of breath. During a field trip to remote northern areas, the combination of rugged terrain and thin air left him close to fainting.

"For several kilometers, the road kept rising and falling, and the lack of oxygen made it very difficult," he recalled.

Amdo county in Nagchu city, known as the "northern gateway" of the Xizang autonomous region, sits at an average elevation exceeding 4,700 meters, where oxygen levels are less than half of those at sea level, and the climate is cold and dry. Zhang arrived as a member of the 11th group of aid officials sent to the county from Shenyang to improve living standards there.

In such high-altitude regions, elderly health management has become one of the key priorities in

improving people's livelihoods. In recent years, facilities have been built or upgraded, and services expanded, including the integration of medical care and daily assistance. One resident, Tashi Tsering, suffered mobility and speech difficulties due to a brain illness. After moving into a newly built care center, he began receiving regular treatment and support, and staff say his condition has since improved.

Zhang noted that many of these projects were initiated by earlier batches of aid officials, reflecting a shared, long-term commitment. "No single group can accomplish everything in just a few years," he said. "Each batch of aid officials brings dedication and a deep sense of responsibility to the work, doing their best to make a difference. Over time, those efforts come together to bring real change."

His team regularly coordinates aid programs outlined during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), helping resolve construction challenges and ensure timely delivery. With that period now closing, new priorities are taking shape.

"Building on extensive prelimi-

nary research and taking into account local conditions, we are now drafting plans for the next five years of aid projects in Xizang," Zhang said, adding that infrastructure across the county would be strengthened, with a focus on rural revitalization, urban renewal, and urbanization.

Alongside infrastructure, the team has also worked to expand access to education and public services, including donating books to local schools and organizing free medical consultations.

Building on these efforts, Zhang has also turned attention to enriching cultural life. After noticing the county lacked a cinema, he worked with local departments to convert an existing venue into a digital screening hall.

"People here had very limited access to new films," he said. "We wanted to bring that experience closer to them."

One of the first films screened was *Puruo Gangri*, a tribute film set in the 1970s that depicts herders moving into the harsh, uninhabited Changtang region to build new homes. It had only just been released in Lhasa and a few other locations at the time.

"We contacted the distributors and secured the screening rights as early as possible," Zhang said.

The screenings were organized for residents and government staff. "Many people were deeply moved," Zhang said. "The film reflects the hardships and resilience of those who came before us, and it resonates with people here who are familiar with that history. At the same time, it also reminds them how much life has improved today. Being able to watch a newly released film without leaving the county is something people truly appreciate."

An important element of the local culture is the high value placed on protecting the environment during daily life. Zhang and his team uphold a strict "environment first" principle to make sure that every project, from infrastructure to public services, respects the plateau's fragile ecology, given that the area is a source of the Yangtze River.

It's a responsibility the team shares with locals. Many residents have lived on the plateau for generations, and their actions reflect a deep-rooted understanding of the land.



Zhang Junzhou (first from right) conducts a field study on ecological and environmental protection with residents in Amdo county, Nagchu city, Xizang autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dawa Dondrub, a 32-year-old deputy head of the protection team in Marchu township, northern part of Amdo county, described how the aid teams work alongside local communities.

"The residents here naturally prioritize the environment in everything they do," he said. "When we patrol or monitor wildlife, residents are right there with us, sharing their knowledge and experience. The aid teams are not imposing anything, but they are working together with the community."

Patrols involve volunteers of all

ages, from young students to retired elders, highlighting a shared commitment across generations, he said.

For Zhang, such collaboration underscores a broader principle. "This is not just about building infrastructure or providing services," he said. "It's about working with local people, learning from them, and ensuring that development strengthens the community while protecting the environment."

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