

# Promoting Rural Revitalization with the Development of Leisure Agriculture: From the Perspective of Comparison between China and Japan

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## Abstract

From the perspective of developing rural leisure agriculture to promote rural development, this article looks forward to promoting rural revitalization through research on leisure agriculture. Japan is an economically developed country with an early start and relatively mature development of leisure agriculture, which has many experiences worth learning from. However, due to the large gap between the national conditions of China and Japan, this article, starting from the perspective of a comparison between China and Japan, takes Nagano Prefecture, Japan, as an example to study the development of tourism agriculture in Japan, explore the shortcomings of China's leisure agriculture development, and then bring reference and inspiration for rural revitalization in China.

## Keywords

Leisure Agriculture; Rural Revitalization; Comparison between China and Japan.

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## 1. Introduction

The Party Central Committee believes that it is necessary to persistently make solving the "three rural" issues a top priority in the work of the entire Party, use the efforts of the entire Party and society to comprehensively promote rural revitalization and accelerate agricultural and rural modernization. "A strong country must first strengthen agriculture, and only by strengthening agriculture can it become strong.". We should base ourselves on the national conditions and agricultural conditions, reflect Chinese characteristics, and build an agricultural power with strong supply guarantee, strong scientific and technological equipment, strong management system, strong industrial resilience, and strong competitiveness. Leisure agriculture is a new type of agricultural business model, which combines agriculture with tourism, leisure, cultural and other industries, bringing new development opportunities to rural areas. The development of leisure agriculture can not only increase the income of farmers, but also provide significant impetus for promoting the economic development of rural areas and promote rural revitalization. Japan is one of the most mature countries in the development of leisure agriculture, whose development can be traced back to the 1950s. According to the data from the "2022-2026 Japan Agricultural Investment Outlook and Risk Analysis Report" prepared and released by the Agriculture, Forestry, Animal Husbandry, and Fisheries Research Group of the Global Impression Investment Analysis Japan Business Unit, Japan's agriculture has been modernized after more than half a century of efforts, with farmers' income levels exceeding those of urban households,

and rural infrastructure and public services similar to those of cities. The leisure agriculture industry is the top priority of Japanese agriculture. In contrast, the development of leisure agriculture in China is relatively lagging behind, with many problems and shortcomings. This article compares and analyzes the development of leisure agriculture in the two countries, points out the shortcomings of China's leisure agriculture development compared to Japan, and proposes targeted measures to promote the development of China's leisure agriculture and promote rural revitalization.

## **2. Problems in the Development of Leisure Agriculture in China**

The development of leisure agriculture in China can be traced back to the 1980s. At that time, the government proposed a "farm entertainment" policy to encourage farmers to combine agriculture and tourism to provide leisure services for urban residents. With the advancement of policies, China's leisure agriculture has developed rapidly. In 2004, the Chinese government officially incorporated leisure agriculture into the national development plan, becoming one of the key industries supported by the state. Since then, China's leisure agriculture has continuously innovated and developed a variety of business models, such as farmhouse entertainment, orchard picking, strawberry gardens, flower sightseeing, and so on. However, up to now, the development of leisure agriculture in China still exposes many problems.

### **2.1 Lack of In-depth Development of Leisure Agricultural Product Resources**

Currently, leisure agricultural products mainly focus on picking, sightseeing, and farmhouse entertainment, with a serious product simplification and lack of differentiation and innovation, which easily leads to the prominent phenomenon of commodity homogeneity. This unitary product model is difficult to meet the diverse needs of consumers and improve the competitiveness of leisure agriculture, which is a major issue in the development of leisure agriculture at present. The construction of leisure agricultural projects lacks macro guidance, and their development and construction are highly arbitrary, with simple imitation and extensive management. There is a certain degree of disorder and blindness in the construction, lack of deep processing and characteristic marketing of agricultural products, and lack of improvement and transformation of rural landscapes. The product features are not obvious, and the business mode and product structure are single, which cannot meet the diverse consumption needs of tourists. At the same time, the leisure agricultural product resources lack the support of cultural pillars, and fail to achieve the organic integration of agricultural folk culture with local characteristics and modern agricultural technology. They cannot reflect the local flavor and cultural charm, resulting in a weak attraction, resulting in a short stay time for tourists, and low economic and social benefits for enterprises.

### **2.2 Multi Department Management, Lack of Overall Planning**

Leisure agriculture involves three industries and has a complex spatial structure, which requires overall planning based on the phased requirements of economic and social development. Leisure agriculture is both "agriculture" and "leisure". At the management level, it involves the functional positioning and comprehensive coordination between the agricultural and rural sectors and the cultural and tourism sectors. Positioning "leisure agriculture" as "agriculture" and positioning "leisure agriculture" as "leisure industry" is not only a question of which department to manage, but also a major issue affecting the development direction of leisure agriculture. For example, in Japan, the "home stay" industry, which is currently concerned by society, is strictly distinguished from rural hotels. The main purpose of developing homestays in many countries and regions is to make full use of the existing residential houses of farmers, increase employment opportunities for farmers, especially rural elderly, enhance external understanding of rural production and life, and establish a communication platform for farmers and urban outsiders. Therefore, the standards in terms of land use system, housing construction, sanitation, fire prevention, etc. are lower than those in the rural hotel industry. Currently, China's tourism homestays are positioned according to hotel management, and their land use system, buildings, roads, landscape, and environmental requirements are significantly higher than those of "homestays", which are mainly operated by farmers, especially

small farmers. Multidepartmental management lacks consistent opinions on the development positioning of leisure agriculture. Each department is formulating development plans and industry standards based on their own understanding and authority. For example, some places have introduced star certification for leisure agriculture bases, unilaterally emphasizing the completeness of tourism reception facilities and equipment and service standardization, while ignoring the "agricultural characteristics" and "farmer characteristics" of leisure agriculture, resulting in unclear planning positioning.

### **2.3 Lack of Professional Talents and Insufficient Industrial Innovation**

The development of leisure agriculture needs the support of specialized talents, but at present, the proportion of service-oriented human resources is too large, technical human resources are in short supply, and management human resources are extremely short. The cultivation of leisure agriculture talents is low, investment is low, and talent introduction is not sufficient, resulting in a huge talent gap, which restricts the innovation and development of leisure agriculture.

At present, most innovative technologies in leisure agriculture in China remain in conventional technology, yield technology, and production technology, while there is a lack of high-tech, quality technology, and processing technology, and the supply of effective agricultural technology is insufficient. At the same time, although the economic benefits of leisure agriculture exceed traditional agriculture, it is still at a disadvantage compared to other industries, and simple services cannot adapt to agricultural innovation and development. Innovation is the strongest driving force for the development of leisure agriculture. Without industrial innovation, people cannot see the development prospects of leisure agriculture [1].

### **2.4 Uneven Infrastructure Construction, Unbalanced Development, and Short Value Chain**

In recent years, China has made outstanding achievements in infrastructure construction in rural areas such as roads, water, electricity, gas, networks, medical care, and sanitation, but compared to cities, it is still very backward. The unbalanced development of leisure agriculture is a prominent issue. The development of leisure agriculture in some regions is relatively mature, such as Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong, and other places, which have formed a certain scale of leisure agricultural industrial chain; For example, the development of leisure agriculture in the western region and some poverty-stricken areas is relatively lagging, with poor infrastructure conditions, making it difficult to attract urban people to eat, live, and travel. The construction of infrastructure such as roads and parking lots connecting scenic spots lags behind, there are many historical arrears in the renovation of rural residential environments such as garbage and sewage, the standards for products and services such as rural homestays and farmhouses are not perfect, the information services connecting leisure agricultural business entities and consumers are insufficient, the business scale is generally small, the service quality is not high, and a complete industrial chain has not yet been formed, unable to achieve scale effects, and the value chain is short.

### **2.5 Low Quality of Employees**

The overall quality and structure of leisure agriculture practitioners have a large gap with the requirements of industrial development, making it difficult to meet the needs of rapid development of the industry [2]. There is a shortage of high-level management talents in leisure agriculture. Due to the limited understanding of leisure agriculture management talents, it is often one person with multiple posts and multiple responsibilities. A survey of small and medium-sized farms and farmhouses found that 85% of farms are under extensive management, without a standardized management system, awareness of the use of information management technology, and detailed planning; The education background of employees is also mostly concentrated at the junior college and high school levels. The overall low quality has resulted in the inability to improve the service level for a long time, which not only affects the experience and feelings of consumers, but also affects the image and reputation of leisure agriculture.

### **3. Development of Leisure Agriculture in Japan: A Case Study of Leisure Agriculture in Nagano Prefecture, Japan**

#### **3.1 Status of Leisure Agriculture Development in Changye County**

Nagano Prefecture is the fourth largest county in Japan. With a pleasant climate, a long history, numerous scenic spots, superior geographical location, developed agriculture and forestry, and rich tourism resources, it is known as the "Switzerland of Japan" and is one of the few sightseeing counties in Japan. At the same time, as one of Japan's rare agricultural counties, Nagano Prefecture faced enormous difficulties in its agricultural production activities due to its unique mountain forest structure and snowy natural environment. Since the late 1950s, local governments and people have taken a series of measures to transform environmental disadvantages into advantageous resources that benefit the people. For example, using snow water to grow high-quality rice and cold resistant economic plants; Help farmers build family style hotels to provide services for tourists who come to enjoy snow and ski [3]. In Japan's struggle against the harsh natural environment, the people of Nagano Prefecture have made unremitting efforts for many years, and their agricultural industry has entered a new stage of ecological tourism and agriculture. Even in the face of the severe economic crisis in Japan, Nagano Prefecture's agriculture still created outstanding economic value, and thus became a beautiful scenery for the Japanese economy in the late 1990s.

Over the years, the government of Nagano County has firmly grasped the development opportunity, relying on its good natural scenery and taking advantage of leisure resources, strengthened the adjustment of the agricultural industrial structure, and carried out a major entrepreneurship in agricultural leisure tourism, making leisure tourism one of the priority industries in Nagano's development [4], in order to meet the yearning of people living in cities for rural idyllic scenery and the desire to return to a peaceful life, Develop local leisure agriculture with the main content of "leisure vacation, sightseeing tourism, fruit picking, leisure fishing, eating farmhouse meals, and living in farmhouses.". It is worth mentioning that the Ministry of Tourism of Nagano County has also proposed a tourism strategy to promote this plan, with the aim of pooling the strength of the entire county to promote the development of tourism. There is a famous "DC" activity in Nagano County, with the slogan "Welcome to the world-class tourist destination - Xinzhou of Mountains". The purpose is to make tourists feel the value of mountain tourism and enjoy various gifts brought by nature. That is, to understand the entire Nagano County as a mountain plateau, fully utilize its geographical advantages, and the idea of "relying on mountains to eat mountains" helps Nagano plan a variety of tourism projects.

Rural tourism in Changye County mainly includes the following categories: sightseeing tourism, leisure tourism, and rural cultural tourism. The specific forms include the following:

- (1) Seasonal orchards, sightseeing and leisure farmyards, etc. For example, in the "Suwa Lake Agricultural Park" in Suwa City, you can experience agricultural experiences such as vegetable harvesting and milk pressing. In addition, at the "Xinzhou Farm" in Matsumoto City, you can experience fruit picking and Jibir cuisine. After seeing and eating well, tourists buy some products and take them back. Some merchants have established long-term and reliable purchasing and selling relationships with farmers through field visits, experiences, and tasting.
- (2) Leisure villa, folk hotel, home stay, etc. Due to heavy snow, earthquakes, volcanoes, and other disasters in Fanshan City, few ancient buildings with a long history have been preserved. In the past 20 years, while building a number of temples and temples, the government has strongly encouraged and supported farmers to build more than 30 Hewu hotels with local folk customs, injecting modern vitality into the ancient traditional civilization.
- (3) Rural education classroom. Changye County is popularizing agricultural experiences. For example, educational institutions such as primary schools and kindergartens will introduce agricultural experiences to enable children to learn the joy of agriculture and the charm of rural areas. This experience covers a wide range of fields, including planting, harvesting, pruning branches,

collecting mountain goods, planting flowers and grass, burning charcoal, weaving, processing, and so on. They can personally experience any work that farmers do. In addition, there are many agricultural experience activities organized by regional farmers, and local residents have more and more opportunities to get close to agriculture.

### **3.2 Experience of Leisure Agriculture Development in Changye County**

(1) The role of government positioning. Support and guide the agriculture of Nagano County. In addition to adverse environmental factors in the early stages of development, Changye County also has problems such as low efficiency and a single industry. Not only in Nagano Prefecture, but also in other cities and counties in Japan, this problem is widespread in the agricultural industry. Each county urgently needs the transformation and upgrading of the agricultural industry. To this end, the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries of Japan has embarked on the integration of agriculture and tourism to promote the common development of leisure agriculture and rural tourism. In terms of main responsibilities, the Japanese government actively provides financial subsidies, improves public facilities, and guides and participates in international cooperation. At the national level, the Japanese government promotes the healthy development of agricultural tourism by improving the agricultural legal system. A series of laws and regulations related to leisure agriculture and rural tourism, such as the Basic Law on Tourism, the Tourism Industry Law, and the Leisure Law on Nongshan Fishing Village, have been introduced in succession; At the local level, taking Changye County as an example, many supporting documents have been issued, such as the "Changye County Land and Agricultural Land System" and the "Changye County Rural Area Support Development Agreement". These laws and regulations clarify the approval and operation standards for agricultural tourism development projects, and have strong operability and guidance. In addition, Nagano County has also established a medium-term management organization for farmland, which is specialized in jointly implementing farmland management and development work with relevant units or groups.

(2) The role positioning of farmers. Participate in and innovate leisure agriculture and rural tourism, comprehensively utilize rural resources, combine local cultural history, natural environment, and agricultural landscape, and integrate comprehensive business models such as modern tourism, catering, and accommodation, extending the single agricultural industry to modern service industries. As the main participants in local leisure agriculture and rural tourism, farmers should not only provide land or venues, but also have a sense of self-development.

(3) Environmental development positioning. A green and sustainable natural environment is the prerequisite for the development of leisure agriculture and rural tourism. In the process of developing agricultural tourism in Changye County, it has always followed natural laws without excessive human intervention. In the face of severe ice and snow weather, neither discouraged nor reckless. It is guided by the government to discover the laws of climate change in accordance with local conditions, find the best production opportunities, and ultimately convert adverse factors into practical economic benefits.

## **4. Measures to Promote Rural Revitalization through Leisure Agriculture**

### **4.1 Strengthen Government Policy Support**

In the early stage of development, agriculture in Changye County faced internal and external difficulties. Internal problems such as single industrial structure and low efficiency exist; The external environment is facing many adverse environmental factors, and it is urgent to carry out the transformation and upgrading of the agricultural industry. To this end, the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries has vigorously promoted the joint development of leisure agriculture and rural tourism.

(1) The government actively provides financial subsidies, improves public facilities, and guides participation in international cooperation. By improving the agricultural regulatory system to promote the healthy development of the agricultural tourism industry, a series of laws and regulations related



to leisure agriculture have been promulgated, including the Basic Law on Tourism, the Tourism Industry Law, the Basic Law on Food, Rural, and Agriculture, and the Law on Revitalization of Mountain Villages.

(2) Many supporting documents have been issued by the local government, such as the "Land and Agricultural Land System of Changye County", the "Agreement on Supporting the Development of Rural Areas in Changye County", the "Measures for the Employment of Persons with Labor Difficulties in the Agricultural Field in Changye County", and the "Relevant Technical Measures for the Response to Disasters in Changye County". These laws and regulations clarify the standards for the approval and operation of agricultural tourism development projects, which are highly operational and instructive.

Currently, China is vigorously promoting new rural construction and targeted poverty alleviation development. In addition to expanding financial investment in rural areas, it is more important to enact relevant laws and regulations as soon as possible, improve the rural tourism industry management system, implement project approval, policy guidance, publicity and communication, and provide support to provide a good external environment for the healthy development of rural tourism in China. Specifically, leisure agriculture and rural tourism, as new forms of agricultural development, should enjoy various national preferential policies, integrate various social advantageous resources, and jointly promote the development of agricultural tourism.

#### **4.2 Give Full Play to the Power of Non-Governmental Entities**

Japanese leisure agriculture is supported and guided by governments at all levels. The main bodies of agricultural parks include local public organizations, associations, enterprises, farmers, etc. Some local public organizations use their own agricultural land, and some obtain the right to use it from the owners of agricultural land; Agricultural cooperative organizations lease land use rights from association members or from other agricultural land owners. Generally, enterprises conclude loan and payment agreements with towns and villages, and apply to towns and villages with a complete operation plan. Farmers can use their own farmland to develop homestay farms, etc., or join the agricultural associations in their cities and villages for unified management. The reason why Nagano Prefecture in Japan has been able to achieve good results in the adjustment of agricultural industrial structure for many years is closely related to the active participation of local farmers in addition to the strong support of the government. Japan attaches particular importance to the cultivation of local residents' professional qualities, encouraging them to recognize the economic benefits brought by agricultural ecotourism [5], guiding local farmers to pay attention to market trends, always stay ahead of the market, and achieve "one mind, three uses", namely, developing key industries, developing alternative industries, and finding emerging industries. Japan's leisure agriculture has now stepped out of the stage of small-scale operation by farmers, and most of it now takes the form of government guidance, association organizations, and the participation of the vast majority of farmers. This can effectively disperse and prevent risks, while also exerting the potential of scale and generating economies of scale effects [6].

China currently needs to increase professional literacy training for residents in development areas, cultivate and introduce high-level talents; At the same time, give full play to the enthusiasm and initiative of farmers and avoid excessive reliance on government support. Actively guide farmers to adjust their production and management structure, vigorously develop leisure agriculture, and encourage farms and enterprises to invest and operate leisure agriculture. Support key farmers in leisure agriculture and subsidize typical leisure farms throughout the country. Establish agricultural associations and rural communes at all levels, and give full play to the positive role of various associations in carrying out leisure agriculture work. Encourage enterprises to invest in the development of leisure agriculture, carry out large-scale development of leisure agriculture, survive the fittest, conduct qualification certification for leisure agricultural parks, and provide financial and tax support. Encourage and support research related to leisure agriculture, and mobilize the enthusiasm of leisure agricultural researchers.

### 4.3 Adhere to Scientific Planning and Sustainable Development

Japan has formed a relatively scientific system in the development planning of sightseeing agriculture. Due to the government's reasonable planning and comprehensive utilization of various local natural resources, "one village, one landscape" and "one village, one product" have become typical representatives of Japanese tourism agriculture. In addition, Japan has effectively combined agricultural and forestry resources, land resources, and local culture, expanding the development field of sightseeing agriculture. From the perspective of sustainable development, the development model of "one village, one product" in Japan is replicable and replicable, with significant results. The further development of sightseeing agriculture has accelerated the adjustment of the agricultural industrial structure in Japan, and the service industry related to sightseeing tourism has gradually developed, driving economic development while increasing employment. Some powerful investors have begun to "come in", and the development model of sightseeing agriculture, which has achieved remarkable results, is slowly "going out". This "coming in" and "going out" has also promoted the further development of the rural economy, making the love of rural residents for the countryside more intense. The flow of population has enabled further communication between cities and rural areas, enhanced the vitality of rural development, and also led to the continuous development and progress of rural areas. Under scientific planning, Japan's tourism agriculture has achieved good environmental benefits, thereby providing a better environment for people to live in.

When developing leisure agriculture and rural tourism in China, we should also learn from Nagano County, adapt measures to local conditions, develop models that are suitable for the local area, and do not arbitrarily follow the trend and apply templates. At the same time, we should strengthen the protection of rural indigenous ecosystems, adhere to the concept of green development and sustainable development, and do not repeat the mistakes of "destruction". We should first develop and then govern. When developing leisure agriculture and rural tourism, full consideration should be given to the utilization of non operational resources such as barren mountains and wastelands, in order to ultimately achieve the coordinated development of rural tourism and environmental protection.

## 5. Conclusion

Leisure agriculture is one of the important ways to revitalize rural areas. By comparing the current development situation of leisure agriculture in China and Japan and the development experience of sightseeing agriculture in Nagano County, it can be concluded that diversified products and services, high-quality services, and government support are the key to the development of leisure agriculture. In order to promote the development of leisure agriculture in China, the government needs to introduce relevant policies and measures to encourage farmers to carry out innovative leisure agricultural projects, improve the quality of services, and provide financial and policy support for the development of leisure agriculture.

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