



Time Out

Shanghai

新旅行

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From the ground up

Tony's Farm, the largest organic farm in Shanghai, is aiming to create a Chinese organic revolution, writes **Crystyl Mo**

Organic agriculture is a tiny sprout in a vast farmland of conventional agriculture in China, but the number of certified organic farms in the Shanghai area is slowly growing. The largest farm yet is Tony's Farm which has ploughed over 200 million RMB into its 280-acre site. 'We want to be the organic agriculture pioneer and authority in China,' says Lillian Yang, Tony's Farm executive director.

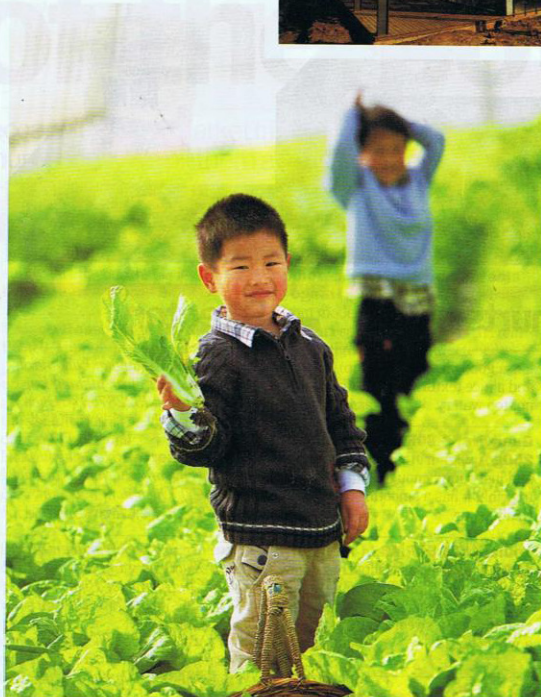
Launched by Tony Zhang, a Sichuan mogul who owns trading and coal companies, as well as a Sichuan restaurant chain in Shanghai,

'We want to show farmers: if you grow organic you can make more money'

Tony's Farm has already earned clear government backing: it will be the only organic farm showcased at the World Expo, with a 200 metre booth and a coveted slot as an official supplier to expo F&B outlets.

The arduous work to rehabilitate the site's soil and water began back in 2004; Tony's Farm received OFDC organic certification in 2008. OFDC is China's only IFOAM-accredited organic certifier (IFOAM is the international group which provides a common worldwide standard for organic certification). Tony's Farm is still undertaking extensive construction, including installing a state of the art 60 million RMB water filtration system.

'We didn't make any money for the first four years and we are still investing lots of money. Agriculture investment is really hard, you have to invest about ten years before you see the return,' says Yang. 'We cleaned the soil through several methods; we grew plants like corn and turned all the vegetables back into the soil, and we input healthy soil and organic fertiliser. We changed the whole



In the green Tony's Farm attracts both young and old; (top) a new greenhouse



environment so when you look at the soil now it's very dark, black and wet: very healthy soil.'

Relatively high prices and a lack of public knowledge on the topic are some of the greatest challenges to China's organic industry. Lin Wenjian, head of production administration at Tony's Farm, believes 'government support is the best way to increase awareness about organics - through organic exhibitions and government education programmes to share knowledge with the public. The government should also arrange an independent body to do strict inspections of organic farms to confirm the quality and standards.'

Public education is an important component of Tony's Farm. More than just a working farm, it will soon be a showcase and visitor attraction. 'All the weeding needs to be done painstakingly, by hand,' says Yang. 'A lot of Shanghai people don't really understand what organic is, they think it just means expensive but they can't

really tell why. So we want to educate the whole market.' Yang says they also want to train local farmers. 'We want to show them: if you grow organic you can make more money and in the end the air will be clean and the soil will be healthy.'

When the current site is complete, Tony's Farm plans to buy other organic farm land, and even list the farm on the stock market. As for now, a Tony's Farm restaurant is under construction in a massive greenhouse where diners will eat surrounded by vegetables growing in raised beds. By the end of this year, they will launch a 100-room hotel designed by the team behind the World Expo German Pavilion and built from recycled shipping containers. 'We want to use these wasted materials to rebuild something, this fits our farm concept of a green industry,' says Yang.

Tony's Farm will have a soft opening in July and official opening with the hotel after the Expo.

How to get Organic goodies

Like many organic farms in Shanghai, Tony's Farm offers home delivery memberships. You can select Chinese or Western produce, and the varieties will change through the seasons, covering a wide range including a half dozen types of lettuce, cucumbers, potatoes, aubergine, tomatoes, basil, thyme, and even lentils and kidney beans.

Membership Prices:
13 weeks: 1,380RMB for a weekly 3-kilo box to feed one-two people
26 weeks: 4,880RMB for a twice-weekly 3-kilo box to feed three-four people
52 weeks, small: 7,980RMB for a twice-weekly 3-kilo box to feed three-four people
52 weeks, large: 13,890RMB for a twice-weekly 6-kilo box to feed five-six people.

If you sign up for a year's membership now, you are eligible to renew at the above rates permanently.

Non-members can order a 3-kilo box for 138RMB. See www.tonysfarm.com for more details.