

jilinspecial

Deers are a way of life in this town in the Northeast

By LIU MINGTAI
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The sika deer, which is valued for its medicinal properties, has become a sort of industry for one town in Jilin province, in Northeast China, thanks to artificial breeding.

Dongfeng has in fact become known as the sika deer town. It opened its first State-owned deer farm and deer-breeding center back in 1947 and has flourished over the past 60 years, setting up eight other similar deer farms.

For many years now, the town and surrounding county have been the nation's top producer of pilose antlers, a common ingredient in traditional Chinese tonics that help the

blood, bones, and joints.

The Dongfeng deer is one of six major sika species in China, and the result of 31 years of breeding efforts, and five generations of deer.

Its breed was recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2004 as a new kind, with genetic stability and strongly disease-resistant.

The "Dongfeng sika" breed has also been registered as a geographical indicator by the State Administration for Industry and Commerce.

Its pilose antlers, as well as the blood and the tail can be found not only on the domestic market, but also in many Southeast Asian nations.

The county has provided more than 10,000 high-quality deer to cities across the nation and had around

165,000 deer by the end of last year. Altogether, there are 6,800 deer farms and individual deer raisers.

The Sanhelinlu Company has more than 4,000 deer at its farm, and is the nation's largest source of deers for breeding.

The Dongfeng Pharmaceutical Co Ltd, another prominent local company involved in the business, cooperates with a number of research organizations, such as the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences' Institute of Special Economic Animal and Plant Science and the Changchun University of Chinese Medicine. They have worked together on 32 types of medicines based on deer products, and 30 other types of healthy food.

The maji pilose antler,

known for its processing techniques, is recognized as a national standard of pilose antler quality.

The local government has preferential policies to encourage investment in the deer business, and seven of its townships have been nominated as deer breeding bases. Each of them is expected to have more than 20,000 deer on average by the end of this year.

They have also spent more than 300,000 yuan (\$47,000) on an official website, to shine a light on the sika deer town.

Sika deer breeding is a part of China's traditional Chinese medicine modernization plan and the government has made a longer-term development plan for the next decade.



PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Dongfeng county, in Jilin province, in Northeast China, is known as the home of sika deer breeding.

It plans to spend more than 3 billion yuan on 14 projects, including deer breeding, deer product processing, and even deer culture and tourism.



WANG HAILING AND LIU ZHENQI FOR CHINA DAILY

Paintings depict the deer and rural life in Dongfeng county.

An imperial tonic now available for everyone

By CHAI HUA

Dongfeng county, near the Changbai Mountains, has a long history of sika deer — 200 years in fact.

It can be traced back to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), when the area around Dongfeng was an imperial hunting reserve, known as the Shengjing hunting field. Commoners were not allowed to live or work in it.

The emperor sent soldiers to protect the area, and many of its rare and valuable plant and animal species were sent to the royal family as tribute. According to historical records, the sika deer was the main form of tribute to the emperor every year.

In late Qing, the emperor hunted in the area less and controls

got looser and many local people started cultivating and hunting on the imperial land.

One autumn, a member of the aristocracy went hunting in the now-neglected land and was overwhelmed by its beauty, scenery, and plentitude. Because of her discovery, the Shengjing Hunting Field sprung to life again for the royal family.

She returned to the palace and told her sister, the Empress Dowager Cixi and, after looking into the matter, Cixi decided to allow 48 local families to hunt within a fixed area under the condition that they contribute 20 sika deer to the government every year.

The hunters used traps and dogs to hunt the sika deer, but gradually found it difficult to satisfy the government's demands.

So, one hunter, Zhao Yunji, was chosen in 1895 to make a proposal on captive breeding to the emperor. The emperor approved the suggestion and even offered the man an official position, putting him in charge of sika deer breeding.

The following year, an imperial deer park was established, and Zhao was appointed to run it. The government ordered that all sika deer hunted in Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces be sent to the deer park. At the time, it had only 60 of the animals.

Then, Zhao Yunji's son, Zhao Zhenshan, succeeded him and the successful breeding of sika deer continued. The deer park grew bigger until, in 1911, it had more than 500 sika deer.

After the monarchy was overthrown, the deer park became

the Zhao's private property and they no longer pay a tribute to the government, so the number of deer grew rapidly.

Zhao Zhenshan asked pharmacologists to look for ways to use the deer antler and fetuses for medicine. They experimented with combining pilose antler, ginseng and other traditional Chinese medicine materials.

Zhao then opened his own pharmacy to sell medicines and tonics made from sika deer antlers, blood and fetuses.

At the opening, the ceremony was something to behold. Even the local warlord Chang Tso-lin and his son, Chang Hsueh-liang, came to congratulate the owner and had were impressed by the deer park's magnificence and the pharmacy's ornamentation.