

Partners : Bureau of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Lanzhou, ROTARACT Torhout (België)

In 1995, a large-scale humanitarian project of the TC-DIALOGUE Foundation was set up for a period of 5 years. It was located in Central China (Gansu Province, region of Lanzhou City). Support and follow-up came from the Bureau of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry in Lanzhou and from the Ministry of Agriculture.

The major problem in this highland region (plateau at 2400 m high) is the absence of irrigation water for the farmland. Rain and melting snow are disappearing rather quickly by run-off and evaporation, creating strong gully erosion, which leads to the loss of huge masses of fertile loam. As the population consists for 100 % of farmers growing wheat, drought is the main reason why this region is one of the poorest in China. Agricultural production is decreasing continuously, due to drought and lack of fertilizer.

Poverty makes it impossible for the local people to build their own typical Chinese greenhouses with very thick clay-walls, oriented to the South, in which considerable quantities of sunshine heat can be stocked. Without any supplementary heating, the temperature in the greenhouses can be kept high enough to enable cultivation of vegetables all year long, also during the six months of winter (October-March). Thereby, vegetables can always be sold at the market in the nearby cities and provide additional annual income.

The TC-DIALOGUE Foundation and the Bureau of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry financed the project. For the first part (15 greenhouses in Wushengyi, nearby Yongdeng City, in 1995), ROTARACT Torhout gave additional financial support. This is a youth division of ROTARY INTERNATIONAL, based in the city of Torhout (Belgium), of which 2 girls and 4 boys spent 3 weeks of their holidays in Wushengyi to help the local people constructing 15 greenhouses, each of them offered to one of the poor families. Once the greenhouses constructed, TerraCottem was mixed with the soil inside. Cultivation of vegetables with a minimum of irrigation water started and the first harvest took place 3 months later. The Bureau of Agriculture of Lanzhou took care of a close follow-up and provided additional training and gave instructions about techniques to optimize yield. In 5 years the annual income of the 15 families continued increasing, reaching the tenfold of the original income.

The same success was booked with the greenhouses constructed during the following years:

1996 in Zhong he

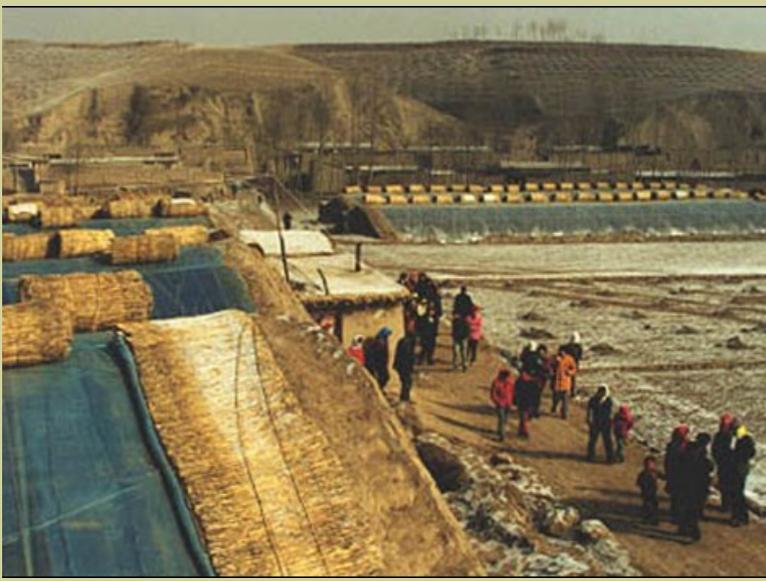
1997 in Guo Jia Van

1998 in Hong He

1999 nearby Lanzhou

In total, 82 greenhouses were constructed, in which different plant species are grown: watermelon, cucumber, celery, potato, corn, garlic, onion, carrot, strawberry and fruit trees (grapes, almonds).

Thanks to the support of TC-DIALOGUE, the use of TerraCottem, and the follow-up by the Bureau of Agriculture of Lanzhou, the standards of living of the local population considerably improved. Before the project, annual income depended directly on success or failure of the harvest and thus on the quantity of rain during summer. Drought was an impoverishment factor. Nowadays, vegetables are produced all year long thanks to the greenhouses and TerraCottem.



Wushengyi January 1996 - Six months after the 6 young Belgians of Rotaract Torhout started building greenhouses with the local people, 15 greenhouses are functional in Wushengyi, helping 15 poor families to get a higher annual income.



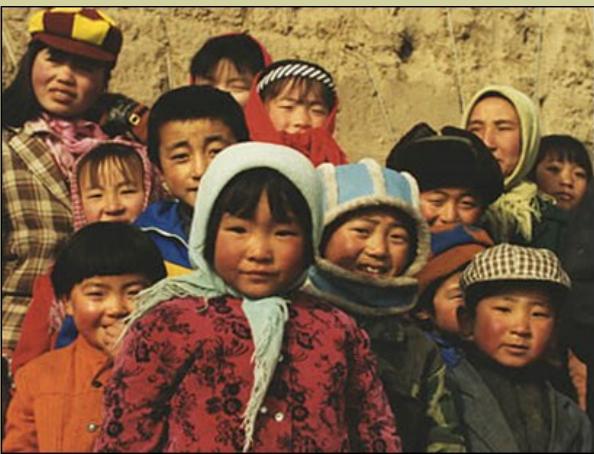
Wushengyi January 1996 - Newly constructed greenhouse with people lowering straw mats and a pile of loam bricks in front.



Wushengyi January 1996 - The local population welcoming Dr. van Cotthem.



Wushengyi 1996 - Happy local farmer in "his" greenhouse with cucumbers.



Wushengyi 1997 - Memorial plate at the entrance of the village to commemorate the TC-DIALOGUE Foundation's project.



Guo Jia Van 1996 - Local farmers planting young watermelons on TC-treated soil in their new greenhouse.



HongHe (Gansu Province) 1999 - Tomato production with TC increases annual income of local population