

Mr. AN Jinlei is a forty-four-year-old farmer at Jinlei Farm at Zilong Village of Hebei Province, Zaoqiang County. He has been exploring and practicing ecological farming on a land of 40 mu since 1995 and has been acclaimed as “Chinese First Farmer” on Internet.

Mr. An grew up in rural China and loved the close relationship he had with land and nature. After high school, he studied at Hengshui Agricultural School and learned agricultural technology. At the same time, his love of Chinese traditional knowledge led him to rethink about life and land. After graduation, when others rushed into city, he went back to hometown as a technician in farm. His main work was to promote pesticides and chemical manuals to farmers. However, he started to doubt them from the strong smell of pesticides.

Then, he traveled to many villages in the county and found that while pesticides increased agricultural production, the quality was decreasing, and land and water were seriously extracted. Mr. An felt uneasy and started to explore ecological farming from 1995. While others used chemical manuals and tractors on land, he collected cow and chicken manure. Sometimes he lived in a shelter on land. Gradually, the food came back to the taste he remembered in memory and the production was competitive.

In 2001, when the village rented out a land of 40 mu, Mr. An and wife bought the land with a price that was ten times higher than others. He was determined to use the land that he perceived as unpolluted. However, he found that the land was still so destroyed by pesticides that the land was too stubborn to be moved. He insisted on physical labor by himself rather than using tractors. He started three months’ fallow on the land, and then used cyclical plantation modes. After about two years, the land was back to life and insects all came back.

While GMO and hybrid seeds brought farmers higher revenue, Mr. An insisted ecological farming. He also explored a way to save water for the dry region he lived in. He also selected and preserved seeds. Now the land is a vivid ecosystem in which humans are only a point of it, together with crops, soil, insects, birds, micro-organisms and underground water. Mr. An believes that the more diverse the ecosystem, the more balanced and stable it is.

Now on this land, numerous insects and birds travel here. One way he checks the health of land is through listening to the sounds from various insects. Villagers have also learned ecological farming from Mr. An, to give up chemical manure, pesticides, and plastic covers. He and his wife also live an ecological life and is exploring a household energy system fueled by wood.

Mr. An's unique philosophies have been moving other people. Last summer, IPDC held an international seminar at Jinlei Farm to discuss about ecological farming with American and Chinese scholars and government officials. He is also working on a report collaborated with WFP and planning on ecological agricultural education programs. "I believe rural China will make ecological dreams come true, and this is why I stay with it."