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The houses of migrants will be improved if they stay long enough on the land

Migrants' Access to Land in Periurban Beijing

Farmland in periurban Beijing is owned by local rural collective units (village committees) but is primarily cultivated by migrants without local *hukou* (household registration). This is different from the typical agricultural production in China where farmland is both owned and cultivated by the local rural population. Two case studies (see figure 1) were conducted in Haidian district of the Beijing suburbs to explore how migrants in Beijing gain access to land.

CONVERSION AND UTILISATION OF FARMLAND

Availability of agriculture land within the borders of Beijing has been declining due to rapid urbanisation and population growth, particularly after 1996. From 1985 to 2002, the area of cultivated land shrank from 421 thousand to 249 thousand hectares, while the total population increased from 9.8 million to 14.23 million. The biggest loss of farmland occurred in the periurban area due to the urban spatial growth pattern, prevalent in Beijing. As a consequence, the majority of land

converted from agriculture to other uses in Beijing is concentrated within the near suburbs.

Efforts have been taken by the government to reserve a certain amount of already cultivated land for continued agricultural use in periurban Beijing, in order to maintain a sustainable urban ecological environment and to provide vegetables and food locally. According to the Beijing Master Plan (1993-2010), further urban development should shift to the outer suburbs and remote counties. And according to the "Ordinance for the protection of primary agricultural land in Beijing", which was issued by the Beijing Municipal People's Congress in 1994, "*The requisition and occupation of primary agricultural land should be strictly controlled*" (Article 15); "*All units and individuals are strictly forbidden to leave cultivated land unused or let it lie waste*" (Article 18).

Farmland in Beijing, as in other parts of China, is owned predominantly by the rural collective units, or village committees. According to the "Land Administration Law of

PRC" (PRC stands for People's Republic of China), land in rural and suburban areas shall be owned by peasant collectives, except the portions that belong to the State, while urban land shall be owned by the State (Article 8). The total population in Beijing can be divided into 3 categories based on *hukou* status: non-agricultural residents, agricultural residents and migrants without local *hukou*. Of these, only the agricultural residents in village committees can share land use rights on the land they own, while non-agricultural residents and migrants cannot.

The total area of cultivated land in Beijing in 2002 was 249 thousands hectares, accounting for 15% of its total area of land. Out of its total population of 14.23 million, 3.29 million or 23% were agricultural residents; 8.07 million or 57% non-agricultural residents; and 2.87 million or 20% migrants. There are 4,005 village committees in Beijing. The average area of cultivated land occupied by each village committee and each agricultural resident is 62 and 0.076 hectares, respectively. In the two case-study villages, Tujing village and Qinghe village, there are 131 and

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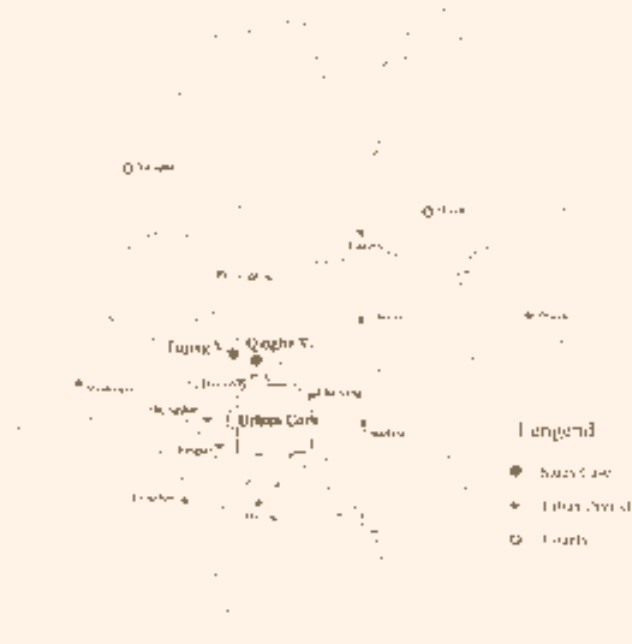
67 hectares of cultivated land, and 753 and 1,343 agricultural residents, respectively, in 2002. The average area of cultivated land per agricultural resident is 0.179 and 0.050 hectares respectively.

However, the majority of agricultural residents in periurban Beijing are reluctant to farm. Instead they are engaged in non-agricultural activities, which pay better and provide higher social welfare benefits (as the most dynamic growth area adjacent to the urban core, the periurban region in Beijing provides good job opportunities and social welfare for the local residents). In 2002, total rural employment in Haidian district was 49,726, but only 25% (or 12,627) was engaged in agriculture, forestry, (animal) husbandry or fishing. In our case-study villages, less than 1% of the rural labourers were involved in agricultural production, more than 80% were employed elsewhere, while the other 19% were unemployed. The latter make their living by renting spare rooms to migrants and by social welfare allocated to them by the village committee. In Qinghe village, which is closer to the urban core, the village committee allocates about 30,000 *yuan* (1 US Dollar = 8.3 Chinese Yuan) annually to each of its residents as social benefits. This amount of money is nearly 5 and 12 times of the average annual per capita income of rural households in Beijing (5880 *yuan*) and China (2476 *yuan*) in 2002, respectively. The income of Qinghe village is primarily derived from leasing land and the development of township and village enterprises (TVE). In Tujing village, there are about 5-6 thousands migrants who rent housing. By charging an average annual rent of 1,200 *yuan* per

Two men who look after the greenhouse harvest cucumbers for sale



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The Location of the two Study cases in Beijing

person, local rural households can generate a total revenue of 6 million *yuan* annually or 8,000 *yuan* per person.

With the increasing costs of local rural labour in periurban Beijing, labour has to be brought in to bridge the labour deficit for agriculture so that the cultivated land is not left unused or wasted (as required by the local laws mentioned earlier).

FEATURES OF MIGRANTS

There were 3.87 million migrants who resided in Beijing for more than one day in November 2002 (according to the National “dynamic monitoring investigation”), while 2.87 million of them resided in Beijing for more than six months. Statistically, they can be regarded as a part of the total population in Beijing. 58 % (or 2.24 million) of these migrants reside in periurban Beijing, 12% in the urban districts and 30 % in the outer suburbs and counties. These migrants are predominantly young and male (80 % in the ages of 15-39 and 62% is male). They are generally better educated than rural residents, but less educated than urban residents in Beijing. Migrants are primarily employed in the “low-end” services and labour-intensive industries: 55% of them are employed in services, such as restaurants, shops, recycling businesses, etc., 35% in manufacturing and construction, 6% as professionals, 2% in agriculture and the rest in other occupations. Although the share in agriculture is quite small, the

total number of persons engaged in agriculture is fairly large, up to 62 thousand, which is larger than the total amount of local rural labourers in the near suburbs (55 thousand in 2002).

MIGRANTS’ ACCESS TO LAND

The only way for migrants to engage in urban agriculture in Beijing is to rent the land from local village committees or local farmers. Two methods of renting were identified in the two case-study villages. With a higher economic profile, a larger population and lesser farmland, the Qinghe village committee has

The majority of agricultural residents in periurban Beijing are reluctant to farm

established a special office for developing most of its cultivated land under greenhouses. Subsequently, these greenhouses are leased under contract to local farmers and migrants to grow popular vegetables, such as tomato, chilli, eggplant, cucumber, etc. These vegetables are sold along the roadsides close to the greenhouse or at large free wholesale markets. The annual rent for such a greenhouse is between 6,000-8,000 *yuan* per *mu*, depending on its quality and available facilities (about 15 *mu* in a hectare). The annual rent for local farmers and migrants is the same, but the former can get back their share of the

Vegetables are sold by the migrants themselves or by roadside vendors



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land leasing revenue gained by the village committee annually. In Qinghe village, migrants rent the majority of greenhouses. The basic contract period is one year only, due to the uncertainty about the lease, but can be renewed

Leasing cultivated land to migrants brings many benefits

yearly. Most of these migrants are young couples from the rural areas of Henan province. In order to minimise costs, they usually leave their children in the home village with their grandparents, and build temporary dwellings beside the greenhouses. They can earn an annual net income of 8,000 - 9,000 *yuan* per person, which is 5 times higher than the average income in their home villages. According to the

New migrants usually build shabby living quarters beside their rented land



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migrants, there are very few violations of contracts in Qinghe village.

The majority of the farmland (about 77%) in Tujing village has been allocated to its local residents, under contract, at the quota of 2 *mu* per person for free use. The rest of the land, equivalent to 450 *mu*, is collectively leased to migrants by the village committee. Those local households who are reluctant to do farming themselves can in turn lease their allocated land to migrants for agriculture use, either collectively through the village committee, or individually. The latter form is less popular and is usually refused by migrants for fear of contractual validity. The price for renting land is generally 800 *yuan* per *mu* per year, much lower than in Qinghe village, where the land is rented with the greenhouses intact. The basic contract period in Tujing is usually 5 years, much longer than that in Qinghe village. This is because most of the tenants (migrants) have to build the greenhouses themselves to enhance productivity of the land. Another reason is that the conversion of land for other uses is less eminent here. Like in Qinghe village, most of the migrants in Tujing village are also young couples from rural areas of Henan province, who leave their children behind and build temporary living quarters on the land they lease. They can also earn an annual income of 8000 - 9000 *yuan* per person. However, there are more cases of contract

violations in Tujing village and migrants who rent land here face higher risks.

OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Leasing cultivated land to migrants by contract is an arrangement that brings many benefits to the local rural residents, the migrants and the society at large. For local rural residents, it not only generates additional revenue, but also more importantly, relieves their obligation for not letting the farmland stay unused or wasted. It also helps them to move on to higher paid jobs. For migrants, this practice provides a good opportunity to earn more money by using their skills. From society's point of view, the valuable farmland in the periurban area becomes more productive. Furthermore, the improvement of cultivated land slows down the process of urban encroachment in this area.

However, the methods of land leasing and the situation of the migrants should be improved. Generally, migrants feel safer in signing contracts with the local village committees rather than with individual farmers because village committees are the legal owners of land and the basic administrative unit. Further measures should be taken to guarantee the land tenure rights of migrants during the contractual period. The production and living conditions of migrants in agriculture also need to be improved.