

Research on Guiding College Graduates to Grassroots Employment from the Perspective of “New Farmers”

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Abstract: The term “new farmers” was first reported in 2005, and similar terms such as “urban returnee youth” and “returnee entrepreneurs” have been used to summarize the returnees who have migrated from the cities to the countryside to engage directly or indirectly in the cause related to agriculture, rural areas and farmers. The “new farmers” is a product of the Internet empowering the “Three Rural Issues”, a new group of farmers, and the development and growth of this group has opened up new ideas for promoting the employment and entrepreneurship of college graduates. As the occupational characteristics of “new farmers” are highly coupled with the potential of college students, guiding them to into “new farmers” can not only effectively alleviate the employment pressure on college graduates and realize their personal value, but also has far-reaching significance in realizing rural revitalization and promoting agricultural modernization.

Keywords: College graduates employment; New farmers; Rural revitalization

1. Significance of promoting college students to become “new farmers”

The need for urban-rural integration and development. Since the reform and opening up, China’s “Three Rural” situation has undergone a historic change, the relative gap between urban and rural incomes is gradually narrowing, but the urban-rural dichotomy has not yet been completely eliminated, the rural industrial structure is single, the human habitat environment is poor, and the urban-rural income gap is large, resulting in the majority of rural graduates unwilling to return to their hometowns, which seriously impedes the overall advancement of China’s economic modernization. In 2018, China has promulgated the comprehensive implementation of the rural revitalization strategy, in which the “Talent and Technology Support Action” is one of the keys to the rural revitalization strategy. In this context, young people, mainly college students, are the most capable group to revitalize the countryside, and with the right guidance and policy support, they can not only work well, but also settle there, and there will be a linkage effect, attracting the majority of rural laborers to return to their hometowns to start businesses and seek employment.

The need for agricultural modernization. The contradiction between the growing needs of our people for a better life and the unbalanced and inadequate development is most prominent in the countryside, and the weakest link in the journey towards modernization is agricultural modernization; our country is still in the primary stage of socialism and will be in this stage for a long time, and its characteristics are to a large extent manifested in the countryside. In building a strong socialist modernization country in an all-round way, the most arduous and burdensome task lies in the countryside, the broadest and deepest foundation lies in the countryside, and the greatest potential and backbone also lies in the countryside. The implementation of the rural revitalization strategy is an indispensable requirement for resolving the principal contradictions in China’s society in the new era, and for realizing the “Two Centenary Goals” and the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation.

2. The feasibility of college students becoming “new farmers”.

Employment difficulties. In recent years, the employment pressure on college graduates has been unrelenting, and every year is the most difficult employment season. Especially since the new normal in economy with the deep adjustment of economic structure, uncertainties increase, and the employment situation is even more difficult. Coupled with the “too rational” employment concept, college students preferred to enter governmental or public institutions, which gave birth to the non-employment and slow employment. They are most reluctant to work in small and medium-sized enterprises, township enterprises, in fact, these two can provide most of

the jobs. This has led to a situation where, on the one hand, “thousands of people are competing for popular jobs in big cities” and, on the other hand, no one turn to unpopular jobs in the countryside.

The commencement of counter-urbanization. In the process of industrialization, social development to a certain extent will appear “counter-urbanization” phenomenon will appear in social development, and it has been practiced by Western countries. Although there is no natural “counter--urbanization” in China, more and more people have begun to want to return to the countryside from the bottom of their hearts. City life is fast-paced and stressful, with high costs, and many young people face the pressure of buying a house, which can seriously affect their quality of life once they take out a mortgage. No resources, no funds, no parents to help, the difficulties of survival in the city confront the young people; therefore, returning to the countryside to start a business may be the ideal choice.

National policy support. From 2004 to 2022 for nineteen consecutive years, the Central Document No. 1 had taken the “Three Rural” as the theme, giving top priority to the “Three Rural” issue in China’s socialist modernization. On February 13, 2023, the No. 1 document of the Central Committee, “Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Doing a Good Job in Comprehensively Promoting Rural Revitalization Priority Work in 2023” was released. The increasing policy support and improving support measures will undoubtedly attract more people to devote themselves to the three rural cause.

The advantages of the countryside are becoming more and more obvious. On January 16, 2004, the Ministry of Information Industry issued the Notice on the Pilot Work of Village Internet Access Project in Some Provinces and Districts, and at the same time issued the Implementation Plan for Rural Communications Universal Service--Village Access Project. Since then, infrastructure construction in rural areas has been accelerated, and highways, electric power, drinking water, telephone network, cable TV network, Internet, etc. have basically achieved full coverage. Although there is still a considerable gap in public products and services compared with those in the cities, there is no longer an absolute barrier between urban and rural areas because of the “village-to-village” project. The natural environment, natural resources and cultural resources of the countryside have a unique charm, and under the high pressure of work, people would like to get close to nature. The popularity of rural and folk tourism in recent years may be indicative of the problem.

3. Measures to guide college students to grow up as “new farmers”

Guiding college students to grow up as “new farmers” requires the joint support of the whole society, and a systematic project and system design is required, in which the role played by colleges and universities is irreplaceable.

Highlight the identity of “new farmers”. Personal identity is a very important symbol, which is particularly important in the context of Chinese discourse. The persistence of the household registration system has resulted in many people having an additional assigned identity, i.e., urban and rural hukou. It is an indisputable fact that rural hukou are at a disadvantage, and most importantly, rural hukou seems to be labeled as having no prospects and no way out. Before entering university, we are used to hearing inspirational words about studying hard to get out of the mountains and working in the city, so it is hard to understand that someone would take the initiative to return to the countryside from the city. Therefore, it is necessary to establish the cultural concept of “new farmers”. In the feudal society, the social status of peasants was second only to that of “scholars” and higher than that of craftsmen and merchants. However, in today’s society, farmers and migrant workers seem to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, labeled as “inflexible”, “dirt” and “uneducated”, and it is difficult to reverse this prejudice in a short period of time, and such prejudice will be a burden on the returning college students. Therefore, from the public opinion propaganda, “new farmers” should be defined as a group of people with passion, pursuits, knowledge, style, charm. They have the ability and opportunity to secure a stable job in the government system; however, they give up and take the initiative to start their own business in the countryside. Only in this way can we generally accept the “new farmers” and try to become “new farmers”.

Continuously strengthen innovation and entrepreneurship education. First of all, colleges and universities can introduce mentors through incentives to enrich the faculty of entrepreneurship mentors. They can also carry out internal training, such as organizing qualified teachers on campus to go into the countryside or agribusinesses to experience the entrepreneurial process. Through entrepreneurship lectures, activity seminars, simulated classes and other methods, we can accelerate the improvement of the entrepreneurship practical quality of the mentors in school. Secondly, the school can also hire part-time mentors, such as famous entrepreneurs in the industry, including experts or front-line managers in the fields of venture capital, securities and finance, consulting and management, etc.; successful people in agriculture-related entrepreneurship or college students and village cadres with successful entrepreneurship. These part-time mentors can provide students with practical entrepreneurial guidance and experience, and help them better understand the entrepreneurial environment and market demand.

Improve the entrepreneurship mentor system. Through measures such as introducing mentors, internal training and hiring part-time mentors, more entrepreneurial mentors with rich experience and practical ability can be cultivated to provide students with better entrepreneurial guidance and services. At the same time, this also helps to promote the deep integration between universities and society and the integrated development of industry-university-research. In this process, China's applied universities can make full use of domestic resources, such as government departments, associations and rural cooperatives, as well as international cooperation and exchange platforms, such as the Chinese government scholarships and the Belt and Road Initiative, to attract and cultivate excellent entrepreneurship mentors. In addition, colleges and universities can establish close cooperation with local governments, enterprises, research institutions, etc., to jointly promote the implementation of the "New Farmers" entrepreneurship mentor improvement project. In the process of implementation, universities should also pay attention to the following points: first, ensure the diversity of the mentor team, including mentors of different ages, genders, geographic regions and industrial backgrounds; second, pay attention to the continuous training and development of mentors in order to maintain their leading position in the field of entrepreneurship; and third, strengthen the communication and interaction with students, so as to understand their personalized needs and characteristics, and provide them with more targeted guidance.

Strengthening vocational education. Since China's reform and opening up, vocational education has developed rapidly, providing a wealth of vocational skills training and upgrading opportunities for the majority of workers. However, compared with the western developed countries, there is still a certain gap in China's vocational education. In order to meet the needs of social development, we need to further reform and improve the vocational education system. It is necessary to strengthen the integration between vocational education and industrial development. Through in-depth research and analysis, we should understand the needs and trends of various industries and formulate targeted vocational education courses and training programs. At the same time, enterprises are encouraged to participate in the practical aspects of vocational education to ensure that students are able to learn and apply what they have learned in the actual working environment. It is necessary to optimize the allocation of vocational education resources. We should increase investment in vocational education, improve practical training facilities and the teaching environment, raise the quality of teachers and promote the convergence of vocational education and higher education. We should establish a perfect mechanism for further studies, so that more graduates of vocational schools have the opportunity to enter higher education institutions for further studies and improve their comprehensive quality and professional ability. At the same time, colleges and universities should also increase their support for vocational education, carry out cooperation among industries, universities and research institutes, cultivate more high-quality technical talents for the society and strengthen international exchanges and cooperation. Drawing on the experience and practices of developed countries in the West, we should introduce advanced educational concepts and technical means, and constantly improve the international competitiveness of China's vocational education.

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