

## Role of China's Mushroom Societies in the Development of the Mushroom Industry

YINGJIE PAN

Shanghai Fisheries University, Shanghai 200090, China. E-mail: yjpan@shfu.edu.cn

**Abstract:** The China Mushroom Society is a non-profitable and people-to-people body acting as a consultant for the government to map out policies related to mushroom production. The Society is responsible for providing the necessary proposals, for seeking support and investment for the production industry from various government sectors, and for organizing opportunities for all sectors related to production, circulation, processing, research and extension to widely discuss and exchange information on the main issues related to production. Moreover, the Society has the additional responsibility of collecting and collating all the good experience from various production areas, and to ensure the information is disseminated nationwide. By playing a superior representative role within the industry, the Society also serves as a hub for coordinating all links related to mushroom production and marketing throughout the country.

**Key words:** China Mushroom Society, international cooperation, marketing, mushroom production, mushroom quality, regional and local mushroom societies.

### 1 Introduction

During the past three decades, the mushroom industry in China has developed rapidly. The industry has also seen a sharp increase in product quality, so that a vast number of mushroom farmers have had their income quickly increased. Mushroom cultivation has become a new industry for agricultural reconstruction in China's countryside, particularly in relatively remote and poverty-affected regions with comparatively abundant natural resources. There are nearly one million mushroom growers rising out of poverty and on the road to wealth through the development of mushroom cultivation. Such a tremendous change is the immediate result of the support policies of government, both central and local, through which investment of large amounts of capital and market fostering has been undertaken.

### 2 The Role of Mushroom Societies

Mushroom societies at every level have also played an important role in this expansion, acting as a bridge between the government and mushroom producers, a position that cannot be filled by either the government or the market. The regional societies, in accordance with the features of the local industrial structure, play active roles in the fields of technical exchange, circulation of goods and trade coordination. For example, they provide prompt and timely feedback and marketing information to mushroom producers, and coordinate the relationship between enterprises and producers. The regional societies also facilitate the distribution of different kinds of high quality fungal strains and advanced cultivation technology, as well as actively reflecting the issues and problems affecting mushroom producers and enterprises.

An organic and integrated system has been formed within the mushroom societies, headed on a national level by the China Mushroom Society, whereby hundreds of regional societies, which are widely scattered in all major mushroom growing provinces and counties throughout China, operate at the local level. Such a system has become relatively mature with the high rate of development within the mushroom industry, and has been an

indispensable pillar supporting the growing industry.

In accordance with the industry's structure in their respective regions, the regional mushroom societies have played an active part in facilitating technology exchange, circulating information, and coordinating distribution. They provided timely feedback and market information to mushroom producers, coordinate the relationship between enterprises and mushroom growers, and take the initiative in reporting to the local authorities the difficulties besieging mushroom growers and enterprises. In more recent years, such societies have been increasingly effective in activities related to the promotion of improved mushroom varieties and advanced cultivation technologies, identification and prevention of diseases, and in safeguarding and protecting the interests of the mushroom growers. To illustrate these features, we can take as a good example the local mushroom society in Zhejiang Province. At one point, due to abnormal weather conditions and contaminated spawn, there was widespread low output of poor quality mushrooms. The local society promptly appealed to experts for an on-site study. These experts duly identified the problems and provided solutions, thereby resulting in the stabilization of mushroom quality and a reduction in the economic losses sustained by the growers. Since the regional societies are located close to the production areas, they are very familiar with all the links between production, processing and distribution, as well as the relevant problems. Proper proposals and/or advice put forward by these societies are not only adopted by local governments but also welcomed among the mushroom growers. In many mushroom-producing areas, when the growers encounter problems in production or sales, the first body they turn to is always the local mushroom society. These days, many production areas are frustrated by problems associated with sales and low prices. Regional societies help to identify markets, obtain information on market demands, and search for distribution channels. It is their exceptional work that helps overcome the disadvantages of these scattered mushroom farmers in terms of market development.

China covers a vast land area, and the wide distribution of mushrooms over the country has pre-determined distinct regional characteristics in terms of production. Provincial societies are very active these days in organizing various activities that target the real needs of the local mushroom growers. In regions where there is a long traditional of mushroom cultivation, their work has focused mainly on raising mushroom quality, preventing pollution, and encouraging the cultivation of new mushroom varieties, while in regions where mushroom cultivation is a relatively new concept, they help the farmer grasp the technology. Now, mushroom production in all these new regions is experiencing smooth development. Provincial societies have also shifted their production-centered work more towards market fostering and guidance on consumer trends, especially with respect to the development of an integrated production-sales industry chain. In this context, the societies have held a variety of annual trade fairs. In this way, local mushroom products are introduced to domestic markets and some have even entered the world market. So far, more than a dozen sizable specialized mushroom markets have emerged. These, and a series of influential mushroom trade fairs that have been held recently, have undoubtedly had a propelling effect on regional mushroom production.

### 3 The China Mushroom Society

The China Mushroom Society is a non-profit making, people-to-people, body acting as a consultant for the government to map out the relevant policies for the mushroom industry. The Society is responsible for providing proposals on policy-making, for seeking support and investment capital for the production industry from various government sectors, and for organizing opportunities for all sectors in relation to production, circulation, processing, research and extension. It also promotes the wider discussion and exchange of information on the main issues related to production. Moreover, the Society has the additional responsibility of collecting and collating all the valuable experience from various production areas, and to ensure the information is disseminated nationwide. In particular, an active relationship has been established and strengthened within the industry through various forms of Society-organized countrywide questionnaires.

Four years ago, when the mushroom industry was developing rapidly in terms of quantity but less steadily from

a quality standpoint, the Society proposed that the industry should focus on both production efficiency and product quality. Subsequently, a new variety of mushroom, variegated *Lentinula edodes* (花菇), or 'pollution-free mushroom' and new forms of cultivation technology were introduced and extended nationwide. In addition, fostering mushroom-related enterprises in China was given top priority. Through the expansion of secondary processing capacity, and the opening up of new markets, thousands upon thousands of mushroom growers scattered far and wide over a vast mushroom-producing area were brought into contact with each other and given guidance on marketing operations.

The mushroom industry in China has changed tremendously compared to what it was 30 years ago. The enterprise-based market and quality control considerations have become the main factors in a mushroom industry driving vast numbers of mushroom growers. For instance, the Dashanhe Company is a large enterprise with an annual output of 10,000 metric tons of dried mushroom exports which alone accounts for the production of 30,000 mushroom growers distributed over four different provinces. Such an evolution in the mushroom industry owes a great deal to the promotional work undertaken by the China Mushroom Society.

The Council of the China Mushroom Society is formed through democratic consultation among all the regional mushroom societies. Members of the Council, elections to which are held every four years, have wide geographical and functional representation, with members involved in production, research and teaching, mushroom-related enterprises and distribution. Routine affairs of the Society between sessions are handled by a Standing Council, and meeting of both the Council and the Standing Council are convened several times each year.

Furthermore, the rapid development of China's mushroom industry has had a major positive impact on less-developed countries while, at the same time, mushroom societies of other nations have also played important roles in the extension and demonstration of Chinese technology and industrial models. In the past few years, international mushroom societies have established and intensified closer communication with Chinese mushroom societies, and paid much closer attention to Chinese mushroom production. Three international symposia related to mushroom production were recently held in China, through which foreign counterparts have gained further knowledge of China's mushroom industry while new technology, especially in relation to marketing, and product processing and preservation, have been introduced into China. It is believed that wider cooperation and communication between Chinese and international societies will be strengthened and further developed in the future.

Recently, the Society has been working on a development plan for the mushroom industry in the next five to ten years, especially in terms of addressing consumption trends, market fostering and enterprise subsidies. Attention to these aspects will most certainly play a positive role in the sustainable development of the industry.

### 4 Concluding Remarks

Generally, local governments initiate the establishment of regional mushroom societies, and encourage farmers and enterprises to become members. They provide substantial support in the form of operational funds and offices, or by sending full-time specialists to direct to work of the societies. At the present time, the function and position of mushroom societies at all levels in China are on the rise. These societies not only propel the development of the industry, but also take part in trade negotiations on behalf of governments, e.g. Sino-Japanese mushroom negotiations. International mushroom societies (e.g. the International Society for Mushroom Science, and the World Society for Mushroom Biology and Mushroom Products) have also strengthened their connections with China and intensified their attention on the Chinese mushroom industry. So far, three international symposiums have been held in China, which have furthered international understanding of the Chinese mushroom industry and introduced to China information about world markets as the well as processing and distribution technology. We can confidently predict that such relationships will be fortified and developed in the coming years.