

## Farmer Tan Wei: supported by TuMaMa in developing his potato business

*Located in Zhaotong, Yunnan, China*

*Contributed by Dr. Peter VanderZaag, Yunnan Normal University*

Tan Wei is the President of the company and the company also includes as managers, Li Jun and Tan Yan Xiong (family members) and 2 other cooperators, Jin Rong Yu and Liu Yun Peng who work together on another farm in another county with Tan Wei. Ludian County is a high elevation mountainous region of greater than 2500 masl with primarily a single summer crop possible as it gets cold in the winter season.

**Public Partner:** Ludian Agricultural Bureau, provided some crop inputs, grant money for some farm implements (tractors, seeders and harvester) as well as and technical and farm management advice.

**Principle Private Partners:** TuMaMa (develops and sells organic/humic acid fertilizers with inorganic NPK added as required by potatoes, apples and other crops), provided technical support, bank loan guarantee and fertilizers on credit.

### 1. Collaboration and institutional support for the new family potato farm

Tan Wei's parents were small potato growers and marketed potatoes from other farmers as well. Tan Wei graduated in 2012 with a business finance degree. After working for his uncle in construction for a year, he came home to farm with his parents in August 2013. In the beginning of



2014, he started growing his own potato crops covering 30 hectares. He procured local potatoes as seed. In the following year, Ludian county experienced a terrible earth quake on August 3, 2014. Relief efforts included TuMaMa donating 12 Tonnes free organic fertilizer. Tan Wei was fortunate to get a portion of that through the Zhaotong City Association of Industry and Commerce. That started his special relationship with TuMaMa. Later that year he became an agent for TuMaMa selling the fertilizers in Huo Dehong

*TuMaMa, CEO Elven Huang, TuMaMa President, Peter Wang with Tan Wei (far right) in the office of TuMaMa.*

township, Ludian County. He started by selling 30 Tonnes to local farmers and used that much on his own farm as well in the first year. Business expanded to over 120 Tonnes in year 2 and over 300 Tonnes in the 3rd year. Through their friendship, Tan Wei sought opportunity to rapidly expand his parents' potato business to almost 350 hectares now.

TuMaMa organized and cosponsored the Zhaotong City Government Seed Potato Forum from July 11-13, 2016. This was a major turning point in making the potato a high-profile possibility for seed potato production and brand marketing both seed and table potatoes in China as well as abroad. It changed the view of potatoes from being a subsistence crop to a commercial business crop by most of the local participants at the forum. Tan Wei got the vision as to the great possibilities for his farm too at this forum. TuMaMa opened the door to new possibilities in getting more land for Tan Wei to grow potatoes, marketing his crops and connecting him with various technical experts as well as linking him with different levels of local governments for promoting and purchasing his seed potatoes. TuMaMa assisted Tan Wei, who really had no assets, by guaranteeing bank financing for almost USD300,000 in 2016-17. Tan Wei has continued to utilize the TuMaMa fertilizers for his farming operation and remains an agent. Tan Wei and his sister and brother in law are all around 30 years of age!

## **2. Quality & healthy potato planting material**

With the assistance of TuMaMa, Tan Wei was able to get seed potatoes initially through the local County Agricultural Bureau and later from some larger specialized seed suppliers of greenhouse minitubers (G0) in Qu Jing, Xuan Wei and Xun Dian districts. The good quality of the initial seed permits him to sell seed locally of G2 and sometimes G1 to other farmers in the Zhaotong city area. The key varieties are: Qingshu 9, C 88, Weiyu 5, Xisen 3, and Xuanshu 2.

## **3. Farm management & crop production techniques**

TuMaMa provides technical support along with 10 agronomists that Tan Wei has now hired to do the job across all his many fields of potatoes in 4 main areas. Tan Wei rents land from farmers and hires the same farmers to do the work of growing the crop on a piece work payment scheme. The farmers must follow the suggestions given by the Agronomists who also calculate their piece work payments.



*Agronomist indicating the scale of the freshly planted potato crop in a new area of the county.*

#### 4. Sustainable production and storage of potatoes

Sustainable farming practices has so far eluded this farm as well as all the other farms in the area. Potatoes are grown every summer season year after year! Major discussions are being held as to how to improve the soils by growing rotation crops and intercropping with legumes. These possibilities are being evaluated with TuMaMa's leadership.

Storage is still rudimentary with Tan Wei renting warehouse space in Huo DeHong Township of Ludian County as well as in Zhao Yang District, both in Zhaotong city. Plans are in place for Lucian county to build a large potato storage facility. Tan Wei plans to rent space in the facility for the short term and later build his own storage and handling/grading facility.

#### 5. Creating added value (branding, packaging, excellent appropriate storage, transportation)

Branding the potatoes that he produces and sells, is his short-term priority. He will add value by doing so. In the long run, he visualizes that his branding this will assist many more farmers besides himself. He plans to make that his main business in the future. Buying other farmers potatoes and branding them as well through his handling / grading/ packaging system will be a benefit to all.



*Tan Wei in one of his potato fields*

#### 6. Marketing.

Zhaotong city has a population of 6 million. Over 20% of the people live in poverty. The government has an aggressive program to provide improved seed potatoes to all farmers free of charge. This has created a huge demand for seed potatoes which government agencies purchase and distribute. In 2018, all his seed is spoken for before he planted except for Qingshu 9 seed that he will plan to sell locally. Diversification of clients for selling seed as well as table potatoes is being pursued by Tan Wei. He now sells seed to other provinces as well as to winter crop farmers in DeHong, Western Yunnan.

*Quotes by Tan Wei:*

1. *“My partnership with TuMaMa is a win-win as both parties’ benefit from the close working relationship.”*
2. *“TuMaMa is like a super charger that drives my business”*
3. *“TuMaMa has many contacts and acts as a bridge to the nearby and far away entrepreneurs who can support our potato business technically”*
4. *“The seed potato forum that TuMaMa cosponsored and organized in 2016 opened the eyes of many local potato farmers as to the great opportunities there are for those who wish to take the potato business to the next level”*

*Quote by Elven Huang, CEO TuMaMa:*

*“We see this type of linkage and support as part of our Corporate Social Responsibility, it gives us great pleasure to see entrepreneurs like Tan Wei succeed in the commercialization of the potato.”*