SERIES INTRODUCTION
In the year 2050 there will 9 billion people. How do we feed them safely, fairly and well. And make sure very mouth is fed.

COMMENTARY
Happy Farms – the computer game about farming young people are crazy about across China. The player - Sherry Han in Shanghai.

Sherry
Melons, strawberries, apples and pumpkins, there’s vegetables and fruits.

(Interviewer) It’s kinda like a real farm?
Yeah it’s pretty fun actually

COMMENTARY
We’ve set Sherry’s Social Media agency, Resonance, a task – can they make farming as popular with young people - in the real world?

Resonance’s hip offices in Shanghai’s trendy French Concession area show why so many young people love city life. Our challenge - make farming as hip and alluring as life in their office.

Rand
I think one of the things the client wants us to do is figure out, is there a way of making farming more interesting so that people on the farms think its cooler to stay on the farms and therefore they don’t try and go to the cities. Or people from the cities might want to become farmers.

COMMENTARY
Californian-born Rand and his wife Sherry are Resonance’s founders. They use the internet to create and identify trends and tricks that can create a buzz for global brands.

Rand
Is it possible for us to create a branding campaign that can influence people to want to become farmers? So any ideas?

COMMENTARY
Here in hectic reality, many young people don’t find farming fun and sexy. They’re leaving the land. And Resonance’s research shows it’s not just China.

We wanted to see if farming can be rebranded - before there are too few people left to grow the food we need in the future.

President Nwanze
Who’s going to feed the world come 2050? Is it the farmer of today, the old woman with a baby on her back and a hoe in her hand? No, it’s the youth of today.

Most African countries have anything from forty to sixty per cent of the population below twenty years. Why are the youth not attracted to agriculture? They say it’s not sexy enough. That’s not true.
Agriculture is not what is not sexy. It's when you start making money out of a business it becomes sexy. It is the money that is sexy. You have to show them that you can make money out of agriculture. Then it becomes sexy.

**Professor Wen Tiejun (translation)**
There is a public perception that causes farmers to think if you don’t go to the city then you’re backwards! This is the biggest issue right now.

**Carlo Petrini (translation)**
There’s been a progressive tendency to think of farm-work as a lowly profession. You see. And that’s in the whole world! The return to the land is one of the most fundamental questions for the future.

**COMMENTARY**
Shanghai’s booming. In two thousand and ten there were over two hundred and forty million migrants from the countryside in China’s cities – more than double five years earlier. They’re here in search of work, love, or a way to get rich quick.

For Rand and Sherry, the bar’s another great place to brainstorm reversing the flight to the cities – as well as showing why there is a flight to the cities.

Even close to Shanghai, we came across villages where there was hardly anyone under forty. The average age round here - closer to sixty. Many much older.

Even the bigger villages can seem eerily quiet. Across China, a quarter of traditional farming lands now lie idle. Partly because youngsters don’t want to farm.

Often it’s already hard-pressed women who stay in the countryside – or in some remote corners of China - maybe nobody stays at all.

**Zuo Xuejin**
In future - I think some villages, some townships - especially those in the middle and the western region of the country - will be deserted. There will be no people living in those villages anymore.

**Du Zhixiong (translation)**
This is a common phenomenon faced by current day Korea, Japan and Taiwan province. They all face this problem. So China is not a special case.

**COMMENTARY**
At the Jiaxian Rice Company, five hours from Shanghai, farmer Xie Tongzhou is sixty four. His workforce is fighting fit and productive but their age - average sixty - shows the issue we’ve asked Resonance to address.

The average Chinese farmer is now fifty. In the USA, fifty eight. And Japan, over sixty. Even if anyone younger wanted to work here, Xie Tongzhu can’t afford the wages they’d demand.

**Xie Tongzhu (translation)**
Since I can’t find any young workers, I go for older people. It’s not so easy for them to work in the city. They’re willing to work for twenty to thirty thousand renminbi.

**COMMENTARY**
The age of Xie Tongzhu’s eighteen employees an issue – but no disaster, productivity per acre is high.
Interview (translation)

Interviewer: Can I ask how old you are?
Farmer 1: I’m 66
Farmer 2: 56
Farmer 3: I’m 67
Farmer 4: I’m 63

COMMENTARY
Xie Tongzhu has over a hundred hectares of rice paddy fields. Of course one answer to an ageing workforce the world over has been to mechanize. But Xie has problems even finding the young people to man the machines he’d need.

Xie Tongzhu (translation)
Rationally speaking, since I have various difficulties in terms of farm labour, I want to look into mechanization. But the problem is, even if I acquired machinery, there is a lack of tractor and mechanical operators.

If you find an operator, you need to train them and pay them well. If you don’t pay them well - no one will operate the machines.

COMMENTARY
Xie Tongzhu’s own son Xie Xinhui left for Nanjing City to be a doctor. He’s back visiting with his family.

Xie Xinhui (translation)
Young people are mostly enrolled in higher education or working in the city where the income is higher. Life is hard in the village. The sun beats down on them every day. Many young people

COMMENTARY
Xie Tongzhu’s team using the ancient Chinese farming method of weed-destroying ducks to hoe the paddy fields. But ducks can’t entirely replace humans.

Xie Tongzhu (translation)
This is a big problem in our villages. If our generation stops farming, who will take our place? We’re worried about this.

COMMENTARY
The world’s ageing farm workforce nowhere clearer than in Xie Tongzhu’s canteen. Raising the question – who will grow the food to feed nine billion people by 2050?

Du Zhixiong (translation)
Chinese society is paying attention to this issue, there are many discussions regarding who will be China’s farmers in 20 or 30 years time. Who will undertake the work of China’s agricultural production?

COMMENTARY
Back in Shanghai and its twenty three million residents, many from families who come from remote areas of China. Rand and Sherry continue their research.

In many remote areas of China young people have little choice but to stay on the land. And yet they may face a destitute future – with millions of farm-workers in China earning less than two dollars a day. And fifty million rural workers currently unemployed.
Sun Yinhong

Another side of the coin is that we have still the poor, remote areas - what we call the 'very rural areas' - that farmers, households cannot migrate out, and they have to stay on the land.

They have to make a living from those pieces of land. And in terms of population, that's a big population. And, well, we have to support them - support agriculture which is their main source of income. This is not just because of food, I think this is more because of livelihood for those people......

COMMENTARY

IFAD – the UN agency that assists small-scale farmers – is working with the government to invest in rural communities.

Sun Yinhong

What we are doing is to directly tackle this situation. On the one hand of creating opportunities in the rural areas for the current labour force, but also trying to get back the younger labour, by providing services, by providing infrastructure, by making agriculture more productive - and more, actually, more... generate more income.

COMMENTARY

Time for Rand and Sherry to review their research. For luxury brands, Resonance try and involve so-called influencers – or trendsetters - celebrities like footballers, and people in the news.

Could they find such “influencers” to improve the image of farming?

Rand

So, some kind of influencer strategy - where we get some kind of hero who's doing really well, and maybe this guy because he's doing so well... this might be is a stretch... but he meets some celebrities...Maybe it's too far, but he gets a lot of 'face', government guys, cuts a ribbon ... and then we social media – that, and it makes everybody else super jealous, all the guys that went to the city to make this living. They suddenly realize... ‘Oh My God’, I could have been this guy if I’d just stayed in the village…and put some effort into that particular thing.

COMMENTARY

The search on for young farming heroes.

Petrinl (translation)

Young people will be the new protagonists of a new agriculture – I don’t think that the new agriculture will be based on old farmers – young people will be the new protagonists.

COMMENTARY

So who can Resonance find to be a role model... or influencer? It's off to the farm to find out.

Four hours drive from Shanghai is “Big Buffalo Citizen Farm” in Jiaze County.

Rand

So I guess we’re here

COMMENTARY

…and perhaps the first hero and, influencer, Resonance are looking for. The farm doesn’t breed buffaloes - It grows rice and vegetables and here - geese. The farm’s run by Cheng Cunwang - whose PHD is in real estate - but who remembered his grandparents’ farm. And how different life used to be for farmers in the good old days.
Cheng (translation)
Traditional Chinese society used to say: “Out of scholars, farmers, artisans and merchants, it is the farmer who is the strongest and the most capable in the family, whilst the artisans and merchants are not considered as capable.”

It is therefore the farmer who is given two bowls of rice, and the artisans and merchants only one.

COMMENTARY
Cheng’s innovation — his team deliver fresh vegetables directly into the homes of city dwellers — avoiding supermarkets and shops.

For city-dwellers Rand and his colleague Jeff, this kind of farming does seem good fun. But they also hear how tough life can be for most farmers in China.

Cheng (translation)
As a bunch of young students, working in agriculture for several years, we learned that the reality of farming is that it’s really hard work, that farmers’ incomes are very low, and they are right at the bottom of society.

COMMENTARY
The idea took off after recent food safety scandals. Every week the farm prepares packages of fresh — and safe — vegetables for households in nearby Changzhou who pay to join up. Today they’re packing food for eighty families.

Cheng (translation)
On Wednesday and Saturday we deliver vegetables we picked in the morning to the homes of our members. This task begins at four or five AM, when we begin picking vegetables.

COMMENTARY
Cheng’s innovation is to make farming more of a profession, raising the profile and dignity of farming. He and his team even seem a bit hip and alternative.

Cheng (translation)
Our farm is considered “alternative” because farmers around here all grow flower and nursery stock, yet we grow grain and vegetables. Why? Because citizens’ needs for healthy and safe agricultural products are on the rise. They’re willing to pay five to six times more than the market price for health and safety.

COMMENTARY
Servicing a booming urban middle class could give farmers new status as middle-class professionals themselves, according to Cheng’s university mentor.

Prof. Wen Tiejun (translation)
According to international studies, China’s middle class has reached almost five hundred million

Their demands on agriculture, first of all are its safety, and a diversified selection of food. I think what they want is the same as other middle class people all the over world. We see this as a stimulant, a challenge, but also an opportunity.

Cheng (translation)
If we can make our style of farming more hip, maybe people would become interested in this modern style of farm life and work. People are always attracted to things that are hip!
COMMENTARY
Cheng’s business venture has shown Resonance that trust and dignity can help make farming a respectable middle class profession in the countryside.

The next possible ‘influencer’ in making farming sexy - is a two hour drive from Beijing - in Tongzhou District, and Mafang village - though her approach to making agriculture attractive is a little different.

Shi Yan is entrepreneur Cheng’s wife. She’s also concerned about young people leaving the land. Shi Yan runs a pioneering farm with a team at Tsinghua university.

She’s trying to start not a business but a whole community of local small scale farmers

Shi Yan (translation)
In reality, I think a very important component of agricultural sustainability is having sustainable people to farm. ‘Who will do it?’ We often ask this question, ‘who will be China’s farmers in 10 years time, who will cultivate this land?’

COMMENTARY
Shi Yan’s first sign of success in reviving farming co-operatives - persuading Lang Xiao, one of the most experienced local farmers, to give her team’s organic farming a try.

Shi Yan’s also convinced Lang Xiao’s twenty four year old son, Lang Jiandong, to stay and work on the farm. With the four new greenhouses they’re building, they could dramatically boost their family income.

Shi Yan (translation)
I think if one wishes to attract young people, or attract farmers back to villages, first of all they should allow farmers to have better income. This is very important. So they can live a respectable life in the village.

COMMENTARY
For Shi Yan, the point of starting a co-operative - young people want not just status and wages but a community life on the farm.

Shi Yan (translation)
I think it’s important that we are able to improve communities in rural villages, their public amenities and welfare, so young people in the village have more opportunities to get together.

COMMENTARY
So what about other young people coming back to farm? Lang Jingdong strikes a note of optimism tinged with caution.

Lang Jingdong (translation)
It’s not possible to force everyone back to the village and do things they don’t want to do. It’s mostly dependent on their interests. As for helping parents, I think everyone should have the will to want to do so.

COMMENTARY
And how to keep people like Lang Jiangdong – who’s stayed on the land - from feeling old-fashioned and isolated? There’s a simple answer. Chinese farmers now part of a wired-up nation.
Shi Yan (translation)
I think the internet could really be important in attracting young people back. In China the internet is reaching more and more rural villages, especially villages near Beijing. So people in the villages can work and communicate with everyone.

Petrini (translation)
To attract young people we have to come up with a different vision: a new farmer who’s in harmony with nature – one who has a good sense of community – a farmer who with new technology is no longer isolated, but communicates with the whole world. So the new technology can give the young farmers a completely new concept of farming from what they’ve had up to now.

COMMENTARY
Back in Shanghai, Rand’s out on the streets doing some market research.

So why do young people in China’s cities say they’re here - not back on the farm?

Vox pops (translation)
“Everyone wants their lives to grow in a better direction. Therefore I think this is why people from villages want to come to cities.”

“Development in villages is not as good as in cities. If young people come to cities they can see and learn more.”

“My grandparents were farmers. They worked really hard so my parents could move to the city. So my parents don’t want their children to go back to farming.”

COMMENTARY
In Shanghai’s fresh food market, Rand joined by Resonance colleague, Jeff.

Rand
It seems like the major lure of the city is economics. They’re just able to like… what did you say Jeff…just double their money…that seems to be the common…

Jeff
They have kids. They have to pay their tuition fees and they have their parents – right - single children policy right. They have to get the best for their children so they need this work to make more money

Rand
So it seems like it goes beyond just money issues, but also to the environment for their kids - like better education, more access to culture, to the city, more cosmopolitan – a lot of intangible benefits.

COMMENTARY
In China, and globally there’s now a debate going on about policy. Whether to spend state funds convincing young people there’s an alternative to the cities – or whether that’s fighting the tide of history.

Du Zhixiong (translation)
Why do rural people leave for the city? Income is a very important factor. It’s pivotal, there’s no doubt about that. But income aside, it is the infrastructure of rural areas which is more important. By raising the standard of living and social welfare, they will not be compelled to leave for the cities.
Zuo Xuejin (translation)
There are some problems that the government has to consider. One is when you make investment in the infrastructure – in the roads, in the highways - in small cities you have to be aware of long trends in population development. So you don't want to waste too much money in those areas where in the future the people are going to leave. So that's something we have to consider.

President Nwanze (translation)
Everybody - whether they are a rural child or an urban child - wants the same thing. They want good life, access to telephone, television… you name it.

If you have those same things available in rural areas – energy, social services, schools and what have you - and a night life - people will stay there. But if you invest only in the urban areas you are basically asking for trouble.

COMMENTARY
A final business debrief, city-style, for Rand and Sherry.

With another hip couple – Shi Yan and Chung - on board for their influencer strategy, they're ready to inspire other social “tiers” to ‘stay not go’.

Sherry
The PhD - he's creating something for the top tier of the people. But that image, or that dream actually, is the model to influence the lower tier of people who will think farm is nicer, or some way they can actually make a living with…

COMMENTARY
They reckon that using both their ‘influencers’, and computer games like the latest “Happy Farms”, they can make a difference.

Rand
We can actually create an entire campaign showcasing heroes. Plus the digital area of the Happy Farm to point with different regions - in addition to drawing in some information about kids eating healthier are smarter, and getting better and more ahead in school. So we could probably create that entire thing. So at the end of the day it’s going to be a dream that we can put in their minds.

COMMENTARY
Historically, the Chinese government has supported the move to cities – in its attempt to eradicate poverty. But it's also aware of the need to keep a young generation on the land.

Du Zhixiong (translation)
Currently China has direct food subsidies, - general subsidies for purchasing agricultural supplies, and subsidies for agricultural machinery and tools.

These are all attempts to continually raise the income level of agricultural producers and the profit rate of the agricultural sector.

COMMENTARY
They may have a campaign strategy – but Rand and Sherry are politely hinting ‘Future Food’ may have set them an impossible task.

Sherry
So in order to influence the ninety nine per cent of people who are now leaving the village and do the farming, I think it really needs some government facility, or some economy system into play…
While we can do the branding thing, for the influencing strategy, maybe some economy system that facilitates needs to be set up to make sure it goes smoothly.

**Rand**

We can brand forever. But the problem is we can never convince them that the money they can make in the city is going to somehow be made by them staying on the farm.

In terms of infrastructure, I think the government would have to come in and economically think how it’s viable for them to stay on the farm... If there is no business model there, we can’t really build and market something that doesn’t have a business model to it... So those are our conclusions – what do you think?

**COMMENTARY**

Making sure there are enough young people to grow the food we need for the future may be a matter of policy more than persuasion, however modern.
Social media agency, Resonance is based in Shanghai’s trendy French concession area. The metropolis is also a draw for a new generation of young Chinese who are leaving rural areas in droves to live in the cities. So if the young are leaving the land who’s now going to grow the country’s food? And can Resonance apply their branding skills to convince young Chinese that farming could be a viable career choice.

**Series information: Future Food**

A series of 6 x 25-min films exploring key questions around global food security.

In discussions of feeding the planet, many now argue for a new way of thinking about food technology, food policy and food science. Since the days of the “Green Revolution”, which promised enough food for all but which ultimately reduced crop varieties, created a dependency on fossil fuels and depleted the land, studies have shown that “agroecology” – the application of ecological principles to the production of food – could double food production in the next 10 years sustainably. But can low-yield sustainable farming methods feed 9.5 billion people by 2050? Without GM crops or synthetic fertilizers, can farmers increase food production by 70 percent?

**tve information:**

tve.org

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**Our aim**

To make people think. We inform. We spark debate. We inspire change. And we’ve been inspiring change for more than 30 years

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