Strategies and Policies for Developing Rural "Local Specialty Products" in Ecological Conservation Areas

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Abstract: The promotion of rural revitalization within the ecological conservation areas ("ECAs") requires a careful balance between ecological protection and economic development and should be guided by the principle of ecological priority. The cultivation of rural "Local Specialty Products" ("LSPs") under a green-development framework aligns with the functional positioning of these areas, drives the revitalization of rural industries, and constitutes a fundamental strategy for addressing the unique challenges they face. Although ECAs possess inherent advantages in terms of developing LSPs, they are also confronted by multiple constraints. Accordingly, we propose development objectives that emphasize (a) driving rural industrial prosperity, (b) enhancing the appeal of agricultural heritage, and (c) ensuring inclusive prosperity in the farming communities. In selecting pathways for growth, priority should be given to improving the quality of products, fostering distinctiveness of the technologies, nurturing cultural identities, and upholding the principle of common prosperity. From a policy standpoint, the development of rural LSPs should be recognized as a key lever for advancing the comprehensiveness of rural revitalization in the ECAs. We recommend a set of supportive measures—namely, reinforcing the guidance for spatial planning, integrating the consolidation of factor inputs, and ensuring the robustness of organizational guarantees—to facilitate the high-quality development of LSPs in these areas.

Keywords: ecological conservation areas, areas, rural local specialty products (LSPs), development objectives, pathways, policy support

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The ecological function areas ("EFAs") serve as critical instruments of spatial governance designed to harmonize economic development with environmental protection. Their designation functions as a tool for spatial governance and for guiding and regulating regional economic activities under the stringent ecological protection requirements (Yang, 2024). In the context of comprehensive rural revitalization, a central question is whether the rural areas within the EFAs can cultivate an endogenous development mechanism that simultaneously upholds ecological integrity, fosters green growth, and increases the incomes of farmers. Addressing this challenge is pivotal for the success of both industrial and ecological revitalization in these specialized areas.

The ecological conservation areas ("ECAs") represent a specific category of EFAs, which are primarily designated for ecological protection. They shoulder responsibilities such as safeguarding the security of the ecosystem, supplying high-quality ecological products, and preserving the water resources. Two typical examples of ECAs include upstream watershed conservation areas and peri-urban ecological protection areas. In December 2010, the State Council's national main functional area planing underscored the need for strengthening the protection and conservation of China's water source areas—such as the eastern mountain ranges, the northern slopes of the Tianshan Mountains, and the headwaters of the Weihe, Jinghe, Shitou, and Heihe Rivers, along with the northern foothills of the Qinling Mountains. Similarly, the *Master Plan of Beijing (2016–2035)*, issued in 2017, designated the Mentougou, Pinggu, Huairou, Miyun, and Yanqing districts, along with the mountainous areas of the Changping and Fangshan districts, as ECAs. Their mandate included safeguarding the capital's ecological security, establishing livable, business-friendly, and tourism-oriented models for eco-development, and showcasing Beijing's historical, cultural, and natural heritage.

Under the major function-oriented zoning framework, ECAs are largely classified as restricted or prohibited development zones, which effectively precludes large-scale, high-intensity industrialization and urbanization. Consequently, these areas must pursue a development-restricte path, which is characterized by green prosperity. In theory, this can also be achieved through the establishment and refining of mechanisms that enable the realization of the value of ecological products—most notably through ecological compensation schemes (Wei, 2011). Empirical studies indicate that the national transfer payment mechanism that was established for key EFAs in 2008 has facilitated economic growth (Ding & Zhuang, 2021) and contributed to the narrowing of urban-rural income disparities (Lu & Zhang, 2023; Zhang & Guo, 2024). In the realm of compensation for watershed ecologies, horizontal cross-provincial compensation policies have promoted green economic development in pilot regions (Huang & Ding, 2024; Yang et al., 2024), increased farmer incomes and rural employment (Li et al., 2022), and reduced upstream–downstream wealth gaps (Zhang et al., 2024). Similarly, the grassland ecological protection subsidy and reward mechanism has improved the grassland ecosystems (Hu et al., 2016; Luo et al., 2020). Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. The conversion of ecological resources into assets and capital remains constrained, the compensation mechanisms are often simplistic, and there are obstacles that persist throughout the production, exchange, distribution, and consumption chains of ecological products. As a result, the market value of ecological products in China remains underdeveloped (Li et al., 2020), which impedes the goal of common prosperity and leaves the ECAs vulnerable to the "rich ecology, poor economy" trap. Moreover, only a fraction of areas within ECAs have successfully leveraged their ecological strengths

to enable sustained economic benefits, while many local initiatives suffer from homogeneous approaches, short-termism, and flawed mechanisms for benefit-sharing (Du et al., 2022). Thus, the balancing of ecological protection with economic development under principles of ecological priority remains a pressing practical challenge for the ECAs.

In this context, the development of rural local specialties as emphasized by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, at the December 2022 Central Rural Work Conference, offers a viable pathway for the rural industrial revitalization of the ECAs. Defined narrowly, LSPs are well-known for their agricultural or processed goods; in a broader sense, they encompass multifunctional agricultural development and the exploration of diverse rural values through their characteristic resources and the forming of integrated primary, secondary, and tertiary industry systems. Aligned with the principles of green development, the promotion of rural LSPs not only meets the ecological protection mandates of the ECAs but also drives industrial prosperity and farmer affluence. Thus, alongside improvement in the realization mechanisms for the value of ecological products, the vigorous development of green LSPs constitutes a core strategy for overcoming the challenges faced by the ECAs.

This study uses the Beijing ECAs as a case example. After analyzing the existing foundations and constraints for rural LSP development, it proposes suitable objectives, pathways, and policy measures that are tailored to the characteristics of the ECAs. Through a detailed case analysis, this article aims to offer practical references for other ECAs—particularly those adjacent to urban centers—in their endeavors to develop robust LSP industries.

The Foundations and Challenges of Developing Rural LSPs in the ECAs

The primary mandate of the ECAs is to safeguard ecological security and maintain the stability of the ecosystems. Consequently, the development of LSPs in these rural areas cannot follow the conventional model that prioritizes scale over environmental integrity. Instead, it must rely on the principle of ecological compatibility, by leveraging the unique local resources and existing industrial foundations while precisely addressing the constraints imposed on the industrial upgrading by the ecological protection. Only through doing this are ECAs able to achieve a productive synergy between ecological protection and their economic growth.

The Foundations

The ECAs already possess a solid basis for cultivating rural LSPs, which can be grouped into three main categories: agro-forestry-based, culture-empowered, and leisure-tourism-oriented.

Agro-forestry-based LSPs

This category encompasses distinctive agricultural and forestry products that are derived from rural areas. Taking Beijing as an illustrative case, the ECAs constitute 68% of the municipality's total area. Within the five primary ecological protection districts—Mentougou, Pinggu, Huairou, Miyun, and Yanqing—the mountainous terrain accounts for 81.3% of the land area (He et al., 2024), thereby creating favorable conditions for numerous agro-forestry products with strong regional characteristics. Representative examples include Pinggu Peaches,

Huairou Chestnuts, Mentougou Jingbai Pears, Miyun Honey, Fangshan Millstone Persimmons, Yanqing Hawthorns and Grapes, alongside the Changping Apples and Strawberries, which have all become signature agricultural commodities for their respective districts. These products typically demonstrate extensive historical development, a substantial production scale, and significant market recognition. At the same time, a number of niche products, celebrated for their "small yet exquisite" and "uniquely exceptional" qualities, have gained recognition. For instance, the Fojianxi pear from Jinhaihu town in the Pinggu district, though it is only cultivated in limited quantities, appeals to discerning consumers. It has been listed in the "Beijing premium agriculture brand directory" and awarded the title "China's fine pear."

Culture-empowered LSPs

This category comprises products and experiences derived from local agricultural traditions or rural cultural heritage. The Beijing ECAs contain numerous historically and culturally significant villages, traditional settlements, and Red culture heritage sites. These cultural assets not only represent important roots of the capital's culture but also provide crucial support for establishing these areas as exemplary areas that showcase Beijing's historical and cultural legacy. Traditional handicrafts, immersive cultural experiences, and Red culture tourism products have emerged as significant cultural offerings within these rural areas. A representative case is Huangshandian Village in the Fangshan district, which has effectively leveraged its own cultural heritage through the use of the "Red Pack basket" by establishing a "Red Pack basket spirit" memorial museum. This initiative facilitates the preservation and practice of the spirit of the Red Pack basket, while adding substantial cultural depth to the development of local rural tourism.

Leisure-tourism-oriented LSPs

This category refers to service-based products developed through the utilization of the natural and cultural resources of the rural areas. Capitalizing on assets such as the pristine ecological environments and the customs of traditional farming, Beijing's ECAs have actively cultivated diverse forms of leisure-tourism offerings, which include recreational sightseeing tours, hands-on farming experiences, and cultural immersion activities. These ECAs have strategically developed their unique advantages: some leverage the scenic ecological environments to create nature-based destinations for urban residents; others utilize their rich agricultural traditions to establish platforms that enable farming activities to be experienced and the agricultural heritage to be preserved; while areas with historical and cultural assets promote an integrated form of cultural-tourism, by creating new modalities for engaging with history and culture. Statistical data from 2022 indicates the existence of 1,027 agricultural sightseeing gardens and 7,105 rural tourism operations distributed throughout these areas, which generate revenues of 1.841 billion yuan, and 1.372 billion yuan, respectively[1], and continually satisfy the recreational, sightseeing, and experiential demands of the capital's residents.

The Challenges

Despite these promising foundations, the field research conducted on Beijing's ECAs reveals persistent obstacles—fragmented product layouts, outdated technologies, weak branding,

1 Source: Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2023.

and limited market competitiveness. These surface-level issues reflect more fundamental difficulties in the development planning, policy frameworks, and stakeholder engagement of the Beijing ECAs, which represent constraints that are common across most regions attempting to develop such products.

The Lack of Strategic Consensus

A widespread cognitive bias is caused by a narrow understanding of LSPs, due to focusing solely on their product attributes. This limited perspective often makes policymakers overlook the broader potential of these products and thereby restrict their development. In Beijing, for example, some of the higher-level policy plans lack explicit provisions or targets that are related to LSPs, which in turn reduces the priority given to them at the grassroots level. Additionally, the small scale of many LSPs, combined with the various ecological constraints in the ECAs, results in weak endogenous motivation and insufficient industrial momentum within some of the townships (Mu, 2023). Consequently, certain areas neglect the development of these products, which leads to underutilization of their unique rural resources, the further shrinking of the scales of certain products, and even the risk of the loss of distinctive varieties. Without a shared developmental vision, the growth of LSPs in the ECAs of rural areas remains fragmented and weak. This situation fosters widespread issues such as product homogenization, oversimplification, and predominantly low-end industrial development.

The Inadequate Policy Support for Factor Allocation

The development of LSPs involves multiple administrative departments, which often leads to challenges such as the inconsistency of policy, poor coordination, and insufficient supporting measures. These issues undermine the effectiveness of policies in enabling the efficient allocation of resources and can even result in counterproductive outcomes. In the Beijing ECAs, the development of LSPs faces several significant obstacles: a lack of elements of modernity, such as advanced technology, scientific knowledge, management expertise, and innovation capacity; difficulties in consolidating land resources; shortages of capital and skilled talent; underdeveloped channels for market expansion; and inadequate data and information systems. Additionally, the absence of essential support infrastructure, such as facilities for processing agricultural products, storage, logistics, and visitor services, combined with low levels of agricultural insurance coverage and an underdeveloped industrial service system, further restricts growth.

The Severe Shortage of Actors to Lead the Development

Attracting more actors into the market is essential for the growth and strengthening of LSPs. However, in Beijing's ECAs, the operations are still dominated by fragmented, small-scale operators, which fundamentally limits improvements in the quality of the products and market expansion. Although there is an increasing number of new agricultural operators, such as agricultural companies and farmer cooperatives, that are becoming key players in the development of LSPs, their overall capacity remains relatively limited. Furthermore, their connections with the majority of the smallholder farmers tend to be weak and mainly transactional, and only involve activities like product sales, land leases, and labor contracts. The more robust and closely integrated forms of collaboration, such as profit-sharing arrangements and joint-stock cooperatives, are relatively uncommon. Participation by collective economic organizations in rural areas is also low, making it challenging to address the existing

inequitable distribution of benefits that disadvantages most of the smallholder farmers (Yu et al., 2023; Hu & Gu, 2022). Consequently, the ability of these new agricultural business entities to influence and drive the development of their surrounding peers within the same industry is limited, which hinders the sector's broader transformation, upgrading, quality improvement, and overall strengthening of LSPs.

Objectives and Pathways for Developing Rural LSPs in the ECAs

The development of LSPs in the ECAs of rural areas should be grounded in the characteristics of the local geography, market conditions, and factor endowments. This requires that clear development objectives be scientifically defined and implementation pathways be rationally planned. This process would not only emphasize the efficient utilization of resources but also promote the coordinated advancement of ecological protection and industrial revitalization. The accelerator for this development lies in the systematic integration of the local natural ecological resources, traditional cultural heritage, modern technologies, and human capital, and transforming these advantages into sustainable drivers of growth.

Clarifying the Objectives and Positioning

Successful development of rural LSPs must be grounded in the unique resource endowments of the rural areas and guided by the principles of ecological and industrial synergy. It also requires a commitment to high-quality growth and the full harnessing of the economic, cultural, and social values of these products to sustain their momentum in the comprehensive revitalization of rural areas.

Driving Industrial Prosperity in Rural Areas

Industrial prosperity should be the central focus. Given their principal functional orientation, the ECAs are unsuitable for large-scale or high-intensity industrialization and urbanization (An, 2022). In contrast, rural LSPs are deeply rooted in local conditions and developed according to regional features and align closely with the functional mandate of the ECAs. The Beijing ECAs encompass 20 of the city's 35 geographical indication (GI) products and 62 of its 91 nationally recognized "one village, one product" demonstration villages and towns.[1] These areas generate over 90% of the city's tourism revenue from its rural areas,[2] which establishes them as key suppliers of the city's agricultural and forestry products and vital leisure tourism hubs. With over 14 million[3] middle-income and substantial high-income consumers in Beijing demanding high-quality, diverse, and personalized rural products—and who have a special preference for nearby sources—these areas hold a vast potential for market expansion. Furthermore, as a megacity with more than 19 million[4] urban residents, Beijing has a concentration of abundant high-quality resources such as capital, technology, talent, information, management, and services, which provide a strong foundation for the development of the sector. Therefore, the LSPs in Beijing's rural areas should be positioned as a strategic breakthrough for achieving industrial prosperity

1 Based on the lists of Beijing's GI products and the "one village, one product" demonstration villages and towns.
2 Calculated using data from the Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2023.
3 Estimated based on the "Beijing Blue Book: Annual Report on Social Development of Beijing (2021–2022)," which states that the middle-income group accounts for 68.5%, combined with population data from the Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2023.
4 Source: Beijing Statistical Yearbook 2023.

within the ECAs. By capitalizing on localized successes, this would help catalyze broader regional development and establish a new chapter in the industrial vitality of Beijing's rural areas.

Establishing a Platform for Showcasing the Appeal of Agricultural Heritage

Rural LSPs not only carry economic but also profound cultural significance and serve as essential vehicles for disseminating agricultural heritage. This includes creating distinctive products that embody the culture of farming and imbuing the products themselves with this rich cultural legacy. As emphasized by Xi (2024), there is a critical need for organically combining protection, inheritance, and utilization—integrating China's outstanding agricultural heritage with modern civilization, endowing it with contemporary relevance, ensuring the continued vitality of traditional culture, and allowing China's farming heritage to demonstrate its enduring charm and elegance in the new era (Xi, 2024). Most of Beijing's 26 traditional villages and 52 systematic agricultural heritage sites are within the ECAs, and the rich agricultural culture they represent is an integral part of the capital's cultural identity. Moreover, the Beijing municipal authorities have established clear directives for strengthening the protection, inheritance, and innovative development of exemplary traditional cultures in rural areas, alongside enhancing the promotion and utilization of the significant agricultural cultural heritage. Development of rural LSPs in these areas should thus center on showcasing the appeal of the agricultural heritage, and thus achieve the preservation and evolution of this heritage through avenues that resonate with contemporary consumer preferences.

Laying the Foundation for the Inclusive Prosperity of Farmers

Promoting inclusive prosperity for farmers is a fundamental objective in developing rural LSPs. Although Beijing ranked among the top three nationally in per capita disposable income for both its urban and rural residents in 2023, its urban-rural income ratio places 24th nationally—and highlights the ongoing challenges in raising incomes in the rural areas.[1] In the ECAs, the per capita GDP is less than 30% of that in the central urban districts, and the household per capita disposable income is below two-thirds of that of the municipal average. The majority of Beijing's 234 officially identified low-income villages are located within these rural areas. Although these villages have exited the low-income status, they face the dual challenges of avoiding relapse and promoting rural revitalization (Mu, 2023), which makes these areas a focal point for narrowing the urban-rural disparities and boosting common prosperity. In 2023, the operating income of the residents in the rural areas accounted for only 5.6% of the disposable income in Beijing, which indicates substantial untapped potential and marks this as a key frontier with regard to the raising of farmers' incomes going forward[2]. By developing high-value-added LSPs within the rural areas and leveraging the ECAs' advantages in regard to location—such as proximity to the urban centers, short transportation distances, and low costs of logistics—these products can more efficiently penetrate urban markets. This approach offers a practical pathway for increasing the operating incomes of farmers and advancing shared prosperity.

Designing the Pathways for Development

The development of rural LSPs in the ECAs should be firmly anchored in the core principle

1 Calculated using data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024.
2 Calculated using data from the China Statistical Yearbook 2024.

of "ecological priority with a green foundation", and the pursuit of quality should permeate the entire industrial chain. It is crucial to establish a new development paradigm that centers on improving product quality, fostering technological distinctiveness, nurturing cultural identity, and upholding the principle of common prosperity. The ultimate goal of this is to create an ecosystem characterized by ecological sustainability, guaranteed quality, cultural inheritance, and shared benefits, and to thereby achieve a deep synergy between environmental protection and industrial growth.

Improving Product Quality: Targeting the Premium Market by Building Refined, Small-Scale, and High-Quality Clusters

LSPs in the ECAs must clearly define their market positioning and competitive advantages and continue to build consumer recognition in regard to their product value by moving away from "volume-driven competition" to "winning through superior quality." Elevating product quality should be the foremost priority, and product differentiation and categorization should be emphasized so as to develop a portfolio of premium offerings. For Beijing, this means not only the upgrading of its traditional agro-forestry products, such as the Pinggu peaches and Huairou chestnuts, but also the expansion into premium market segments through the development of upscale rural homestays and personalized LSPs. Leveraging Beijing's strategic location and vast consumer base, the ECAs should cater to the diverse and sophisticated demand for green, high-quality agricultural products and ecological goods, and strive to provide customized rural LSPs tailored to urban consumers. Efforts should be focused on cultivating "refined, small-scale, and high-quality" industrial clusters of an appropriate size, as the establishment of moderate-scale operations is essential for sustainable growth. The integrated and dynamic nature of regional LSPs calls for clustered development and the avoidance of fragmented efforts. Industrial clustering lowers production costs, spreads operational risks, enables cross-industry opportrunities and resource sharing, and facilitates economies of scale and scope (Yang & Zhang, 2025).

The Fostering of Technological Distinctiveness: Strengthening Innovation and Promoting the Application of Tech Along the Value Chain

Technological advancement must focus on both ends of the value chain—the production ("head") and the market ("tail"). Low efficiency at the production end and limited marketing channels at the sales end are among the primary constraints on the development of rural specialty products in ecological conservation areas, making it necessary to strengthen technological applications at both the upstream and downstream ends. On the production end, the integrated application of modern breeding technologies, cultivation and farming techniques, and agricultural machinery needs to be accelerated. This means the continuous innovation of the production processes for LSPs, the establishment of smart agriculture management systems, and assisting the agricultural operators in better controlling the production processes. On the sales end, the active pursuit of market promotion through e-commerce channels needs to be strengthened. This means the utilization of new marketing tools such as social media, e-commerce platforms, and cloud platforms; the exploration of opening dedicated online stores for rural LSPs, and collectively launching a range of products that reflect the characteristics of the ECAs; actively building and maintaining online brand images to enhance brand awareness and exposure. Beijing possesses the nation's strongest, most extensive, and most talent-rich

scientific research systems. The ECAs must fully leverage Beijing's superior resources with regard to science and technology by using technology to empower the development of LSPs and making technological sophistication the defining characteristic of the products in Beijing's ECAs.

Nurturing Cultural Identities: Integrating Rural Charm Into Multifaceted Value Realization

Developing rural "LSPs" requires the active cultivation of their unique cultural identities and innovative spirits, which serve as intangible assets that support the multifaceted realization of their value. To promote the development of LSPs in the ECAs, it is essential that the value underlying these products is deeply explored through fully tapping into the customs, local traditions, and cultural heritages of the rural areas. Efforts should be made to enhance the design of the packaging, discover the value, and promote the products with the aim of striving to transform "good products" into "quality products" by imparting compelling stories that are enriched with meaningful cultural significance and highlight their quality. At the same time, it is important to actively cultivate new development scenarios for LSPs that are able to reflect the unique agricultural conditions and development realities of the ECAs. Through the leveraging of the distinctive customs, local flavors, and cultural characteristics of these areas, innovative "LSPs +" models—such as "+ culture," "+ technology," and "+ experience"—should be explored. These diversified models should create fresh consumption experiences, reshape consumer perceptions, and promote nearby employment, entrepreneurship, and income growth for the residents of rural areas. For the Beijing ECAs, it is advisable to follow the principle of "the city driving the greater suburbs, and the greater suburbs serving the city." To this end, the efforts should be focused on continuously broadening the sales channels for LSPs through active government promotion, support from e-commerce live-streaming initiatives, and the organization of exhibitions and fairs. These measures will help establish the ECAs as the premier destinations of leisure tourism for both Beijing and its surrounding regions.

Upholding the Principle of Common Prosperity: Enhancing the Conversion of Ecological Value to Improve the Well-Being of Farmers

The ECAs should regard enhanced ecological and environmental protection as a fundamental imperative, while prioritizing improvement in the well-being and sense of gain among farmers as a core objective in the development of rural LSPs. It is recommended that the ECAs adopt modern agricultural ecological technologies alongside green management principles and practices so as to promote a rural development that simultaneously boosts resource efficiency and agricultural ecological performance, while also harmonizing the production, living, and ecological functions. The efforts should focus on fully harnessing and revitalizing the green ecological resources that are inherent in rural LSPs through the scientifically optimized, efficient, economical, and circular use of resources. This approach will drive fundamental changes in the patterns of resource utilization and accelerate the transformation and upgrading of LSPs, converting ecological and resource advantages into industrial strengths and new income sources, and thereby foster the growth of collective economies in the rural areas. Equally important is the establishment of robust mechanisms for benefit-sharing that create a community of shared interests among stakeholders and ensure that all stakeholders can partake in the added value that is generated by the industrial integration. Special attention should be given to balancing the interests between the new agricultural

operators and the broad base of smallholder farmers (Wei, 2022). The ECAs should enhance ecological compensation and the mechanisms for benefit-sharing, while also engaging farmers through equity partnerships, land leasing, and employment opportunities. This approach can encourage the greater participation of farmers in the development of LSPs and ensure that they fully benefit from the ecological gains.

Policy Measures for Developing Rural LSPs in the ECAs

To advance the high-quality development of rural LSPs in the ECAs, a systematic and well-coordinated policy framework is essential. This requires leveraging the market's decisive role in the allocation of resources while encouraging the broad participation of the diverse actors in the market. Simultaneously, governments should enhance macro-level planning, resource integration, and organizational support to create an effective synergy between market forces and governmental guidance (Mu, 2023). Policies should be designed that integrate theoretical guidance with practical exploration, drawing on the regional comparative advantage theory and industrial ecology principles to inform the developmental and spatial planning, while also adapting to local conditions through targeted factor support and the provision of services. The aim is to robustly position LSPs as a driving force behind industrial revitalization in the rural areas. Specifically, tailored measures should be introduced with regard to planning guidance, resource facilitation, and institutional mechanisms so as to foster a supportive environment for the cultivation of distinctive and sustainable local industries.

Enhancing Planning and Guidance for the Development of Rural LSPs

The development of LSPs is vital for the rural economies in the ECAs. LSPs serve as a crucial breakthrough and entry point for the stimulation of rural vitality and must therefore receive high priority. Given the diversity and uneven development of the rural areas within these ECA areas, top-level planning is essential. This planning should follow principles of priority-setting, targeted policies, and systemic thinking, as well as clearly defining development goals, industry positioning, strategic layouts, and integrated implementation. First, the high-quality development of LSPs should be embedded within the broader frameworks for rural revitalization in the ECAs. Emphasis should be placed on the three categories of LSPs: the agro-forestry-based, the culture-empowered, and the leisure-tourism-oriented. The core objectives must include quality enhancement, development of unique characteristics, and cultivation of a local "identity." Efforts should be made to leverage the local sci-tech talent to fuel product innovation and growth. Second, support for the specialty industries must be intensified through the creation of priority LSP directories, improved institutional and policy frameworks, and the revitalization of the key production factors, market dynamism, and stakeholder engagement. Increased fiscal investment is needed to develop and refine the industry standards in the rural areas at the national, local, and group levels, thereby strengthening the industrial foundation for LSPs. Third, special LSP enhancement programs should be implemented, which include developing customized agricultural plans at the township and village levels, as well as targeted implementation plans for the specialty planting and breeding industries. The integration of brand agriculture, GI products, and other characteristics of the rural areas into the rural

revitalization frameworks must be institutionalized. Each of the ECAs should be guided in defining the clear positioning of their brand, crafting authentic local narratives, and promoting both the specialization of bulk agricultural industries and the branding of distinctive specialty sectors.

Diversifying Financial Support for the Development of Rural LSPs

The development of rural LSPs in ECAs requires not only targeted fiscal support but also the mobilization of financial and private capital to build a diversified funding system. First, the fiscal support for LSPs should be increased and better targeted. The establishment of special funds for the high-quality development of LSPs must be considered, and these should also be accompanied by clear usage guidelines for unlocking the potential of LSPs, accelerating the scaling, standardization, branding, and support of key industries, as well as enhancing the quality and strength of distinctive sectors. Preferential tax and fee policies should be offered to help local specialty enterprises grow. Second, financial institutions should be encouraged to develop products that suit the characteristics of LSPs. Guided by the objective of providing high-quality financial services for economic development, financial institutions should actively innovate and tailor products and services to the needs and characteristics of the industries. This includes designing collateralized loan products tailored to the characteristics of different LSP sectors and the needs of enterprises within industrial clusters. In addition, fintech applications can be leveraged to support LSP development, including the introduction of private capital into smart agriculture, smart tourism, and smart market scenarios, thereby improving customer acquisition and retention. The range of collateral that is acceptable should be expanded by increasing the credit support for the industries and ensuring the inclusion of more specialty sectors in the agricultural insurance schemes. Pathways for shifting from collateral-based to credit-based lending should be explored, such as using policy-based finance to promote the high-quality development of rural industries and empowering the LSPs. Third, private investment should be engaged. This involves improving policies on the financing of loans and subsidies for the support of infrastructure so as to encourage private capital to flow into sectors compatible with the ECAs, supporting private-sector participation in rural services through instruments such as government service procurement, and encouraging lawful and compliant private investment in LSPs through diverse channels. The goal is to establish a multi-tiered, multi-channel investment and financing mechanism, guided by public funds, supported by financial credit, and which is primarily driven by private investment.

Strengthening the Talent Support for the Development of Rural LSPs

A robust talent pipeline is crucial for upgrading the quality and value of rural LSPs. First, the development and recruitment of professional talent should be accelerated. This includes fostering agricultural sci-tech professionals, building high-level innovation teams, and nurturing practical agricultural experts in alignment with current productivity demands. Entrepreneurial support services should be optimized to encourage enterprises to be emotionally invested, rural entrepreneurs to return, and university graduates to launch ventures in their hometowns, thereby creating effects that are demonstrative and catalytic. Furthermore, the ECAs can identify and promote rural artisans who are able to help in the revitalization

of traditional crafts, as well as cultivate effective brand ambassadors who can strengthen the recognition of "local specialty" and "rural specialty" brands. Agricultural skills development programs, which include vocational training, entrepreneurship, and employment training for returnees, should be conducted with targeted investments in funding, incentives, professional evaluations, infrastructure, and information services. The introduction of more tailor-made, demand-driven training ("precision order-based training") will enhance the accuracy and relevance of these initiatives, and thereby improve the overall skills and capabilities of the farmers. Second, an expert advisory mechanism for LSPs should be established. An expert database for this sector can be created through the leveraging of talent resources from higher education institutions and research organizations, particularly those specializing in agriculture. The ECAs can then select leading industry experts and outstanding practitioners to form "multiple advisory teams for a single LSP." Third, efforts must be made to find and strengthen new agricultural operators. This includes introducing a dual approach for talent attraction and local capacity building and providing vigorous support for farmer cooperatives and family farms, alongside the cultivation of capable agricultural managers (Deng et al., 2024). Through partnership and employment-driven support mechanisms, villages and enterprises should be encouraged to collaborate closely throughout the development process for LSPs in the ECAs. Enterprises, farmer cooperatives, village collectives, and households should be guided in the joint development of distinctive agricultural brands and the integration of an increasing number of LSPs into the broader agricultural branding strategies. Fourth, greater investment in service-oriented talent is essential for the development of LSPs. Strengthening the grassroots agricultural technical service teams and establishing professional, private service systems will ensure that skilled technicians are able to engage directly with households, so that high-quality seeds and advanced techniques reach the production fields, and the essential know-how is effectively transferred to farmers. This will accelerate the widespread adoption of new varieties and innovative technologies, and thus maximize their benefits. Additionally, assistance should be provided to agricultural operators in areas such as the dissemination of technology, research-to-practice translation, product design, cultural resource development, standards-setting, and marketing strategy formulation—so as to facilitate improvements in quality across the sector. Support for the industry organizations, including LSP associations and alliances, is crucial for the enhancement of professional guidance and the comprehensive promotion of standardized management and service quality throughout all the LSP sectors.

Exploring Appropriate Models for the Supply of Land in the Development of Rural LSPs

The availability of land directly affects both the scale and quality of the development of the rural LSPs. Currently, the inadequate supply of land has become a major constraint within the ECAs. Therefore, it is essential to explore and establish suitable models for the supply of land that will enable more favorable conditions and provide space for the growth of these products. First, the supply of land specifically designated for supporting infrastructure needs to be increased. This should be done within the constraints of the existing township land-use plans, urban and rural construction land quotas, and building scale regulations. The coordinated use of reserved land quotas should be optimized at the township and district levels to guarantee the provision of necessary infrastructure land for LSP development. Second, the revitalization and utilization of idle rural construction land should be accelerated. When activating stocks

of unused rural land, priority should be given to meeting the needs of rural LSP industries for construction land. Flexible and diverse land supply methods should be adopted so as to accommodate the dispersed spatial requirements of industries such as leisure and tourism, and thus contribute to more comprehensive rural revitalization. Third, the spatial planning of LSP development needs to be optimized. Industrial land policies should be tailored to the actual development needs of these products. Pilot programs can be launched in townships that have already developed relatively advanced LSPs, which will address the demand for essential facilities such as storage and logistics. Land supply should preferentially support the leading specialized industry clusters, modern agricultural parks, and agriculturally strong towns, and thereby attract private investment into the rural specialty industries. Corresponding policy incentives should be provided to support the growth of LSP enterprises and promote their concentrated, clustered development.

Establishing and Strengthening the Work Mechanisms for the Development of Rural LSPs

A scientifically grounded and effective work mechanism is crucial for ensuring the healthy development of rural LSPs in the ECAs. Only through the creation of a coordinated and vertically integrated multi-stakeholder framework can the major challenges associated with developing these products be effectively addressed. First, the responsibilities for all levels of government must be clearly defined. The development of rural LSPs should be incorporated as a key objective within the comprehensive rural revitalization strategies in the ECAs. Local governments should be required to formulate development plans that suit their specific contexts and use the development of LSPs as a lever for promoting rural employment, boosting farmers' incomes, and preserving traditional culture. Second, incentive mechanisms should be established and improved to support the development of LSPs. These products should be integrated into the evaluation systems and statistical frameworks for rural revitalization. Performance assessments should be market-oriented and tailored to the specific conditions of the individual ECAs through the use of categorized indicators that emphasize quality improvement. Special attention should be paid to the development of cultural and creative products, rural leisure experiences, and the highlighting of township-specific characteristics and cultural heritage. The incentive effects of leadership performance evaluations should be fully utilized so as to motivate government officials at all levels to promote and expand rural LSPs throughout the ECAs actively.

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