

SNAPSHOTS



A simple lunch in a cotton field in Dolatbag town of Bachu county, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.



COTTON LABOR IN DECLINE

Since the 1990s thousands of seasonal workers have come to Xinjiang for the cotton harvest. PHOTOS BY HU HUH / XINHUA



Chen Xibo picks cotton in a field in Dolatbag town, Bachu county.

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It is the harvest season for cotton in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, the country's largest cotton-growing region. That means it is the busiest time of the year for laborer Chen Xibo, a seasonal worker who has come to pick the cotton fields this time of year for the past 13 seasons.

A villager from Zhaotong, in

Southwest China's Yunnan province, Chen has been picking cotton from dawn to dusk for days in a field in Dolatbag, a town in Bachu county, along with his wife and two other relatives. They live in a cottage on the side of the fields and start their work before sunrise. Chen, 30, has made the long journey to Xinjiang for the opportunity. The work accounts for more than half of his annual income.

Chen is one of the thousands of cotton laborers who have come

to Xinjiang since the 1990s. This year, however, something is different. Chen said he has observed more large-scale farming, which means more machines are starting to take over the tough, time-consuming labor traditionally done by pickers.

"The jobs in the traditional way of harvest are definitely less and less. I am thinking about finding another kind of job next year. Luckily there are other jobs to do," Chen said.



A cotton harvester moves through a field, taking over the tough, time-consuming labor traditionally done by pickers.

