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COMMUNITY MATTERS C3

Apples that alleviate poverty

Jenny Hammond

With Christmas upon us, it is time for the seasonal foods that have become a tradition for the holiday season. These foods include of course roast turkey, cranberry sauce, mince pies but also mandarins, dried fruit and nuts and even things as simple as apples.

Now, a charity has combined the festive season and the sale of apples as a way to help orphans and abandoned children in some of the poorest rural areas in China.

"Apples have always been part of the Christmas tradition in Western countries, as a decorative piece, a gift, a drink (hot cider) or food (apple pies, etc)," explains Marie Duval, a volunteer for the Children of Madafu.

"Selling the fruit is a win-win operation, for the children we help, but also for the buyers who would have bought apples anyway and who can now do it for a good cause."

The Children of Madafu is a charity helping disadvantaged children in provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi and Hubei.

Founded in 1999 by Marcel Roux, a former vice-president of Doctors without Borders.

"It was originally named 'Datong', then was renamed 'Children of Madafu' to pay tribute to its founder, who died in 2006. Madafu



was Marcel Roux Chinese name, Ma for Marcel and Daifu for Doctor," says Duval.

"The children we are taking care of are not in traditional orphanages but in what we call 'orphanages without walls,'" explains the French expat.

"Actually, when children become orphans or are abandoned, they are usually taken in by a relative, grand-parent or uncle. But these relatives often cannot afford to feed another mouth, let alone two or three more (if siblings are involved)."

In the poor rural areas where the foundation works, families live on an average of 150 yuan (US\$20) per month.

"What we do is give financial help to these relatives so that fostering becomes possible for them. It also helps to maintain the children in their villages, within their families."

The allowance consists of living expenses (food and clothing) as well as tuition fees for high school and post high school students.

The Christmas apples come from the children's villages of Tianshui in Gansu and Baoji in Shaanxi.

"They are bought by the association's local manager from local growers. This year, we bought 2,700 kilograms, part going to Beijing by truck, part to Shanghai by train."

Explaining where the idea to sell the Christmas apples came from Duval continues, Duval said: "It all started in October 2004, during a trip of the association's volunteers in Gansu to visit the children."

One of the volunteers noticed that a lot of apples were being stored by peasants.

"When asked why, they explained they had too much and couldn't sell



Funds go to the charity Children of Madafu that helps disadvantaged kids in the provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi and Hubei. — Gilles Sabrie

them, so the association decided to organize a sale to help them."

Two months later, the apples were shipped to Beijing and sold at the French School as a charity operation.

Now, it is the fourth year that the apples are being sold in Beijing and the first year in Shanghai.

The apples have been sold in two schools locally over the past week, the French School and Rego School, but now they can be collected directly from the volunteers.

"Our houses are open on certain days for purchase and pick up of the apples," says Duval.

Describing their wares,

she continued: "The apples are Fuji apples, grown by local producers."

Our local manager, helped by villagers, chooses only the best ones, big, juicy and sweet. Just the smell is delicious, she enthused.

"Christmas is the time of giving and receiving gifts, of generosity. People know that when they buy our apples, they also help orphans and abandoned children and this makes a big difference to them," she continues.

"Christmas apples for Madafu have become a source of income for local growers. Knowing that the apples will be sold in Beijing and Shanghai is

also a source of pride."

The money raised from this year's apple sales will be put towards buying stoves and coal supply for primary school classes and for taking care of the children.

The cost of one stove or one winter coal supply is 300 yuan.

The average cost of one child care for one year is 1,200 yuan.

"The apples are sold for five yuan each. Of course, it is more expensive than in a store, but it is a way to raise money to help the children," she finishes.

For more information email to madaifu@hotmail.com, or visit www.madaifu.org