

From China's Fields to the Developing World: Jiangsu University's Agricultural Training Legacy

A historic international training program at Jiangsu University educated 131 agricultural specialists from 39 developing countries between 1980 and 1994.

ZHENJIANG, JIANGSU, CHINA, March 17, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On a summer day in the early 1980s, a group of international students stood in a rice field in eastern China, carefully watching as a professor demonstrated the operation of an agricultural machine. The sun was intense and the air heavy with humidity, yet the lesson continued with enthusiasm.



The first Asia-Pacific Agricultural Machinery Design and Manufacturing Training Program at Jiangsu University, September 1980.

For many of the trainees—who had traveled from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe—it was the first time they had seen modern agricultural machinery operating in the field. What they were learning would later influence agricultural development far beyond China's borders.

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Education and agricultural technology can connect nations and improve rural life across continents.”

Danny Dong, Changjiang Scholar, Jiangsu University

The training was taking place at [Jiangsu University](#), an institution that had already established itself as one of China's leading centers for [agricultural engineering](#) education.

What began as a modest international training program would eventually become an important chapter in the history of global agricultural cooperation.

The story began in September 1980, when China's Ministry of Agricultural Machinery commissioned Jiangsu University to host an international agricultural machinery training program under the Asia-Pacific Agricultural Machinery Network.

At the time, many developing countries were seeking ways to modernize their agricultural production. [Agricultural mechanization](#) was widely seen as a critical pathway toward improving productivity, increasing food supply, and reducing labor intensity in rural areas.

Jiangsu University was well prepared for this role. The university had been among the earliest institutions in China to establish an agricultural machinery major and had already built a strong reputation in the field.

As early as 1961, the university had taken a leading role in developing China's first agricultural machinery teaching materials. It chaired the national committee responsible for compiling agricultural machinery textbooks and teaching guidelines.

Over the following decades, the university developed a complete teaching system that included textbooks, design manuals, laboratory guides, and practical training programs.

By the late 1970s, Jiangsu University had already begun training graduate students in agricultural engineering and had established a strong academic foundation recognized both domestically and internationally.

Teaching Agricultural Engineering Across Languages

The international training program faced an immediate challenge: language.



Training program participants visiting Changzhou Tractor Factory for field study.



Teaching materials and practical training manuals developed by the Jiangsu University training team.

Many professors in the agricultural engineering department had originally studied Russian rather than English, which had been common among Chinese engineers in earlier decades. Teaching complex engineering concepts to international students therefore required extraordinary effort.

The teaching team responded creatively.

Professors first wrote teaching materials in Chinese. Graduate students then translated the materials into English, and senior professors who had studied abroad reviewed and refined the final texts.

By 1991, the program had produced 13 textbooks, 7 design manuals, and multiple laboratory and internship guides specifically designed for international trainees.

Teachers also worked tirelessly to improve their spoken English. Many memorized English lecture scripts in order to deliver their courses fluently and confidently in the classroom.

Their dedication became one of the defining features of the training program.

From Classroom to Factory and Farm

The program emphasized practical experience as much as theoretical knowledge.

Trainees did not remain only in classrooms. They visited diesel engine factories, tractor manufacturing plants, rice transplanter workshops, and combine harvester factories, where they observed modern agricultural machinery production firsthand.



International trainees celebrating a birthday with traditional Chinese longevity noodles at Jiangsu University.



International trainees practicing rice transplanting during field training.

Students also traveled to farms to study the practical application of agricultural machines in real farming environments.

During the hottest months of the year—often in July and August—professors accompanied students into the fields to demonstrate machine operations and explain key engineering principles.

These hands-on experiences helped trainees understand how mechanization could transform agricultural production in their own countries.

A Warm Home for International Students

Life outside the classroom was equally memorable.

International participants lived in Linjiang Building, a residence hall located near the Yangtze River. Surrounded by trees and green lawns, the building provided classrooms, meeting spaces, guest rooms, and dining facilities.

The university paid careful attention to the daily needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. The kitchen prepared a variety of dishes, including halal meals for Muslim students.

When trainees celebrated birthdays, cooks would prepare a traditional Chinese dish known as “longevity noodles,” symbolizing friendship and good wishes.

These small gestures created an atmosphere of warmth and cultural exchange that helped build strong relationships between Chinese teachers and international students.

International Recognition

The program soon attracted global attention.

In 1983, officials from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) visited Jiangsu University and expressed strong appreciation for the training program and its impact.

Impressed by the program’s effectiveness, the organization later entrusted the university with organizing additional training courses focused on small and medium-sized agricultural machinery.

This recognition helped expand the program’s international influence and confirmed the importance of technical education in supporting agricultural development.

Training Agricultural Leaders Around the World

Between 1980 and 1994, the program trained 131 specialists from 39 countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe.

The curriculum evolved over time. Early courses focused on the structure and operation of agricultural machinery, while later programs expanded to include agricultural machinery design and manufacturing.

Participants widely praised the courses for their practical value and the dedication of the instructors.

After returning to their home countries, many trainees became leading experts, engineers, and policymakers involved in advancing agricultural mechanization in their national agricultural sectors.

Their work contributed to improved farming productivity and technological development in many developing regions.

A Legacy of Global Agricultural Cooperation

The training program not only helped build technical capacity in developing countries but also played a crucial role in establishing Jiangsu University's international reputation.

It laid the foundation for future international cooperation, academic exchange, and the enrollment of international students at the university.

Today, decades later, the spirit of international collaboration demonstrated by the program continues to resonate.

As the world faces growing challenges related to food security, sustainable agriculture, and rural development, the exchange of knowledge between universities and nations remains more important than ever.

Long before global development initiatives highlighted such cooperation, Jiangsu University had already shown how education, technology, and international friendship could work together to support agricultural progress around the world.

About Jiangsu University

Jiangsu University, located in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province, China, is widely recognized for its strengths in agricultural engineering, mechanical engineering, and technological innovation. The university has played an important role in China's agricultural modernization and continues to expand its international cooperation in education and research.

Series: Global Stories from Jiangsu University

This article is part of the international media series "Global Stories from Jiangsu University," which highlights the university's contributions to agricultural engineering, technological innovation, and global educational cooperation.

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