

# Tree farm branches out for China growth

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Victorian tree growing company Blerick has joined forces with Chinese company Orisis to grow trees for landscaping in China  
Source: Supplied

**THE bustling avenues of Shanghai are a world away from the rolling hills of Victoria's West Gippsland region.**

But to budding Chinese entrepreneur Yanwen Huang, they represent the key to a dream.

Huang wants his company to be the biggest tree-growing company in China by early next decade and believes Ron Geritz can help him do it.

"It is the mutual respect and mutual trust to each other. It is not easy because we are from a different hemisphere, from a different world. But we trust each other. We are just like a family," Huang tells *The Australian*.

A fortnight ago Huang's landscaping consortium company Orisis Landscape signed a 10-year service contract with Geritz's company Blerick Tree Farm, a garden design firm based at Nerrim South that two years ago started exploring development opportunities in China after focusing on the domestic market for nearly two decades.

It is the second 10-year agreement to provide technical and supply management advice at tree nurseries in China signed by Blerick, the family business of Geritz and Michelle Jones that turns over more than \$1 million a year.

The aim is to produce and supply ornamental trees that meet international industry standards for quality and performance for the Chinese landscaping industry, including developing exclusive ranges of trees that are not currently available commercially in China.

Blerick imported 20,000 trees into China from America last year and will import the same number from the US in the year ahead.

"We want to help them set up large-scale commercial tree farms in China using Western standards. Their aim is within eight years to be the largest listed commercial tree farm in China and be a listed company. They have a big aim," Geritz says.

"We are involved advising them from the ground up on the techniques of growing, how to set it up, we've helped them formulate a potting mix, fertilisers, etc."

In the past 18 months the partners have established 50,000 trees at their first Chinese farm with a market value of \$12.5m and are negotiating the purchase of 200ha in the southwest of China for further plantings.

"That will allow us to bring production to 300,000 trees. In two years' time there will be another farm, and that will take our production up to 500,000 trees which is what they are aiming for," Geritz says.

Huang says he is proud of the progress the partners have made.

"They can not only provide us with technical support, but also operational level and management support. I am confident we can grow more international landscaping trees in China. We will be the No 1 tree-growing company in China," he says.

But the ultimate goal is to import Australian trees and Blerick is working through protocols with a view to exporting high-quality trees propagated at their farm in the shadows of Mount Baw Baw to China. That could be up to 30,000 trees a year.

Blerick has two farms at Nerrim South, one a 2ha farm it has established over 20 years which has 10,000 trees on site, the other a 17ha farm for more commercial developments.

"We have had four visits in the past month from all the partners that have come to Australia to visit our farm. I've been to China six times in the past year," Geritz says.

"If you want to go down this path, you really need to be prepared to put in the hard yards to build the relationship.

"In the end it is the trust and relationship that will make it work. For us, it really was a leap of faith to step in. But I am confident it will work."