

Encouraging agriculture as a sustainable livelihood among Alexandra's youth

Six passionate youths from Malboro, Gauteng are creating a livelihood for themselves after establishing the LeanoAgri Food Garden in their community.

Nomsa Ncube (35), spokesperson for the co-op, says it was very difficult until Shoprite came on board. "Starting out was extremely hard. We took lessons over weekends and spent our own money on seedlings, hose pipes, and other equipment. The land we were given had been a dumping site, so we started from scratch. But luckily Shoprite came on board at the end of last year, and it has been a breeze ever since. They've helped set us up in so many ways."

The drip irrigation system that Shoprite provided has been a massive help, explains Ncube, as they had been watering by hand before. The retailer also supplied the young farmers with gardening equipment and a container to store their tools safely.

Shoprite's support includes 18 months of hands-on permaculture training, which the co-op members found most beneficial. The knowledge and skills gained are now being shared with the broader community including primary school learners, teenagers and the elderly.

"We hope to cultivate a love for farming, while creating opportunities for self-sustainability," adds Ncube.

While LeanoAgri Food Garden's business has grown significantly in the past year, Ncube and her partners – Nonhle Manzini, Sibusiso Tongeni, Tebogo Molopa, Wilson Mothiba and Phumudzo Mugeru – are confident that it can develop even further.

They currently grow Swiss chard, mustard spinach, rapeseed, kale and spring onion as these crops are most in demand by the community and street vendors that buy from them.

Hunger relief and food security are at the core of the Shoprite Group's corporate social investment programmes. The Group currently supports more than 175 community food gardens and over 3 400 home gardens, which impacts almost 53 000 beneficiaries. In the past year, more than 2 700 community members were trained in sustainable food gardening, assisting them to grow nutritious and organic food.

"Shoprite is committed to creating and supporting sustainable livelihood opportunities. By supporting community food gardens, we empower community members to sustain themselves and their families by creating independence through transferring skills," says Sanjeev Raghubir, Shoprite Group Sustainability Manager.

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