

How a woman-led garden turned into a lifeline for 200 people for Orange Farm community

What began as a determined response to unemployment and food insecurity in Orange Farm in Gauteng has grown into a thriving community-led farming initiative – thanks to the vision and leadership of Zama Ndlovu, the woman behind the Vukasechaba Massive Fresh Produce Co-op.

Ndlovu established the cooperative in 2012, driven by a desire to create meaningful change in her community. Today, she leads a team of 16 garden members who work together to feed over 200 people and supply fresh, locally grown vegetables to public hospitals across Gauteng, including Chris Hani Baragwanath and Tembisa hospitals.

“This journey started with a few women and a big dream,” said Ndlovu. “We wanted to do more than survive, we wanted to grow. Now our produce is nourishing hospital patients, creating jobs, and equipping the community to be more self-sufficient through farming.”

The project is strengthened by an intergenerational team, which also ensures its longevity. By introducing younger garden members – many mentored by the founding women – the co-op is cultivating a new generation of food gardeners who are committed to improving food security, and drives economic upliftment in the community.

The 28 000m² garden yields a variety of vegetables. Surplus harvests are regularly donated to nearby informal settlements, helping to alleviate hunger .

The hospital supply contract, secured last year, marks a major milestone in the co-op’s journey – providing a steady income stream that is critical for long-term sustainability and skills development.

To meet the growing demand, Zama and her team are expanding crop varieties and upgrading irrigation systems to improve quality and output. These upgrades are helping to transform the co-op from a grassroots initiative into a scalable commercial operation.

Much of this growth has been made possible through support from the Shoprite Group, in partnership with [Food & Trees for Africa](#). Since November 2023, the collaboration has delivered crucial infrastructure including a fencing and irrigation system, along with gardening tools and, planting materials like seeds and seedlings. Training workshops were provided including topics like permaculture and water conservation .

“The support from the Shoprite Group couldn’t have come at a better time,” Zama said. “Their investment is helping us build a sustainable farming model that not only feeds people but transforms lives.”

Through its [Act For Change programme](#), the Shoprite Group supports more than [280 community food gardens](#) and has positively impacted the lives of over 90 000 people.

Under Zama's leadership, Vukasechaba continues to inspire a culture of local food production, environmental care and community participation, sowing the seeds of long-term change for Orange Farm and beyond.

END