



Press release - final approved

Where communities grow: food gardens helping families start the year strong

The festive season may be a time of celebration, rest and togetherness, however, as the new year begins, many South African families face a far more sobering reality. January brings with it school fees, uniforms, transport costs and the pressure of stretching household budgets after the holidays. In this moment of transition, community food gardens across the country continue to play a vital role – offering not only fresh produce but dignity, resilience and support to those who need it most.

More than spaces for growing vegetables, these gardens have become hubs of learning, shared effort and practical care. Across South Africa, community food gardens like the family-run **Siyazondla kwaPhindangene** cooperative in Ulundi and the **Kunothile Agricultural Primary Co-operative** in uMbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal, are helping families begin the year nourished and better equipped to face the months ahead. These are just two of the many gardens nationwide demonstrating the power of collective effort and community support.

Since its establishment in June 2019, giving has been at the heart of Siyazondla kwaPhindangene cooperative's mission. While the garden provides a steady income through the sale of fresh, organic produce, the cooperative prioritises sharing its surplus with employees, their families and community members in need. As the transition from the festive season into the new year places extra strain on vulnerable households, Siyazondla is expanding its support while creating long-term employment opportunities for women, young people and persons with disabilities. Their garden is not only feeding people - it is growing futures.

"As we look ahead to 2026, our hope is for Siyazondla KwaPhindangene to grow into an agrihub that supports not only our cooperative, but local farmers and families around us," says Indlunkulu MaMohale Buthelez of Siyazondla KwaPhindangene. "At the start of the year, when many households feel the pressure most, our garden is a place of sharing - from providing seedlings and helping with ploughing, to giving surplus vegetables to those who need them. Our potatoes will be ready early in the year and they're a favourite in our community, whether as potato salad, roast potatoes or chips. These simple meals, grown from our own soil, help families begin the year with food on the table and hope for what lies ahead."



To recognise and support initiatives like Siyazondla, Shoprite launched the Act For Change Food Garden Competition in October last year, celebrating community gardens that are driving nutrition, sustainability and upliftment at grassroots level. With collective prizes of R1 million in support tailored to each garden's needs, the project honours outstanding gardens and strengthens their capacity to make a meaningful impact.

Siyazondla is among the hundreds of inspiring entries received from across the country, as the competition now enters its next phase: celebrating the gardens that are cultivating abundance and hope in their neighbourhoods.

Turning surplus into support

The **Kunothile Agricultural Primary Co-operative in uMbumbulu, KwaZulu-Natal**, has emerged as another anchor of support in its community. After selling their produce to sustain members' livelihoods, the growers consistently set aside surplus vegetables for local households and school feeding programmes. These contributions were especially important over the festive season, a time when many families faced tighter budgets and children missed out on the regular school feeding programme meals provided during the school year. As the new year begins, this support helps families stretch their finances through an often challenging month, ensuring children and households have enough to eat and meet their basic needs.

Kunothile's impact extends beyond food relief. Project members have made it a priority to pass on practical food-growing knowledge to young people, equipping them to start small home gardens. In doing so, they are cultivating not only vegetables but a new generation of young growers who understand the power of self-reliance and community care.

"As the new year begins, we focus on helping families and older community members plan their home gardens, sharing leftover seeds so they can start planting again," says Nqobile Mbonambi of Kunothile Farmers' Co-operative. "We also open our garden to young people, offering free lessons and practical skills – and no one leaves empty-handed. It's our way of making sure the garden continues to feed, teach and support the community as the year unfolds."

"Food is a key household consideration. At the start of the year, post-festive spending and back-to-school costs increase financial pressure, making access to affordable food more significant," adds Sanjeev Raghubir, Chief Sustainability Officer at the Shoprite Group. "Our community food gardens are not just growing vegetables - they are growing dignity, resilience and community spirit. Projects like Siyazondla



and Kunothile show how ongoing support can help families navigate a challenging month, ensuring food security and a strong start to the year.”

Why food gardens matter now

As consumers continue to face mounting economic pressures, community gardens are proving to be essential sources of relief and resilience. Many of this year’s Act For Change Food Garden Competition entrants provide both an income stream for their members and a vital safety net for neighbours who might otherwise go without. The skills gained in these gardens, such as soil preparation and water-wise growing, also ensure that knowledge is shared and sustained across generations.

“As we embark on a new year, the Act For Change Food Garden Competition celebrates the growers whose hands bring nourishment, stability and kindness to their communities,” says Raghubir. “Their gardens remind us that when people plant together, they flourish together and that collective action in food growing can create long-term benefits for communities beyond a single season.”

ENDS