

ONE SMALL SEED: A FORGOTTEN FIELD IS NOW A FLOURISHING FOOD GARDEN

A few months ago, if you were to ask 12-year-old Jeandré Jacobs where a lettuce comes from, he'd have simply replied "the shop."

Today, he's able to explain exactly how to grow lettuce, and a variety of other veggies, from scratch. "I've planted spinach, lettuce, beetroot and spring onions and I knew nothing about gardening before. I've even started gardening at home," Jeandré says, beaming with pride.

The little gardening guru's newfound knowledge is thanks to a collaboration between Danie Ackermann Primary School and Checkers. What was once a patch of dry grass along the N2 highway in Somerset West is now a fully fledged 100 square metre garden providing nutritious food to learners who rely on the school's feeding scheme for their daily lunch.

Implemented in the midst of Cape Town's crippling drought, the garden runs completely off the grid and hasn't used a single drop of municipal water to date.

The first seed was planted by Peter De Lange, a parent and local resident who wanted "to connect the youth with land again and take them back to their roots." When he discovered a nearby, vacant plot, De Lange approached the school about his vision. Checkers came on board immediately upon hearing of this amazing initiative in December 2017.

"Checkers' support has been invaluable. They've helped us with funding for plants, educational workshops, the water tank, fencing, tools, a worm farm and more," says Dominic Doyle from Food and Trees for Africa, adding that the project has shown the local community just how accessible gardening is.

There are big plans in the pipeline for the garden, including a food market, an outdoor classroom and more crops but already, it's added immense value to all involved. For parents, meaningful work and new skills. For children, a sense of purpose and joy. They love checking in on their veggies during lunch breaks and teachers say the increased levels of pride and respect in learners extends beyond the garden. Children are more environmentally conscious, are picking up litter, share a common purpose and are closer than ever before.

Most importantly, the youngsters are making their own positive contribution to society - fighting hunger and ensuring food security for themselves and others, for years to come.

END