

## **Setback becomes catalyst for a community farming co-op**

When Alecia Magwaza lost her job at a clothing factory in 2010, she looked to her community for inspiration and decided to start a farming cooperative. Today, with Checkers' support, she is able to grow enough produce to earn a living, employ five people and her farm generates excess crops, which are donated to underprivileged families.

Alecia (53) started the Esigodini Farmers Primary Cooperative in 2011 in the rural area of Illovu, near Amanzimtoti in KwaZulu-Natal. Since then, she and her team have been farming for the community on a 2.5-hectare plot.

"Working such a big plot with our hands every day isn't easy, but we know we have to. Our community needs us and we need to earn a living," says Alecia.

The small group of farmers have been selling their fresh, organic produce to community members at affordable prices, but their fence was in desperate need of repairs to prevent wandering animals from eating the crops. They also needed shade netting to protect the plants from wilting in very hot weather.

As part of Checkers' ongoing efforts to fight hunger across South Africa, the supermarket chain has been partnering with community food gardens and farming co-ops.

"The team taught us many new things and we now know what plants can grow together. We learnt about recycling and we have the shade cloth that we needed to protect the crops. Our fence has also been repaired," explains Alecia. Checkers' support also included a full set of gardening tools, two 5000-litre water tanks, seedlings and training workshops.

With Checkers' welcome support, Alecia and her team are now able to generate sufficient income for the co-op and supply community members with nutritious fresh produce including spinach, beetroot, cabbage and carrots.

ENDS

CAPTION: The women employed at Esigodini Farmers Primary Cooperative near Amanzimtoti, KZN produce enough vegetables for underprivileged families in the area to benefit from their excess produce.