

A thirst for knowledge the foundation for a thriving community food garden

After Mkhululi Magubane left high school, he struggled to find a job in Mtwalume, KwaZulu-Natal, so he started gardening to support his family and over the years, he made an effort to soak up as much traditional farming knowledge as he could.

He realised that a successful community food garden could help other poor families too and today Shoprite supports Mkhululi's ambition to make the 2-hectare food garden in his community more productive with modern farming methods.

Mkhululi (48) established the Notshetshezi Primary Cooperative in 2012. "Ours is a very poor community where a lot of people don't have jobs. A few of us asked the tribal leaders for permission to expand our food garden and they said yes so we've been working hard to make it a productive garden," says Mkhululi.

Using chicken and other animal waste to fertilise the soil, Mkhululi and four other volunteers work full-time in the garden to grow staple crops such as maize and vegetables including cabbage, spinach and tomatoes. The small food garden currently has 40 beneficiaries and with Shoprite's support, Mkhululi hopes to grow enough produce to sell to shops in the area.

"We sell to some community members who can afford to pay, but we mostly give the produce to poor families. We also use our crops to barter for other vegetables, which we then share in the community," explains Mkhululi.

Through implementation partner, Food and Trees for Africa, Shoprite installed a fully-fledged water infrastructure system that includes a 5000-litre water tank, piping, irrigation and a petrol pump. "Shoprite has also given us seedlings, fertiliser, fruit trees and gardening tools, and we are learning new farming methods like companion planting," says Mkhululi.

The training workshops offered by Shoprite takes place over 12 months so that the food garden can be assessed to ensure that the new farming methods are working. "I like to learn new ways to plant the crops. It's going to help our garden and our community in the long-run," says Mkhululi.

ENDS

CAPTION: Volunteers at Notshetshezi Primary Cooperative has partnered with Shoprite and is employing modern farming methods to provide fresh vegetables for their community.