

How a school garden is feeding young minds and stomachs

The Johan Hus Primary School is a small school situated at the foot of the picturesque Tsitsikamma Mountains in Humansdorp in the Eastern Cape. Here learners not only learn about the environment in a hands-on manner, but the crops they grow are also used in the school kitchen to feed all the pupils.

Oom Georgie Botha (60), who has been the caretaker at the school for 10 years, has been gardening since he was eight years old and he keeps the school garden going with help from the learners and some of the teachers.

Roughly 200 children from Grade R to Grade 7 attend the school and, according to Oom Georgie, they always look forward to helping in the garden. "The teachers do natural studies classes to teach the children about the environment. At the same time, they work with me in the garden and I teach them about the crops, and how to take care of the plants," says Oom Georgie.

While Oom Georgie is a knowledgeable gardener, he says the crops need regular watering and he would like to expand the garden to potentially sell some of the extra crops.

The Shoprite Group stepped in to provide proper water infrastructure for the garden that includes a borehole, a pump, piping and a 5000-litre water tank. Its implementation partner, Food and Trees for Africa (FTFA), also provided training, compost and vegetable seedlings that include cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, onions and beans to help Oom Georgie add to existing crops of beetroot, carrots, spinach and leeks.

"I didn't know about permaculture so the training has been very good for us because they're teaching us new ways to plant and that's going to help us expand our small garden and make it sustainable," says Oom Georgie, adding, "I always look forward to the training because I teach the children everything I learn. We're all learning these new skills together."

The Shoprite Group fights hunger by supporting food gardens in communities throughout South Africa for a minimum of 18 months. Each garden partners with one of the Group's supermarkets closest to it - in this case Usave Thornham in nearby Nompumelelo.

"As retailers we care about the communities we serve and our partnership with Johan Hus Primary is another way in which we play our part to ensure that people have access to a regular supply of fresh, nutritious vegetables. In addition, the next generation learns to grow their own food, making sure that food security in the community is not a problem going forward," says Thembisa Ntoni, branch manager of Usave Thornham.

ENDS

Photo 1: Oom Georgie Botha and the Johan Hus learners

Photo 2: Layla Steageman and the Johan Hus learners