

## **Community food garden provides hunger and poverty relief**

A large community food garden at *Reach Out Community Project* in Evaton West, near Vereeniging, is helping to fight both hunger and unemployment.

More than 500 community members, many of them children, receive meals from the project's feeding scheme which is supplemented by a variety of fresh vegetables from their food garden.

As part of Shoprite's ongoing commitment to combat food insecurity, the retailer partnered with *Reach Out Community Project* on their food garden earlier this year.

Pule Selai, marketing director at the non-profit organisation, says that they run numerous social outreach programmes, including a green door temporary shelter for victims of gender-based violence, early childhood development programmes and a drop-in centre which also provides needy families with food.

He explains that the garden is central to many of these projects: "It's used to sustain some of the projects, to help the community and to generate an income for those who work in the garden. The workers can take produce to cook at home when they need it. They also take produce to the nearby market to sell to generate an income."

Pule says they're very grateful that Shoprite has joined forces with them: "We've already received seedlings, seeds, some equipment, fertilisers as well as extremely helpful training."

As part of their investment, Shoprite provides permaculture training over a period of 18 months to each of the gardens it assists. "We have lots of land which we are cultivating. We grow a wide range of crops, from spinach, to potatoes, peppers, cabbage, sweet potatoes, onions and tomatoes. Through the training we've already learnt more about how to prepare the soil and take care of soil. If you don't take care of soil, you can't have good crops," Pule explains.

Ultimately, he says they want to introduce the children from their early childhood development programmes, as well as those that access the drop-in centre aftercare, to farming. "We really want to stimulate an interest in farming from a young age."

The Shoprite Group is committed to building the resilience of the communities in which it operates, particularly in the face of climate change. At present Shoprite supports more than 151 community food gardens and 2 538 home-based gardens.

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