

SA school breaks ground in new farming method

By **ANDISWA MAQUTU**

PUPILS at a Vaal Triangle school are among the first in the country to grow vegetables through aquaponics, which uses fish farming and gravel instead of soil.

The technique works in a closed system where nutrients from fish tanks feed gravel grow beds. The gravel also works as a filter for the water and clean oxygenated water is then pumped back to the fish tanks.

The system uses 80-90% less water than traditional farming methods.

Through a partnership with Air Products, a supplier and distributor of speciality gases, and Inmed, an international, philanthropic, nonprofit organisation, Carel de Wet Technical High School in Vanderbijlpark says it is the first school in South Africa to operate the largest commercial aquaponics unit in the country.

The project aims to address poverty and hunger in the area and also to get more pupils in the country interested in agriculture as a career.

According to Food Bank SA, about 11-million people in the coun-

try do not know where their next meal will come from and one in five children under the age of nine years suffers from stunted growth as a result of malnutrition.

Aquaponics is generating increasing interest, as alternative ways to growing food on land unsuitable for traditional farming methods are sought.

Inmed's operations manager Janet Ogilvie said: "Small farmers have really bad soil and this solves that problem.

"You can grow up to 10 times what can be grown in traditional soil and in a much smaller space."

This kind of farming is also done in Jamaica and Peru, according to Ogilvie. — *BDLive*