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News release

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## **Turning a family project into a sustainable enterprise**

The Itshokolele farm in Bultfontein, a family project aimed at producing different vegetables to generate income and provide food security in the community, is a lesson of persistence, resilience and the power of adaptive agriculture.

Around 2013, the family was granted 6ha of land by the government but only 1ha of shade netting and drip irrigation, so they were only able to produce vegetables on a small portion of the land. Without working capital to buy seeds, compost and fertilizers to expand the project, the family only managed to plant around 4 or 5 rows of crops. On several occasions, the family used its grocery money to buy seeds, with family members, including children, going without food for up to three days at a time. They also could not afford school uniforms, so the children could not attend school.

To compound the problem, the only family member who received training died unexpectedly, leaving the rest of the family bewildered and a little hopeless.

Learning of the family's plight, INMED South Africa stepped in to support the project.

Under the watchful eye of Mantombi Madona, INMED's co-ordinator in the Free State, the INMED adaptive agriculture team helped the family build a reservoir, chicken house and seedling nursery, as well as install 1ha shade net tunnel with drip irrigation. INMED also provided intensive training in adaptive agriculture for climate resilience as well as clever ways to make the most of their land. The farmers now use the entire area with shade netting and irrigation to generate produce solely for sale and they have innovatively created a family garden by using the old feed bags as a windbreak for their own crops and to protect them from animals.

The project began to thrive with these improvements, but it was short-lived.

Wracked by one of the worst drought's in decades, the farm's borehole dried up. "In spite of these challenges, the family still managed to produce crops to sell and sustain themselves because of their adaptive agriculture practices, even though

production was severely diminished due to the lack of water,” says Janet Ogilvie, Programme Manager at INMED South Africa.

As the project’s main challenge was water, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries funded the project with R15 0000 in addition to drilling a new borehole on the farm. Now that the drought has broken, the family is taking proactive measures to ensure their farm’s sustainability, including installing an outlet and top on the reservoir dam, equipping the borehole with a solar power system, erecting a water tank stand and 5000 litre JOJO tank and installing water supply pipes, which will now improve the water problem.

The farmers are enthusiastic and positive that the changes will get their agro-enterprise back on track and thriving again. “Food security plays an important role in our lives especially in the community of Bultfontein and in my family as a whole,” says Mpaka Pertus Moshweshwe, one of the farmers. “INMED South Africa has taught us how to produce more at a lower cost, and we have never looked back once we started this project. It symbolises the love and care that we have for the community and allows us to provide them with fresh quality vegetables at a very affordable price.”

The Itshokolele farm has also become a source economic security for Bultfontein, says Moshweshwe. “We have managed to create jobs for the community and are able to donate to the schools, creches and disadvantaged families in the area.”

“We have been encouraged by these committed and motivated farmers and their ability to adapt to climate change, even long after the INMED South Africa project ended,” notes Unathi Sihlahla, Programme Director of INMED South Africa. “It is a testament to the importance of teaching the agriculture community new adaptive techniques, and we encourage corporates and other NGOs to support this family farm and others like it. Queries can be addressed directly to INMED South Africa.”

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