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News release

INMED South Africa project in Pella demonstrates resilience

Thriving in spite of all the odds, a stalwart group of women of the Pella Food Garden Cooperative in the drought-ravaged town of Pella in the Northern Cape, continue to make a significant contribution to their small impoverished community, thanks to INMED Aquaponics® and forward-thinking corporate investors.

Farming in Pella is fraught with challenges. Located on the edge of the Kalahari Desert, Pella's climate parches crops during the day and freezes them at night. Add to that the high salt content of the soil, and it is not an equation for successful food production. But it was the perfect location to demonstrate the climate resilience of INMED Aquaponics® and adaptive agriculture techniques when INMED South Africa and Old Mutual partnered to work with the Pella Food Garden in 2017.

Since that time, the group has increased its capacity exponentially with the addition of aquaponics, along with a production and cold storage facility funded by Old Mutual and Biotherm to turn excess produce into a branded line of pickled vegetables and preserves. "In this arid landscape, the ladies cannot afford to let anything go to waste," says Dr Sandra Pretorius, Health in Action Programme Manager for INMED South Africa, who provided food prep training. The improvements have led to job creation and food security for the community, which has been particularly hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Pella Food Garden has been a lifeline for its neighbors during the pandemic. "During this time we have been able to give donations of vegetables to the local school for their feeding scheme meals," says Esther Nell, who has chaired the Pella Food Garden since its inception. The co-op also has been donating seeds and seedlings to community members to start their own backyard gardens for food security and better health, as well as encouraging neighbors to share their fresh produce with the aged in the community and various churches that distribute vegetable parcels to those in need.

Scaling for greater impact

Today, with another investment from Biotherm, the Pella Food Garden is scaling up its operations with additional drip irrigation, mist sprayers in the seedling nursery and a new printer/scanner for their administrative office to prepare them to become a satellite production and training facility for the INMED Aquaponics® Social Enterprise. INMED ASE, is a sustainable agro-enterprise with a social mission of transitioning historically marginalized populations from subsistence to self-reliance

via aquaponics. The venture was launched earlier this year with seed funding from Mondelēz International under its Sustainable Futures programme.

Karah Mashava, Farm Manager of the INMED ASE, is currently teaching the co-op members the best planting methods for cultivating crops in such an arid climate. They also will continue to receive business training and other valuable knowledge that the group will soon share with other farmers and emerging agro-entrepreneurs in the region.

Unathi Sihlahla, INMED South Africa Programme Director, says the Pella Food Garden will play a key role in scaling the INMED ASE model nationally. “We need to help commercialise the project and increase the production of fish and vegetables as part of our broader INMED ASE strategy to help vulnerable individuals launch aquaponics enterprises.” The Pella Food Garden is perfectly poised to inspire other farmers. He “When the Pella Food Garden first started, they could hardly put a plate of food on their table each night,” Sihlahla recalls. In only a few years, the co-op has made such progress that they are looking to INMED South Africa to help them expand their market outside of the immediate community.

“All of this was only possible because of the skills INMED has given us and the inputs they shared with us to develop our farm,” says Nell, adding that her co-op is ready to pay it forward in a big way.

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Editor’s notes

About INMED Partnerships for Children

INMED Partnerships for Children is a non-profit international development organisation that has worked in more than 100 countries for over 30 years to build pathways for vulnerable children and families to achieve well-being and self-reliance. Through multisector partnerships and in-country affiliates, INMED builds effective systems that deliver innovative and sustainable approaches to break complex cycles of poverty for current and future generations.

INMED South Africa

Since 2006, in-country affiliate INMED South Africa has been working in collaboration with a wide range of corporate, foundation and government partners to transform the health, lives and futures of South Africa’s most vulnerable children. INMED South Africa’s programmes focus on food security, child and community

health, and economic and social development via climate-smart agriculture and participatory education. Incorporated under Section 21, INMED South Africa is a registered non-profit organization (NPC/PBO) recognized by the Department of Social Development and the South African Revenue Service (SARS). For more information, visit: www.inmed.org.za.