

PIONEER FOODS HELPING RURAL LIMPOPO SCHOOL FOOD GARDEN

In July 2008, Pula-Madibogo Primary School in Mankweng received sponsorship from Pioneer Foods, through national greening and food gardening public benefit organisation, Food & Trees for Africa (FTFA), to develop their Permaculture food garden and environmental projects, and support nearby schools and their community.

The Pula-Madibogo Permaculture food garden project is in Sovenga, a poverty stricken pocket of Limpopo Province. The area is characterized by a high rate of unemployment and HIV/AIDS and the school has a number of orphaned and vulnerable children.

Recognising the need to contribute towards job creation, alleviate poverty and combat crime, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and malnutrition in the area, the project leader, Mrs Mmamabolo, other educators, learners and community members attended a Permaculture food gardening workshop at nearby Toronto Permaculture Resource Centre in 2001. Soon afterwards they started food gardening and the project developed so well that last year they won the advanced category in the Woolworths Trust EduPlant competition.

Nevertheless there was still a need to develop the project which is on their 250 square metres of land. A reliable water supply was cited as a major challenge, as was more trees and plant material, securing their food garden against theft of produce and the interference of livestock, and further training for more community members. Through the funding from Pioneer Foods certain of these project constraints are receiving attention.

Mrs MM Mmamabolo, the project leader, states that, "This Permaculture and environmental project, has attracted people from the local community, schools, Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Affairs & Economic Development and Education and local government. The project is alleviating poverty and contributing towards job creation for unemployed community members. The organic vegetables are having a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable children in the area."

The Pula-Madibogo Permaculture project members have incorporated methods of water harvesting, conservation and management, soil enrichment and conservation, seed harvesting, the planting of a diverse range of food and indigenous plants and energy management into their project. The members make their own compost using collected organic material (leaves, twigs and cut grasses) and vegetable waste from the kitchens, liquid manure and have established a worm farm. The project members keep records of all sales and donations of produce and the have developed a portfolio of evidence that shows the developmental stages of their project.

The school has been involved in a community and school outreach programme that incorporates waste management and tree planting in the RDP houses in Sovenga Township. The school has participated in other climate change and environmental competitions and one of the learners who participated in several presentations was awarded a bursary to study at The Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy.

The project has received students from the University of Limpopo, local schools, community members and government departments to obtain Permaculture and environmental information. Department of Environmental Affairs and Economic Development use the school as a role model of environmental activity in the area.

The food garden is designed according to Permaculture principles which include zone and sector planning for sustainable land-use management. The project is flourishing with a variety of vegetables such as spinach, beetroot, green pepper, chillies, lettuce, herbs, celery and onions. Pula-Madibogo Primary School learners and neighbouring community members involved in the project are encouraged to establish their own food gardening projects at their homes and report back to the project leader on the development thereof on a regular basis. Excess vegetable seedlings are also distributed to the learners to boost their home-based food gardens.

On the 9th September 2008, Pula-Madibogo Primary School, together with local government, community members, students from University of Limpopo and schools, will celebrate their achievements at an Arbor Week event. 150 fruit and indigenous trees will be donated by Pioneer Foods through FTFA for the project and other local schools. Guest speakers will include Ms Kgopa, Department of Education, Mr Makgareetsa, Department of Environmental Affairs & Economic Development, a representative from the Department of Agriculture, the local councilor and Mr Joe Matimba from FTFA.

The Arbor Week event will take place at Pula-Madibogo Primary School at 10h00. To attend the event or for further information please contact Mr Joe Matimba on 083 481 5035. For directions contact Mrs. Mmamabolo on 015 2677 819 or 073 1768 447.

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