

PROJECT UPDATE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT (WEPP) July 2020

The Alekarenge Work Experience Pilot Project (WEPP) has continued to progress considerably throughout the past few months. Local workers have been fencing and developing new horticultural plots, while vegetables have been harvested by students. All COVID-19 advice remains adhered to.

The pandemic continues to highlight the lack of resilience in remote community food systems and the WEPP's role in improving food security, food sovereignty and self-sufficiency. Tennant Creek's only supermarket burning down has further revealed these vulnerabilities, while the parliamentary inquiry into food security in remote Indigenous communities has received over 100 submissions this month detailing the need for fresh, affordable and healthy food.

Neil and Del Norris, project supervisors, have been busy providing work and training programs for the three groups of trainees:

- Cohort 1- primary school students
- Cohort 2- senior school students
- Cohort 3- job seekers and community members.

Several community members continue to be employed in Cohort 3 who have been fencing and developing additional horticultural plots on the lease area. A tractor has been purchased and is being used to clear the new plots, which are on the site of the old market garden that once supplied fresh produce to Alekarenge and nearby communities.



Cohort 3 preparing new plots on the site of the old market garden

Students in cohort 2 have seen their first harvest of turnips, bok choy, broccolini, snow peas, green and purple beans, lettuce, beetroot, rainbow chard and spinach. The harvests were trimmed, washed, weighed, packaged and gifted or sold to community members and workers.



Cohort 2 transplanting cabbage seedlings they grew from seed



WEPP facility garden planted by cohort 2



Cohort 2 weighing and packaging the harvest

The Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd (AHPL) AGM was held at the WEPP facility this year with some students from the program assisting with catering. The two corporations that make up AHPL, Arlpawe Aboriginal Corporation and Arlpawe Residents Aboriginal Corporation, elected new AHPL board members and discussed plans going forward and the opportunities the WEPP can provide to the community.



Students Lena Walker & Christie Langdon-Walker assisting with catering the AHPL AGM



Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd (AHPL) AGM in June

In June, AHPL and Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Kargaru Land Management Unit, a division of Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation (Tennant Creek). The MoU has the objective of promoting cooperation in horticultural development, education and job development, including joint agricultural activities, exchange of students/trainees, crop trials and harvesting activities. Native lemongrass (*Cymbopogon ambiguus*) (Aherre-aherre in Arrernte) will be the first trial crop to provide both a seed harvest twice yearly and a harvest of foliage three to four times per year. The seeds will be pressed for oil.

The garlic trial with Australian Garlic Producers (AGP) and Coles Group is showing promising results. Bulb formation has begun and the crop is due to be ready for harvest by the end of September.

A MoU has also been signed between the NT Department of Primary Industry and Resources and Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture for the purpose of information sharing and working collaboratively to support commercial horticultural development in the Alekarenge area, and later throughout the NT.

Negotiations are being held with the NT Government Department of Education VET Sector to see where programs may align.



Cohort 3 planting the garlic trial in late-April using a spacer



Garlic trial in mid-June

Several members of the Northern Land Council (NLC) Executive Committee visited the WEPP to see how the program was developing on the ground and how the planned WEPP for the Mataranka region might work.



From left: Djawa Yunupingu (NLC executive), Neil Norris (AHPL), Paul McLaughlin (PMG Agriculture), Samuel Bush-Blanasi (Chair NLC), Simeon James (cohort 3 AHPL), Randall 'Ziggy' Rice (cohort 3 AHPL), Rodney Campbell (cohort 3 AHPL), Chris Neade (NLC executive), Vincent Lange (CEO Centrefarm).



Cohort 3 fixing the WEPP fence



Cohort 2 picking turnips and snow peas



Samuel Bush-Blanasi (Chair NLC) with PMG Agriculture peanut harvest

The WEPP includes a 130ha lease area designed to provide on-the-job training in:

- Horticultural plot development
- Fencing, irrigation and weeding
- Plant propagation and establishment
- Marketing and transportation

The WEPP training and commercial facility is aimed at building capability and capacity, providing a link between the community and nearby horticultural developments, and producing marketable fresh food. It is a pilot for future Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency (ALEDA) projects that will be rolled-out across the NT.

The WEPP is part of a long-term holistic plan to develop viable and sustainable primary industry on the Aboriginal estate to support the emergence of a commercial and economic base, providing employment for local people on their own land and terms, and enabling the flow-on of commercial and social benefits to the whole community.