

PROJECT UPDATE ALEKARENGE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT July 2021 Issue #5

About the Work Experience Pilot Project and the Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency (ALEDA)

In association with the Central and Northern Land Councils, Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture are currently establishing ALEDA to implement and coordinate multi-industry Aboriginal-owned developments throughout the Northern Territory. ALEDA aims to facilitate economic independence by supporting and assisting Traditional Owners to develop commercial opportunities.

ALEDA's pilot phase includes six commercial horticultural operations and two Work Experience Pilot Project (WEPPs), providing a real-life opportunity to trial the commercial and social aspects of the strategy, while addressing nutrition and food security, economic participation, local decision-making, education and training.

The Alekarenge WEPP, established by Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd (AHPL) and Centrefarm in 2020, embraces 3 cohorts of trainees: 1) primary school students; 2) senior school students; and 3) adult community members. The 130ha facility is designed to provide on-the-job training in: horticultural plot development; fencing, irrigation and plot management; plant propagation and establishment; and marketing and transportation.

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

Cohort 1:

The Alekarenge School Garden is coming along well with the citrus planted earlier in the year taking hold. AHPL, the Alekarenge School and Food Ladder have built a hydroponic greenhouse at the school for the students and WEPP trainees to grow produce year round.



Students with the new greenhouse



Students establishing footings with help from Food Ladder

The greenhouse has now entered its second growing season after learning a few lessons from the first crop that saw the leafy greens, Asian greens and herbs thriving, while the beans grew too quickly and didn't flower.

Cohort 1 now has \$500 in the bank thanks to produce sales from the school greenhouse, training centre gardens and eggs from the training centre hens. The students are planning on using the money on an end of year pizza and movie party for all the senior students and trainees.

Cohort 2:

Many of the Trainees have now completed 4 units of their Certificate I in AgriFood Operations. This is the first time the training has been made available to young people living in Alekarenge and was made possible by AHPL's work in establishing a partnership with the Department of Education NT. More certificate courses are planned.

The Trainees have each been designated an area for their own garden bed which they have edged, cultivated, added compost and nutrients, set up micro irrigation, mulched and planted with seedlings. They have also painted up signs to label their plots. The Trainees have planted a new orchard in WEPP grounds, in addition to their responsibilities in caring for the main garden, the hens and the new shade house where the seedlings and cuttings are cared for.



Cohort 2 irrigating and planting their garden beds

In May, the Trainees attended the Northern Food Futures Conference in Darwin. They were very excited to be going to this conference and learning about the different styles and types of agriculture which are currently in operation in northern Australia. The WEPP was reported on by Joe Clarke and Vin Lange (Centrefarm), with the Trainees present, and there was a great deal of interest in what is happening in Alekarenge.



Northern Food Futures Conference



Tour of exotic fruit farm in the Darwin region

While in Darwin the Trainees visited an Exotic Fruit farm, a Mango farm, a Barramundi farm, Taminmin School Agricultural department, Parliament House, the War Museum, the Botanic Gardens, Mindil Beach Markets, as well as shopping, swimming, and a tour of Batchelor Institute. They also visited the Department of Primary Industries nursery to view the future Alekarenge Mango trial trees. The Trainees were excited to see the plants were grafted and growing nicely. It was a hugely successful excursion for the years 10-12 Trainees. Many good contacts were made and even a win from the Auction, a bulker bag of soil conditioner was donated to the WEPP.



Charlton showing the Trainees' orchard during a recent inter-school visit.

Cohort 3:

Cohort 3 have been busy keeping the larger jobs under control. They have built a new pump shed for the bore and developed the plots for larger pumpkin and cabbage crops. Cohort 3 continue to maintain the current garlic trails, which are looking promising. Garlic Australia and Coles are planning a visit in the near future. Cohort 3 have also completed the construction of a seedling shade house at the WEPP facility for Cohort 2 to use to grow seedlings and cuttings.



Shade house built by Cohort 3



Second garlic trial with Garlic Aus.

In late June, the Trainees hosted a visit from Year 11 students from Colac School in Victoria. The Victorians have a school agriculture campus but were amazed that the Trainees were growing so many lush vegetables in the red sandy desert.

The WEPP hosted a celebration for the Centrefarm Co-mapping on Country project in April. The project, funded by AHPL, got together the Traditional Owners of the region to create a large multi-purpose canvas map of Country around Alekarenge. Those involved created a 'living' map that privileges stories, sites, flora/fauna and language that they see as useful to: make decisions about economic/social developments; educate young people; and educate non-Indigenous people. The celebration involved all 3 trainee cohorts and elders in the community who presented the map in its new home at the WEPP and talked to the stories that are recorded on it.



Graham Beazley presenting the map to WEPP students



Men talking about the dingo dreaming shown on the map