

PROJECT UPDATE ALEKARENGE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT March 2021

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

In association with the Central and Northern Land Councils, Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture are currently establishing the Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency (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 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 (employment pathways & opportunities), local decision-making, education and training.

The Alekarenge WEPP, established in 2020, embraces 3 cohorts of trainees: 1) primary school students; 2) senior school students; and 3) CDP participants and casual employees. 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.



Students watching the new irrigation bore being drilled

After a small break over summer the Alekarenge WEPP has had an impressive start to 2021. Last year's completion of a large machinery shed and new irrigation bore have set up the training centre for a busy year of horticultural trials, a market garden on the farm and paved the way for a 20-hectare irrigation area over the next three years.



6 bay shed completed by Cohort 3 (CDP participants and casual employees) in 2020

At the end of last year, the then Cohort 2 (years 7-9) hosted a marvellous Christmas party for their families as well as invited guests. A three course meal was prepared and served by the students, which was packed with plenty of fresh farm produce they had grown. Several senior custodians and community members who have been supporting the training centre planning for over a decade proudly attended the party hosted by their grandchildren.



Christmas party at the facility's industrial kitchen and mess hall

2021 school year has started with gusto:



Alekareng School Garden being cleared of buffel and prepared for the new shade house

Cohort 1 have not only cleared most of the overgrown weeds in the school garden, they have started the year with planting some citrus trees, which will be enjoyed by future students at the school.

Cohort 1:

At the school, Years 7, 8 and 9 have begun establishing the Alekareng School Garden, which is starting to look like a serious growing area after some heavy labour clearing the buffel grass and weeds.

In conjunction with AHPL and Alekareng School, Food Ladder are providing their expertise in greenhouse technology and sustainable food systems to develop a hydroponic greenhouse facility at the school and school program with Cohort 1.



Work on Alekareng School's new Food Ladder Climate Controlled greenhouse has begun.



Cohort 1 planting citrus trees in the school garden

Cohort 2:

This year's new Cohort 2 (Years 10 to 12) have shown significant interest with 18 young men and women enrolling in the program. This is the first time for quite a few years that Alekareng School has been able to offer students education past year 9 in Alekareng. The aim is that the students (trainees) will complete Certificate I or II in Agrifood Business with other Certificate courses being planned for later in the year. The trainees have been very keen to work the garden and have transformed the rain flattened, weed infested training centre garden back into neat horticultural plots, with irrigation set up and seeds or seedlings planted in most beds.

Cohort 2 also weeded and tidied up the pumpkins, sweet potatoes, eggplant and capsicums which survived the summer break, and have removed the old greenhouse structure to begin planning a herb garden.



Training centre plots being tidied up for planting



Shirleen and Aliana with one of the 18-week old laying hens

There has been significant interest from organisations in and around Alekareng to purchase vegetables and fruits on an ongoing basis. The trainees have spoken with the manager of the aged care facility regarding the ongoing supply of vegetables fresh from the garden for their client's meals; the Art Centre Manager has also expressed interest in purchasing produce for the artists' lunches and the IGA in Tennant Creek have made approaches regarding purchasing produce from the Cohort 2 garden.

The farm has recently introduced a brood of hens, the first livestock at the facility, allowing for animal husbandry to be integrated into the education and training program. Future plans involve a chicken breeding program as well as incorporating a small herd of goats into the program.

In February the trainees hosted the Department of Education NT, NT Farmers, and the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade, giving them a tour of the facility and an update of activities. The Department of Education have shown significant interest in partnering with AHPL and Centrefarm to support cohorts 1 and 2.



Trainees presenting update to NT Government and NT Farmers



Cohort 2 men dismantling the old greenhouse

Cohort 3:

Post school CDP participants and casual employees have been working hard on fencing another section of the farm ready to start a market garden.

They are also preparing areas for more crop trials including: avocado and mangoes with the Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade; larger garlic trials with Garlic Australia; and potentially potato trials in conjunction with a professional grower.

The new garlic trial, in conjunction with Garlic Producers Australia, has just been planted by Cohort 3 and they are now preparing ground and irrigation for future plantings which are planned for this year.



Cohort 3 erecting fencing



Serra Drilling have struck good water for the planned new plantings.

The new irrigation bore airlifted over 45 litres/sec allowing significant expansion of the irrigated area. Australia's leading precision irrigation company are currently designing a precision irrigation system for the farm to ensure water needs can be met with minimal waste.