

PROJECT UPDATE ALEKARENGE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT

October 2020

The beginning of Spring has seen plenty of activity at the Alekarenge Work Experience Pilot Project (WEPP). Over the past few months, local employees have been fencing and developing new horticultural plots, while the students have continued growing and selling fresh produce to the community.



First harvest from the garlic trial

Central Land Council (CLC) CEO Joe Martin-Jard and Economic Participation Manager Sera Bray visited the WEPP and were very pleased with the progress. They were taken on a tour of the facility and provided with a freshly harvested lunch supplied by the students.

Alekarenge Horticulture PL (AHPL) and Centrefarm Aboriginal Horticulture have been working closely with the CLC and Northern Land Council (NLC) to establish the Aboriginal Land Economic Development Agency (ALEDA).

The first garlic trials with Australian Garlic Producers were harvested in September and have shown promising results with excellent bulb formation. Samples from the crop have been sent interstate for analysis, while several other varieties are to be harvested in the coming weeks.



Students showing CLC CEO Joe Martin-Jard their vegetable plots



The CLC's CEO Joe Martin-Jard and Economic Participation Manager Sera Bray visit the WEPP

ALEDA is being designed to implement and coordinate multi-industry developments throughout the NT. It aims to facilitate economic independence by supporting Traditional Owners to drive the commercial development of their land assets, generating local jobs and wealth.

The WEPP is an essential component of the ALEDA strategy and will provide a model to build capability and capacity at future ALEDA projects.

ALEDA's pilot phase includes six commercial horticultural operations and provides 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, and education and training.



Students Lena Walker and Aliana Ryder at the student garden (photo: NT Dept. Edu.)

Students have continued growing and harvesting plenty of vegetables over the past few months including crops of cabbage, tomatoes, spring onions, broccoli, snow peas, chard, spinach, garlic, lettuce and zucchini.

The vegetables have been weighed, packaged and sold to local residents and workers via a weekly market stall that is getting increasingly popular and selling out each week. A market stall was also set up at the community's NT election polling booth.

AHPL are continuing discussions with the NT Government Department of Education to determine how Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs and accreditations may fit in with the WEPP.

Two of the students also took up the opportunity for some paid work at the WEPP over the school holidays and catered for a CLC meeting at the facility. Providing morning tea and fresh lunch from the garden for the large group of Traditional Owners and CLC staff.



WEPP produce store at the Alekareng NT election polling booth



Students planting seeds (left), students fertilising the garlic crop (middle) and a weekly market harvest packaged and priced (right)



WEPP employees erecting the new shed to allow for the projects expansion

A new shed is currently being constructed at the WEPP to support the projects expansion and 2021 goals. It is envisioned that the horticultural plots will expand by 5 hectares per year rising to a 20-hectare irrigation area. There has also been increased interest by commercial agribusiness operators to engage the WEPP in trialling a variety of different crops including mangos, potatoes, grapes and tomatoes, in addition to native foods and medicines.

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



New shed nearing completion

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. The strategy responds to key challenges with innovative solutions designed to bring together Aboriginal aspirations and knowledge with commercial business and development.



New plot cleared by local WEPP employees (left) and planted by the students for a summer watermelon crop (right)