



Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd

PROJECT UPDATE ALEKARENGE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT October 2021 Issue #6

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) middle 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 3:

Cohort 3 have been a part of some big leaps forward this quarter. AHPL's second garlic trial was completed, with representatives from Garlic Australia visiting the farm to see the successful crops for themselves. The harvest has been shipped off to Victoria for further analysis and negotiations are now in progress for a potential commercial crop to be established early in 2022.

The 1 hectare of pumpkins planted in July are nearly ready for harvest, and despite some hotter than average temperatures, the crops of Coventry and Butternuts have flourished under the care of the Cohort 3 workers, who even spent a week manually pollinating before the bees arrived.





Cabbages ready for harvest and being sent to local supermarkets

Cohort 2:

Cohort 2 has also achieved some significant milestones this quarter and it is expected 8 Trainees, including teacher Annie Adams and Assistant teacher Derek Walker, will be eligible to graduate with their Certificate 1 in Agrifood Operations in December. This is a noteworthy milestone for the project as students in the community were previously unable to complete education past middle school without going away to boarding school.

Early in September, the WEPP took a bus load of Alekarenge residents to Mick Waak's 100th birthday in Katherine and brought back another 12 hens for the farm. The WEPP is now getting on average around 12 eggs a day and selling eggs per the dozen. The cohort 2 garden now includes a strawberry patch and the trainees are picking a large varieties of tomatoes, along with the cherry tomatoes that have been harvested for months. The winter crop of zucchini is almost at its end and the new plants are starting to bear fruit along with some button squash, which is also a good seller. Cohorts 1 and 2 have also been learning to fly drones and it is planned for the Trainees to learn how to decode images taken with drones, to check for fruit production, plant and soil health, and pest or disease infestation. Drones are becoming more popular in agriculture and have numerous applications.



Students drone training



Alekarenge Horticulture Pty Ltd (AHPL) Annual General Meeting

Cohort 2 also assisted with the AHPL AGM where new directors were elected from the two local Aboriginal corporations, financial and activity reports were provided and decisions were made for the project going forward. It was beneficial for the students to be in the room with the senior people and seeing how the governance structures worked as some of them may choose to move into directors roles in the future.

Cohort 3 also began the work of extending the training farm compound to include room for a commercial greenhouse, dedicated classroom for cohort 2, and accommodation for AHPL's new staff member Tully Dingle and his young family. Experimental trial crops have also been successfully grown, with cabbages and a selection of potato varieties being harvested, and watermelons coming along nicely. The cabbage harvest was sold to IGA supermarkets in both Alice Springs and Tennant Creek starting a strong new relationship between the farm and local suppliers.



Ziggy inspecting the pumpkin crop



On September 22nd and 23rd the WEPP hosted Michael Liddle from Desert Knowledge Australia (DKA) who brought a program called Codes for Life, where the elders from the clans in Alekarenge spoke with the younger generations of men and boys to encourage them in the traditional ways of respect and protection of the families in the Community.

Michael Liddle and senior men from the region at the Codes for Life workshop

Cohort 1:

In June, the Foodladder greenhouse was re-seeded with lettuce, bok choy, pak choy and herbs. Cohort 1 have been testing the water from the tank daily for nutrient levels and pH levels which need adjusting every so often. By the end of July and into August, the students were harvesting and selling the produce in the community and to the Mirnirri Store in Alekarenge. The students also made and sold zucchini chocolate muffins and zucchini fritters which both went down very well with the customers.



Harvest ready for market



Muffin making with the zucchini crops



Cohort 1 and Foodladder's greenhouse