

PROJECT UPDATE ALEKARENGE WORK EXPERIENCE PILOT PROJECT January 2023 Issue #8

About the Work Experience Pathway 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 Pathway Projects (WEPPs), providing a real-life opportunity to trial the commercial and social aspects of the strategy, while addressing nutrition, 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: Cohort 1) middle school students; Cohort 2) senior school students; and Cohort 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.

For the second year in a row, summer floods have damaged transport networks across Australia, highlighting the lack of resilience in remote food systems and proving the benefits of locally grown produce.

Cohort 3:



Installing the mango irrigation system



Community gathering for the planting of the mango orchard

The second half of 2022 began with the completion of the next phase of our irrigation construction, installing a permanent watering system for 300 mango trees and preparing the 2-hectare plot of land. The planting took place on a day in early August, and was completed in just 2 hours, as a large number of community members of all ages joined in, guided by our guests from the Northern Territory Department of Industry, Tourism and Trade.

This success was followed soon after by the harvest of our 4-hectare Garlic crop alongside Nick Diamantopoulos and the crew from Australian Garlic Producers (AGP). The commercial size trial, whilst not perfect, saw two truckloads of Alekarenge garlic shipped to Mildura for sorting and distribution, and valuable lessons for future crops.



Cohort 3 and Nick Diamantopoulos from Australian Garlic Producers harvesting the 2022 garlic crop

To show their support for their partnership with the WEPP, AGP hosted AHPL staff and Directors for a weekend in Victoria, showing us around their farms and processing facilities. We even saw the Alekarenge Garlic ready for dispatch to major supermarket chains.



AHPL trip to Victoria to see the garlic processing and dispatch operations, most notably the Ali Curung garlic ready for market (centre)

This period has also seen the completion of multiple smaller projects, including the erection of a dedicated classroom facility, branded signage for the Lhurna Therik Training Farm, upgrading of the headworks section of our irrigation system, and the installation of a bird repellent system in the mango plot, as well as land preparations for next year's farming. In the last few months of the year, the local male staff were fortunate to learn and work with Jason Muller, a professional builder who moved on site to lead a number of construction projects around the farm.



Erecting the new Lhurna Therik signs



The new WEPP classroom



Building a shade structure for the classroom



Cohort 3's solar bird repellent system



Establishing footings for the greenhouse



Installing the irrigation mains from the bore

The women meanwhile, have been continuing their engagement with the Cohort 2 aged men and women of community, reaching students who have previously not been part of the project at Lhurna Therrk. They have also expanded their roles, taking on more and more of the administration and day to day running of the Training Farm, including maintenance of the garden and produce areas.

Cohort 2:

Students from Cohort 2 did not have the smoothest start to the Semester, with Alekareng School unable to replace their outgoing senior teacher until the very end of the year, and the departure of valued AHPL coordinator Lizzie Storer. With the Cohort 3 women developing their roles, the program did still see many successes, with the focus shifting temporarily to extracurricular learning and practical farming. The gardens were planted and flourished, with market harvests continuing all semester.



Cohort 2 maintaining the greenhouse



Cohort 2 using the fresh produce in the WEPP commercial kitchen



Planting out the market garden plots



Cohort 2 learning music production at the WEPP

Students were given the opportunity to learn and experiment with music production, creating and publishing recordings of original songs, learned to bake pizza, breads and cakes, and cater for gatherings of the community, including all those who turned out for the planting of the mangoes.

When their school studies did return to the farm during term 4, many students made a fantastic effort of catching up on a good portion of the semester's curriculum, as well as continuing maintenance and harvest of the market produce.

Cohort 1:

Middle school students at Alekarenge School hit the ground running this Semester, with the continued flourishing of their greenhouse project at the school, and their packaging and sale of the market produce grown by the C2 students at Lhurna Therrk to the community.



Cohort 1 in the flourishing school greenhouse



Cohort 1 making pizza dough

With Tully from AHPL and their supervising teachers, students visited businesses and sites around Ali Curung every Friday morning with an impressive selection of produce for sale. Not only did they learn about and sample a wide variety of fresh herbs and vegetables, but they also developed their communication skills and mathematics, promoting and conducting all the sales themselves.

Regular time was also spent during the semester on cooking with and preparing the food grown. Students made relishes and sauces, which they also sold, and learned to make pizza and stir fry, all using produce grown at the school and the farm. When possible the Cohort 1 students visited the farm to inspect the gardens themselves, and collect eggs from the chooks, even fashioning some original new labelling for the Ali Curung egg cartons. All money made during the Markets will be spent on equipment and appliances, of the students choosing, for use in 2023.



Fresh produce prepared for the weekly market





Cohort 1 designed egg cartons



Cohort 1 cooking the fresh produce in the AHPL kitchen