

Woolworths, partners launch community learning farm in Stellenbosch

Woolworths has partnered with Spier Wine Farm, the Sustainability Institute and its AgroEcology Academy to launch the **Living Soils Community Learning Farm** in Stellenbosch's Lynedoch Valley. The three-year pilot project aims to establish a learning farm that demonstrates ecologically-restorative methods to grow nutrient-rich foods to improve community food security.



From left to right: AgroEcology Academy interns Phutuma Mgu, Thandiwe Myingizani and Vuyolwethu Zicina with their Living Soils Community Learning Farm mentors Spier Farm Manager Orlando Flander and local farmer Eric Swarts.

Through the AgroEcology Academy, it will involve the training and development of young farmers to address local youth unemployment and land reform issues.

Woolworths, which has a focus on improving food security and sustainable farming, has come on board with funding of R4.4m.

"We're very excited to play a key role in this partnership," says Zinzi Mgolodela, Woolworths director of corporate affairs.

Instituting a shared vision

"The partners share the vision of the Living Soils Community Learning Farm becoming a viable model of community-based food security and the sustainable development of local livelihoods that can be replicated all over South Africa. The project is aligned to our successful Farming for the Future initiative, therefore, an extension of partnerships with our suppliers, and apart from the funding we will be providing, the project will benefit from access to sustainable farming expertise in our supply chain."

Stellenbosch wine farm, Spier has contributed three hectares of land and farming equipment to the Living Soils Community Learning Farm. Heidi Newton-King, Spier's HR and sustainability director says: "Through our Growing for Good initiatives, Spier supports communities through learning. By contributing land and resources, we look forward to exploring the development of a long term impact model."

The Sustainability Institute and its AgroEcology Academy will host and drive the project with a dedicated project manager.



From left to right: Vuyolwethu Zicina, Thandiwe Myingizani and Phutuma Mgu interns from the AgroEcology Academy taking soil samples to determine viable production options for the first planting of the Living Soils Community Learning Farm

The priorities of the Learning Farm will be the production of nutritious food that will help to transform at-risk households into food secure families, and the provision of training and learning that empowers emerging, young farmers with the skills to tackle food insecurity, youth unemployment and land reform.

Jess Schulschenk, director of the Sustainability Institute says: "Research will form an important part of this programme, so we can document and share best practice in ecologically-restorative approaches to nutritious food production and understand how social justice and innovation can be driven through sustainable food systems and models. We look forward to the learning, advocacy and thought leadership that will emerge from this very rooted and necessary work to realise food security, youth skills development and land reform in practice."

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