

SUNfarming technology spells good news for food security

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Senzeni Zokwana has commended a farming project, which harnesses the power of the sun to grow vegetables. The Minister visited the SUNfarming project, situated at the North West University in Potchefstroom, on Tuesday.



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The solar powered vegetable growing project was born from a partnership between SUNfarming and the University of Potchefstroom in 2013, establishing the first Solar Training Centre in South Africa. The centre has trained over 450 people since 2013, providing skills on solar photovoltaic (PV) technology.

The project began production in June 2016, producing tomatoes, spinach, cauliflower and other herbs. No soil is required to grow vegetables in the project's tunnels and water productivity is increased through drip irrigation. The project has three tunnels, with six young women trained per tunnel. Solar tunnel production has much higher yields compared to conventional farming.

An opportunity to address household food and nutrition insecurity

"The project provides an opportunity to grow affordable and nutritious food in local municipalities. This is an opportunity to effectively address household food and nutrition insecurity.

"This is innovative technology for agriculture and we want to see this replicated in other parts of the country, as it effectively deals with the issue of climate change and the scarcity of water and land," said Minister Zokwana.

Buni Maretlwa, one of the workers at SUNfarming, said she was excited to have been in the first group of people who were trained in this project. "We are no longer planting our vegetables using the soil, but coco fibre. Our system of farming saves water. Our vegetable pots are irrigated on time and we produce fresh vegetables," said Maretlwa.

Sun farming good for the future

Professor Fika Janse van Rensburg, the University of the North West Potchefstroom Campus Rector, said the North West province is blessed with a lot of sunshine, and all that was needed was creative, innovative minds to come up with great initiatives to make use of the sunlight in order to increase agricultural production.

"Sun farming is good for our future... In Potchefstroom, we have more agriculture land that must be utilised."

Tlokwe Mayor Kgotso Khumalo was pleased with the potential sun farming presents. "I am excited about the project and the potential it has for our municipality. I want to pledge our full support to this project."

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