

Urban farming project Hola Harvest launched in Joburg

Looking to making farming more attractive to SA's youth, SAB and AB InBev Africa has introduced its first group of urban farmers in Johannesburg's inner-city and surrounds with the installation of three 200m² rooftop farms, addressing challenges of unemployment and food security.



(L-R) Back row: Sibusiso Mahlangu, Sibongile Cele, Fezile Msomi, Puseletso Mamogale and Khaya Maloney.

Front row: Siyabonga Mngoma and Themba Baladzi

The project is facilitated by its youth entrepreneurship programme SAB KickStart in partnership with the City of Joburg, the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA).

Seven young agri-entrepreneurs

The farms, situated at the top of 1 Fox Street in Braamfontein and at Outreach Foundation in Hillborw, are run by seven young agri-entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 35. They are Sibusiso Mahlangu (Outsauce), Sibongile Cele (Mcebo Unlimited Wealth), Fezile Msomi (Hazile Group), Puseletso Mamogale (Midi Agricultural Farm), Khaya Maloney (Afri-Leap), Siyabonga Mngoma (Abundance Wholesome Foods), and Themba Baladzi (Rutegang Agricycling Co-op).

The rooftop farms are supported by a newly formed brand called Hola Harvest, under which they produce a wide range of fresh produce such as leafy vegetables, strawberries, chillies, and violli flowers. The produce will be sold to restaurants and local communities around Johannesburg Central and the profits will go to the entrepreneurs themselves to assist them in managing their businesses. In addition, the farms have opened up opportunities for three agro-processors to run enterprises based on the produce that they convert into condiments and sauces.

SAB and AB InBev Public Interest Commitments

The Urban Agriculture Project forms part of SAB and AB InBev's Public Interest Commitments made to the South African government in which the organisation invests R1bn into economic stimulus and societal benefit programmes. The organisation has committed to invest R610m into agriculture, R200m into entrepreneurship, and R190m is earmarked for societal benefit programmes. Of this, approximately R2,200,000 will go towards growing urban agriculture and the urban farmers needed to support this.

SAB and AB InBev join a number of organisations globally that see opportunities in restricted spatial areas such as city centre building roof spaces to farm a vast variety of produce that will be sold to local markets.

Aligning technology and food security

“SAB looks to innovative ways to help tackle youth unemployment effectively in South Africa. The Urban Agriculture initiative is one such initiative which involves commercial hydroponic farming. This initiative closely aligns technology and food security, as well as consumer education to facilitate job creation amongst young unemployed graduates.

“Global ecological challenges present opportunities for intrepid entrepreneurs to develop innovative solutions, which not only address the problem facing the sustainability of our Earth and the survival of its people, but assists the drive towards creating much-needed jobs. Through this project, we are also demystifying the misconceptions of agriculture by making farming more attractive to the younger generation,” says Phumzile Chifunyise, enterprise development manager at SAB and AB InBev Africa.

As a means of promoting awareness and knowledge of the urban agriculture concept, consumers are able to tour the various technologies used in a demonstration farm on site at 1 Fox Street.



Addressing eco-social, economic challenges

“Rooftop farming is a concept growing in popularity for being a smart and no-fuss solution to helping address, on a small

scale, eco-social and economic challenges. It requires minimal infrastructure and can be developed over a short period of time to yield quick results. We are always looking for innovative ways in which to improve people's lives and society as a whole, and urban agriculture provides us this platform.

"We are helping to demystify some of the perceptions of farming, especially that of a traditional sector only accessible to those with high capital, land and infrastructure, years of experience and knowledge. And what better way to address this than rooftop farming," says Chifunyise.

The Urban Agriculture Project develops the rooftop farm entrepreneurs by providing infrastructure funding and support in the form of business training to assist with how to operate and manage the farms, and training in urban farming practices.

Developing young entrepreneurs

An incubation programme with the young entrepreneurs was hosted in partnership with local organisation Wouldn't It Be Cool (WIBC), which focuses on developing young entrepreneurs through innovation. The Urban Agriculture entrepreneurs participated in a three to six-month training programme, after which they presented their business model on how they would solidify themselves in the market. They were then provided with the rooftop farm infrastructure and access to market.

The programme uses hydroponic technology through which fresh produce is grown in A-frame shelved racks. Props are used to hold the plants upright allowing their roots to reach the nutrient-rich water sitting below them. The rooftop farms are well equipped to accommodate all seasonal weather conditions. Plastic sheet roof tunnels keep the plants warm in winter, and protect them from severe weather such as storms and hail in the summer months. The sheets can be retracted to release heat, if necessary.

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