

THE URBAN AGRICULTURE INITIATIVE

Fact sheet



MINERALS COUNCIL
SOUTH AFRICA

Formerly the Chamber of Mines of South Africa



Minerals Council's rooftop garden

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QUICK FACTS

WHO AND WHEN

Participants in the Urban Agriculture Initiative include the Minerals Council, the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, the Wouldn't It Be Cool (WIBC) incubation and mentorship organisation, FNB, Africa Housing Company (AFHCO), University of Johannesburg, Stay City, Thebe Investment Corporation, BothaRoodt Fresh Produce Agency, and green business support organisation Sophiatown BizCre8.

The Minerals Council hosted the launch of the Urban Agriculture Initiative on 11 October 2017.

HELPING PROVIDE INNOVATIVE FOOD SECURITY AND EMPLOYMENT SOLUTIONS

The Urban Agriculture Initiative aims to create an urban agricultural ecosystem by repurposing disused rooftops and making use of hydroponics and aquaponics to produce agricultural produce for Johannesburg’s inner-city communities.



The initiative was established by the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership, in which the Minerals Council South Africa (Minerals Council) is a key stakeholder. The Minerals Council has participated in and funded a pilot project to assess the feasibility of growing herbs and vegetables on the rooftops of inner-city buildings

including the Minerals Council itself. The first crop was planted on the rooftop of the Minerals Council building for the benefit of agripreneur, Nhlanhla Mpati. A successful basil crop has already been harvested and sold to the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market and surrounding cafes and coffee shops.

Another participant, First National Bank (FNB) Bank City, is currently producing enough non-starch vegetables for its canteen from its rooftop farm and has surplus to send to its branch canteens.

Johannesburg is one of many cities in the world turning to inner-city farming with the objective of addressing high unemployment and food insecurity while regenerating neighbourhoods.

The Minerals Council hopes the project will extend beyond rooftops to sidewalks and even to other under-utilised spaces for the benefit of the people of Johannesburg’s inner city and beyond.



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THE ROOFTOP GARDENS OF JOHANNESBURG

Nhlanhla Mpati is an agripreneur who started the rooftop garden on the Minerals Council building in Johannesburg’s inner city. Nhlanhla had some farming experience when the WIBC initiative identified and trained him as one of its first rooftop farmers.

Nhlanhla has since produced some 15kg of basil and has orders for at least six months. His hydroponic farming method does not require soil – a practice dating back to the time of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in 600BC. His basil grows in just 21 days as hydroponic plants mature much faster than crops in other mediums. Nhlanhla plans to increase his range of crops to include spinach and carrots.

GROWING THE PROJECT

The success of the Minerals Council’s pilot project has led the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) to fund the start-up costs of another 24 projects in the inner city of Johannesburg – helping to provide sustainable employment to 24 farmers. The DSBD will review the entire project in 2018 with a view to increasing available funds.

Property owners in the city have made 60 buildings available for these rooftop farms. The Minerals Council intends to give farmers an additional 400m² on its 93-year old heritage building.

HYDROPONICS AND AQUAPONICS – THE ADVANTAGES

- Crops are grown in special water solutions without the need for soil or large open spaces
- A very small area is required to produce a sustainable crop
- Water consumption is significantly reduced as 95% is circulated and reused
- Production can be increased 100 times per square metre by extending the gardens upward
- Soil erosion is eliminated
- Hydroponic plants mature much faster than crops in other mediums

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