



RASTAFARIAN ORGANIC VEGETABLES

Citrusdal

Project Objectives:

- Develop an organic production plan.
- Prepare soil.
- Planting.
- Harvest.

Project Timeframe

12 months

Long Term Goals:

- Purchase land.
- Specialise in organic crop production.
- Farm commercially.

Contact:

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“Initially there were a lot of people interested in our project. But as soon the real work started, many of them disappeared.” Listening to these words from Willem Petro, who is in the leader of the Citrusdal Rastafarian Emerging Farmers Project, it is easy to see that the nine men and women, who form the group, are not afraid to work hard for a living and the things they believe in.

Petro decided to start doing something about unemployment, poverty and hunger in Citrusdal. Having grown up on a farm, he had acquired some agricultural knowledge and could put it to use in the group. The project started by growing fresh vegetables on small garden plots in between houses.

In Citrusdal, most of the employment opportunities are directly linked to the seasonal citrus fruit industry. Without permanent employment, most households are faced with uncertainty and poverty for most of the year.

In 2002, the opportunity was given to the backyard Rasta farmers to apply for use of municipal land. Their application was successful and the Rastafarian Emerging Farmers soon found themselves involved in a land reform project facilitated by the Cederberg Municipality. An 85 hectare farm known as Petersfield was purchased by the municipality, using State funds from the Department of Land Affairs. “The soil is good quality and suitable for agriculture,” Petro says. The farm was to be shared with other emerging farmer groups.

The nine Rastafarians decided to work hard and make the best of the opportunity. The farm has an allocation of 10 hectares of water for irrigation from the Olifants River. “Water can be a big problem,” Petro says. “The upstream farmers pump lots of water from the Olifants River. By the time it flows past our land, the river is almost empty, especially in summer.”

Despite the challenges, the Rastafarians are preparing to





Water for Resource Limited Farmers and Reform



plant three hectares of organic vegetable crops specifically potatoes, tomatoes, onions and beetroot. The farm also has three hectares of citrus under irrigation. Recently the project applied for organic certification from the Bio-dynamic Organic Certification Authority (BDOCA) to facilitate access to the organic vegetable market. “The planting of crops takes a lot of careful planning and knowledge. Planting at the wrong time can ruin a crop. This is one of the reasons why we attend all the training workshops available to us,” says Petro.

Part of their short term objectives include not only to supply fresh produce to the local community, but also to sell the produce further afield to generate income.

“In 2006 we successfully planted beans which we sold at quite a profit and were able to make improvements such as repairing existing fences around the farm. We also kept some of the seed which will save money once we start planting again.”

“We are also looking to extend our lease from five years to nine years and 11 months. Five years is not enough time to really get a project like ours properly off the ground.” According to Petro, they would like to own their own commercial farm. A local commercial farmer has assisted the group by lending them a tractor to plough and prepare the soil, while other commercial farmers have also indicated their willingness to assist. The nine Rastafarians, who in Petro’s words, “earn their bread by the sweat of their brow,” are starting to enjoy the results of their labour.

