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INMED ASE Farm Manager Living His Passion for the Land

For Kararegra Mashava, Farm Manager of the first INMED Aquaponics® Social Enterprise (INMED ASE) in South Africa, the charm of agriculture lies in working with living organisms. “They teach you something new every day,” he says.

The INMED ASE in Vanderbijlpark houses commercial aquaponics systems that will be used for food production and training. It will also serve as a consolidation centre for the growing number of aquaponics farmers to sell their harvests at higher market rates, as well as purchase seedlings, fingerlings and other inputs at bulk prices.

Ultimately, the INMED ASE will serve as a powerful catalyst in transitioning historically disadvantaged populations, including people with disabilities, women and youth, from subsistence to commercial agricultural production using climate-smart aquaponics.

Managing this unique social enterprise is a big job. “Each day brings new challenges when you are dealing with living matter and this aspect of farming really excites me,”

says Mashava. “The opportunity to learn always presents itself, and I was privileged to be given the opportunity to join the INMED South Africa team to manage the INMED Aquaponics® Social Enterprise--a new type of incubator of entrepreneurial agro-enterprises for climate-smart food production.”

Mashava explains that aquaponics is an intensive form of farming combining hydroponics and fish farming in a closed symbiotic system that produces at least 10 times more crops than traditional farming and, uses a tenth of the water and no chemical fertilisers or pesticides.

“This model is very easy to build—and because it is made of locally available materials it is very easy to replicate in any other area,” he says.

Formerly the farm manager at Gamtoos Flowers and Vegetables, an agricultural enterprise at Thornhill in the Eastern Cape, Mashava started his INMED ASE journey in November last year.

He holds a B.Sc. Natural Resources Management and Agriculture (Agronomy) honours degree and advanced-level studies in geography, agricultural sciences and biological sciences.

Looking back on his tenure at Gamtoos, Mashava says he was fortunate to be part of the success of this enterprise and is grateful for everything he learnt there as farm manager.

“The opportunity to oversee all farm operations, from inception, was a real eye-opener. I used every day to strengthen my innovative thinking skills and further my understanding of how aquaponics, hydroponics and aeroponics are designed and operate,” he says.

“With the varied experiences at Gamtoos and keeping up with new trends, I felt ready and excited to take on the INMED ASE venture,” he continues.

Mashava is responsible for fully developing and establishing operations to steer this new enterprise forward to meet quarterly and annual targets. “My primary responsibilities include implementing and managing the ASE to maximise quality

production and achieve growth and market performance through entrepreneurial approaches, and to implement innovative business concepts,” he says.

In the short time Mashava has been an INMED ASE farm manager, he has certainly been making hay while the sun shines.

The team has already developed an urban cultivator for microgreens production. “Microgreens are leafy green vegetables that are harvested just after the germination of seeds and are fully developed cotyledon leaves, along with one pair of very small partially developed true leaves. Seeds of green leafy vegetables, salad greens, herbs and seeds of plants with edible flowers can be used for raising microgreens,” Mashava explains. “Microgreens are considered ‘functional’ foods and are a dense source of many nutrients, such as minerals, vitamins and antioxidants that can prevent many diseases and deficiencies when consumed in small quantities. The nutritional values of microgreens are more quantitative than mature plants,” he says.

The role of farming, as he sees it, is becoming increasingly important and it is Mashava’s dream to see more youth becoming lovers of the land.

The fact that the world population continues to grow and that everyone needs food three times a day, makes agriculture relevant – right now and in the future. “I would love to see more young people join the sector—especially when they learn how diverse and interesting it is. You get to combine different disciplines, like commerce, engineering and biology, to name a few.”

Mashava says it is rational and appropriate for countries to place emphasis on the sustainability of the agricultural sector through initiatives like the INMED ASE.

INMED’s vision is to make the INMED ASE technology and ideas transferrable to all communities to enable them to grow food and create employment. “This makes the training aspect very important,” says Mashava, noting that INMED South Africa will start e-learning and on-site training in a couple of months targeting at least 18 000 individuals in the next 3 years.

The key to success with the INMED ASE, Mashava concludes, is attitude. “I believe one has to be passionate about farming. I have also learnt that agriculture requires patience.”

INMED ASE is made possible by seed funding from Mondelēz Global LLC, via the Mondelēz International Foundation, through its Sustainable Futures social impact investment programme.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

About INMED Partnerships for Children



INMED Partnerships for Children is an international humanitarian development organization that has improved the lives of vulnerable people in more than 100 countries for 35 years. Through multisector partnerships and in-country affiliates, INMED builds effective systems that deliver innovative approaches to break complex cycles of poverty for current and future generations. INMED's programs in climate-smart agriculture and aquaponics, maternal and child health and nutrition, and economic development have made a sustainable impact on the lives of millions of children and their families. For more information about INMED Partnerships for Children's programs and partners, visit <https://inmed.org>.

About INMED South Africa



Since 2006, in-country affiliate INMED South Africa has been working in collaboration with a wide range of corporate, foundation and government partners to transform the health, lives and futures of South Africa's most vulnerable children. INMED South Africa's programs focus on food security, child and community health, and economic and social development via climate-smart agriculture and participatory

education. Incorporated under Section 21, INMED South Africa is a registered non-profit organization (NPC/PBO) recognized by the Department of Social Development and the South African Revenue Service (SARS). For more information, visit: www.inmed.org.za.

About the Mondelēz International Foundation



The Mondelēz International Foundation (MIF) is the charitable arm of global food and beverage conglomerate

Mondelēz International. Through international partnerships with leading NGOs, MIF funds nutrition education, active play and fresh foods

programs to empower more than one million children and their families around the world to lead healthier lives. Mondelēz is the first company to invest in the INMED ASE through its Sustainable Futures Programme. For information, visit:

<https://za.mondelezinternational.com/>.

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