

Sustainable agriculture for the future

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Scientific methods help to determine Socio-Economic and Food Security Status

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Issues of household food and nutrition security have received worldwide attention due to the climate change impact and dire economic conditions which put new and additional stress on food systems. Out of the nine provinces of South Africa, eight provinces are classified in a 'Stressed Phase' and in need of urgent government intervention, namely; Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Gauteng, North-West, Free State, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape,

and Western Cape; while the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province is classified in a 'Crisis Phase'

Home food gardens are identified as an important supplemental source contributing to food and nutritional security and livelihoods. The production of food on small plots next to human settlements is the oldest and most enduring form of cultivation. Home food gardens are found in both



Households are able to sell their vegetables to the community and other local markets.



An example of quality produce from household food gardens.

rural and urban areas in mainly small-scale subsistence agricultural systems. They provide various social, economic, and environmental benefits like improving food and nutritional security, improving health, empowering the status of women, preserving indigenous knowledge, and building integrated societies, generating income, enhancing livelihoods, and household economic welfare and the use of environmentally friendly approaches for food production while conserving biodiversity and natural resources.

Notable efforts have been made to promote food security by the South African government. The Agricultural Research Council (ARC) and Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) signed an agreement to improve communities in all nine provinces of South Africa through the development of a vegetable production garden strategy, known as the Agricultural Para-Professional Development Programme (APPDP). The objective of the APPDP is to create and support sustainable rural development through improved vegetable production in their respective homestead gardens to increase food security and household incomes. In collaboration with the Agricultural Research Council the horticultural sector can become the driving force for economic growth in the rural communities.

As part of the APPDP, the ARC executed a study in the Gert Sibande District in Mpumalanga Province with the aim to



Agricultural Research Council official monitoring the household's garden.

determine the socio-economic and food security status of the selected households. In the Gert Sibande district the share of the population below the poverty line has also worsened over the years (46.5%), making it the second highest of the three districts in the Mpumalanga Province. The study used a purposive sampling procedure to select 54 sample households. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, interviews, site observations, focus groups, and government reports. In addition, the collection, coding, and analysis of data on food and nutrition security done by the ARC – Vegetables, Industrial, Medicinal Plants (VIMP) team to identify and to inform decisions is on government initiatives towards reducing food and nutrition security in South Africa.

Some the findings were that the majority of the food insecure households were younger females less than 35 years of age. Households with many family members were also more likely to experience hunger as the limited food available has to sustain more hungry mouths. In addition, about 70% of the households depend on social grants as a source of income. It was also established that dark green leafy vegetables and 'other' vegetables such as cabbage, tomato, onion, and cauliflower were the most accessible and consumed food groups with percentages of 93 and 96 respectively.

It is evident that the food security status in Gert Sibande district is worrying as households do not have economic access to grow and purchase their own food and food also do not last until the end of the month. The study concludes that household's participation in the vegetable government intervention can potentially improve households farming knowledge, increase production and income, and ultimately flatten the food insecurity status.

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