

## Greening the future

# Farming in harmony with nature

Non-Profit Organisations Award  
Sponsored by Nedbank  
Runner-up: African Conservation Trust

**Janis Theron**

In KwaZulu-Natal, where about 20% of South Africa's population lives, poor agricultural practices have caused extreme losses of topsoil, the creation of huge dongas and the felling of vast tracts of indigenous forests.

Non-profit organisation African Conservation Trust promotes ecological "micro-farms" that not only tackle these problems, but now pro-

vide sufficient fresh vegetables and fruit to feed about 27000 people each year in more than 40 schools, through 250 individual gardens across the province.

Since 2000 the trust has been promoting food security projects that contribute towards eradicating poverty and hunger. It targets women whenever possible and has provided on-site permaculture training to 40 farmers in the Mtubatuba area.

"Conservation agriculture farming practices are based on natural ecological processes and therefore promote biodiversity," says Dominique Christian, a researcher and project



**African Conservation Trust works with women whenever possible and has provided on-site permaculture training to 40 farmers in the Mtubatuba area. Photo: ACT**

developer for the trust. "Our practices encourage minimal soil disturbance and water use, crop rotations and the avoidance of artificial fertilisers and pesticides."

The organisation also assists with

the replanting of indigenous forests, harvesting of rainwater for home-stead gardens, and reducing soil erosion in two major catchment areas of the Ukhahlamba Drakensberg Park world heritage site so that an esti-

mated 40 000 people benefit directly

Evidence of these interventions is clearly visible, says Christian. Areas of land have been set aside by communities for biodiversity conservation through stewardship processes.

Soil erosion and the silting of vital water sources have been reduced in neighbourhoods where the trust works, dongas have been rehabilitated and alien invasive plant species have been reduced.

Last year the trust helped 16 rural farmers from northern Zululand and Richmond to obtain national qualifications framework certificates in agro-ecological farming. They subsequently established food gardens using the principles they learned.

The trust also runs programmes to protect endangered species such as the black rhino and Jozini cycad.

It started the Skydive for Rhinos campaign two years ago to raise funds for antipoaching initiatives in the province.

"Our work is making a valuable contribution to a future that is not only greener, but one where every person's needs are met in a manner that is both sustainable and protects the natural resources on which we depend," says Christian.