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Social Employment Fund participants harvesting a spinach crop. Photo: Carl Grossmann.

Seeds for green future

Kloof NGO trains over 6 000 farmers

EARTH Day is a global opportunity to raise awareness of the planet's need for protection and is a drive toward a sustainable future. The Earth Day organisation is advocating for reducing plastic production by 60% within 16 years in their current Planet vs Plastic campaign. In addition to the focus on plastic, further priorities include reforestation, species decline, climate change and how it affects food systems, and regenerative

agriculture. The Kloof-based NGO, the African Conservation Trust (ACT), embraces the benefits of regenerative agriculture and has successfully trained 6 035 small-scale farmers in agro-ecological farming practices in the last 24 months. The participants are part of a mass employment programme, called the Social Employment Fund (SEF), which falls within the Presidential Employment Stimulus

(PES). "The small-scale farmers are located across the country, and they've created gardens amounting to more than 70 hectares of cultivated land. The food that is produced is organic, nutrient-dense, chemical-free and devoid of plastic packaging. The produce is consumed by the farmers, sold across the fence into their communities or donated to the vulnerable," says Carl Grossmann,

chairman of ACT. The United Nations has stated that a thin layer of topsoil requires a millennium to form, and the globe's topsoil is expected to be depleted within 60 years. However, regenerative agriculture could play a vital role in moving that deadline. The practice of regenerative agriculture keeps soil disturbance to a minimum (through a no-till and cover-cropping system), improves plant diversity,

which keeps nutrients and water in the soil, and raises the quality of water in the river systems. Grossmann says the agro-ecological course that ACT offers is a four-day process, with hands-on training in permaculture principles, garden-planting techniques, the making of natural pesticides and fertilisers, and seed-saving methods. The course is followed by a supply of seedlings, consumables and mentoring.

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