The Mondlezi Foundation has launched its new aquaponics facility at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University with a view to growing healthy meals for children.

"The aquaponics facilities will help address this challenge," said Mondlezi SA’s managing director, Joost Vlaanderen.

The facility comprises five fish tanks filled with tilapia, as well as nine grow beds planted with a variety of fast-growing crops. Lettuce, spinach, peppers, cucumbers and herbs are among the nutritious, organic fresh produce that is being grown in the system.

The aquaponics plant will also provide research opportunities for agricultural students from NMMU.

NMMU innovation feeds kids

Aquaponics facility that combines aquaculture with hydroponics will provide poor children in PE with nutrition.

Photo: NMMU innovation feeds kids

The Mondlezi International Foundation, Mondlezi South Africa and NMMU launched a new aquaponics facility at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth.

Government officials, the private sector and local schools were treated to a tour of the facility, one of two commercialised aquaponics units that the foundation and Mondlezi (humanitarian organisation) are building as part of their EFHeal Health in Action programme.

Aquaponics is an innovative food production technique that combines aquaculture (fish farming) with hydroponics (rootless crop production, with the cultivation of plants in water).

The facility at NMMU will provide children from primary schools in low-income communities of Port Elizabeth with access to fresh, nutritious produce.

The humanitarian organisation has been working in SA for more than 10 years where it has pioneered aquaponics production to promote healthy nutrition and income generation.

A second aquaponics system will provide healthy, nutrient-rich produce to primary schools in the Soteto area. Manufacturer of this system will begin later this year.

"Daily consumption of fresh produce is widely acknowledged as key to a well-balanced diet, yet for many in low-income communities, healthy food choices are often out of reach," Mondlezi SA’s managing director, Joost Vlaanderen, said.

A three main goals are to ensure school children from disadvantaged communities have access to nutritious food, get enough physical exercise and learn about nutrition through the national school curriculum.

The Port Elizabeth aquaponics system is about 225m² in size and will at maximum capacity produce about 2 tons of various greens and about 1.9 tons of fish annually. It will provide fresh produce to supplement the nutritional needs of children at various schools in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area.

While fish will be harvested twice a year, vegetables will be available throughout the year once the system is running.

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