WORLDWIDE fruit

Strengthening Livelihoods

How Climate Resilience Funding is Building Regional Capacity for Nature-Based Solutions

Case Study 5

2026

Context

Agriculture stands at the forefront of some of the world's most pressing challenges, including soil degradation, biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and extreme weather events. Recognising the critical role that the agricultural sector plays in both contributing to and addressing these issues, **Worldwide Fruit Limited** (WFL) has committed to a holistic and collaborative approach to sustainability. Their journey is not just about meeting industry expectations—it is about proactively shaping a more resilient, regenerative, and responsible supply chain.

Since 2019, WFL has worked closely with **Blue North Sustainability**, a consultancy specialising in agricultural sustainability, to support farmers in implementing practical, long-term solutions. This partnership has shifted WFL's approach from a prescriptive "top-down" model to a "bottom-up" strategy that genuinely empowers farmers. By prioritising farmer-led initiatives, WFL ensures that sustainability efforts are not only effective but also deeply rooted in the realities of agricultural operations.

Through this ongoing collaboration, WFL has driven key initiatives such as water stewardship projects, the large-scale roll-out of the **SHERPA** online sustainability management system, and **carbon footprint** reduction programs. These efforts have equipped farmers with the tools, knowledge, and support needed to navigate the complexities of modern agriculture while reducing environmental impact.

These case studies highlight WFL's commitment to sustainability by showcasing the progress, challenges, and opportunities within its supply chain. They capture how farmers and suppliers are adapting to climate change, reducing carbon footprints, and strengthening livelihoods. A key theme across these stories is the mindset shift required for sustainable and regenerative practices to take root. Farmers are moving beyond conventional approaches, embracing new ways of thinking, and finding innovative solutions to long-term resilience.

These case studies serve several purposes:

- **Demonstrating Progress**: Showcasing real-world examples of how sustainability efforts translate into action and impact.
- **Encouraging Knowledge Sharing**: Providing a platform for farmers and suppliers to exchange insights, challenges, and lessons learned.
- **Strengthening the Business Case for Sustainability:** Highlighting the tangible benefits of regenerative practices, from improved soil health to economic resilience.
- **Aligning with Global Sustainability Goals:** Supporting WFL's commitments under the Courtauld Commitment 2030 and other key sustainability frameworks.

By documenting and sharing these stories, WFL and Blue North aim to inspire meaningful change across the agricultural sector—one rooted in collaboration, innovation, and farmer empowerment.

This case study explores how climate resilience funding is being used to strengthen regional coordination, build nature-based solutions capacity, and support long-term livelihood resilience within WFL's South African supply base. It examines the Waitrose Foundation-funded WWF South Africa – ECOFARMS "Growing Climate Resilience: Restoration Nursery Project" as a current example of how targeted funding can build skills, infrastructure and practical restoration capability across multiple farms. It also introduces the Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network as an emerging framework for more coordinated, landscape-level action — one intended to align ecological, social and agricultural priorities over time. Together, these developments illustrate how climate resilience funding can help lay the foundations for stronger rural livelihoods, improved environmental stewardship and more connected regional approaches to resilience.

Case studies in the 2025/2026 series:

- Case Study 1: Regenerative Farming in the Koue Bokkeveld, South Africa.
- Case Study 2: Regenerative Farming in the United Kingdom, Chandler & Dunn.
- Case Study 3: Regenerative Farming in the Elgin Valley, South Africa.
- Case Study 4: Reducing Emissions Through Regenerative Farming.

BLUE NORTH

THINKING. FUTURE

Compiled by Malissa Murphy
Blue North Sustainability

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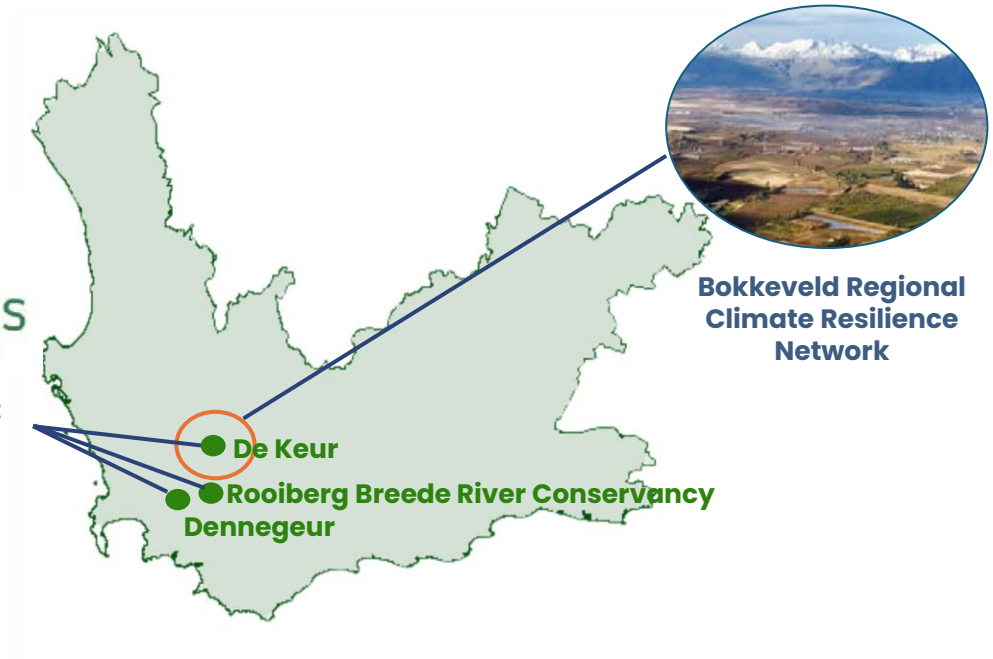


Chapter 1: From Projects to a Regional Climate Resilience Concept

Building resilience within agricultural landscapes requires more than individual farm-level improvements. Increasingly, growers, retailers and conservation partners recognise that climate adaptation must be understood at a broader scale - one in which ecological systems, production landscapes and rural communities are interconnected.

In response, WFL and ECOFARMS have been giving thought to the value of a more connected regional approach to climate resilience. Rather than viewing projects in isolation, this approach considers how growers within a defined production area might align around shared priorities, reduce duplication of effort and create a stronger platform for longer-term resilience.

Within this emerging thinking, the **Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network** represents an important concept. Centred in the Koue Bokkeveld, it reflects an intention to move toward more coordinated, multi-farm approaches that bring together ecological restoration, socio-economic opportunity and agricultural adaptation.

The concept is still in development, but its purpose is clear: to create a framework through which regional priorities can be identified and addressed more strategically over time. This includes exploring how growers, implementation partners and wider stakeholders might work together around common goals, supported by deep insights into localised social needs, ecological threats, challenges to economic growth and risks to agricultural production.

At the centre of this thinking is the recognition that climate resilience, as it relates to agricultural production, is not only about protecting crops or responding to immediate environmental risks. It is also about safeguarding the interconntected systems that enable agricultural regions to function - healthy catchments, functioning ecosystems, stable labour communities and collaborative local relationships.

Photo by De Keur

Photo by Zonnehaven

Andrew Purnell of **ECOFARMS** has played an important role in helping to shape and bring this idea to life. Working closely with growers on the ground, he has helped frame how a regional approach to climate resilience could move beyond individual projects toward something more connected and cumulative. In this sense, the Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network is less a finished structure than a developing direction of travel, one that seeks to build a stronger bridge between practical interventions today and a more coordinated resilience pathway in future.

The Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network

The Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network is being explored as a way of aligning growers around shared regional priorities and creating a more connected response to climate-related risks.

The idea is rooted in several key questions:

- **What are the most pressing ecological, social, economic and agricultural vulnerabilities within a given production region?**
- **What are the expected regional climate change impacts and how do they affect people, ecosystems, economic activity and agricultural production?**
- **What is a realistic version for a resilient climate-adapted future for this region?**
- **What does a *Theory of Change* look like that is going to systematically address vulnerabilities and effectively build climate resilience?**
- **Which integrated and collaborative projects would have the greatest holistic impact on climate resilience?**
- **How can retailers, growers and implementation partners work together in a way that exponentially increases positive outcomes over time?**

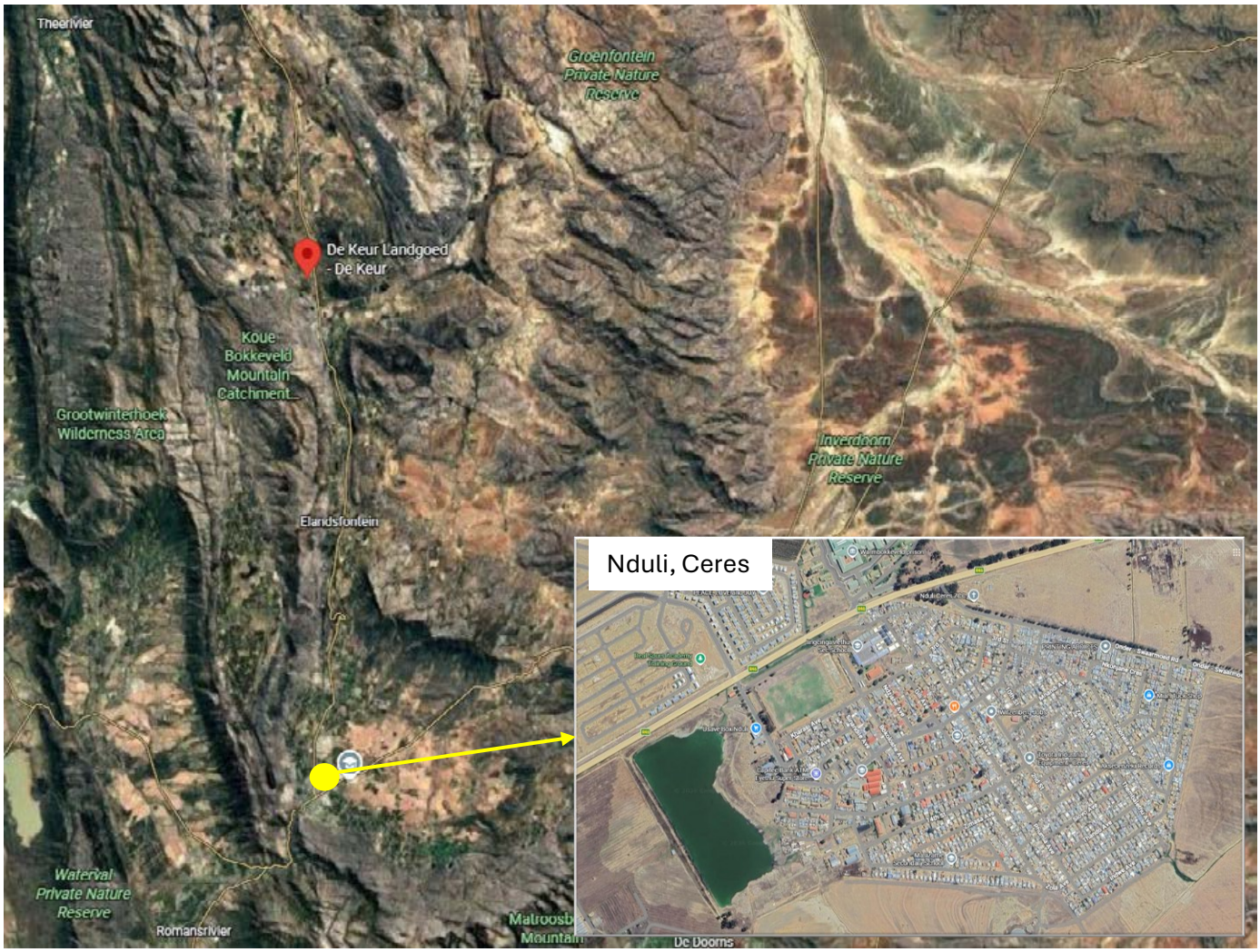
In this way, the network concept is intended to support a more strategic, landscape-level approach — one in which projects are not simply funded as stand-alone initiatives, but contribute to a broader pathway towards a resilient future.

Regional Community Context: Nduli

The wider community context also matters. Discussions around the Bokkeveld framework have highlighted the Nduli community, near Ceres, as an example of the kinds of social pressures that shape agricultural resilience in practice.

Challenges related to water availability and quality, electricity instability, school capacity, transport and broader municipal service delivery all have implications for worker wellbeing and community stability. Although these issues sit largely outside direct grower control, they form part of the wider ecosystem in which farms operate and workers live.

For this reason, the emerging resilience framework is not only concerned with ecological risks, but also with how more connected, community-aware approaches might support healthier, more stable rural systems over time.



Map of the Koue Bokkeveld region showing De Keur, a participating farm in the Growing Climate Resilience Project, and the nearby Nduli community, highlighting the local landscape and community context in which the project operates.

While the Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network remains in development, a current funded project, the Growing Climate Resilience: Restoration Nursery Project, offers a practical example of the kind of shared capacity-building intervention that could support this more strategic direction in future.

Chapter 2: Growing Climate Resilience - Building the Foundations

Running from August 2025 to November 2026, the **Growing Climate Resilience: Restoration Nursery Project** represents an important step in translating climate resilience ambitions into practical action.

Funded primarily by the Waitrose Foundation, with strategic support from WWF South Africa, the project focuses on piloting Nature-Based Solutions in the Western Cape by strengthening indigenous plant propagation capacity and enabling restoration work on farms.

In this sense, the restoration nursery project is foundational. It is not presented as the regional network itself, but as a concrete example of the kind of collaborative, multi-site intervention that can begin to build the practical capacity on which stronger regional resilience efforts may later depend.

From Intention to Implementation

Across the Western Cape, growers are increasingly engaging with regenerative farming, ecological restoration and broader sustainability initiatives. Yet turning these intentions into repeatable, effective practice requires more than good will. It requires trained teams, nursery infrastructure, plant material, restoration planning and implementation support.

The Restoration Nursery Project responds directly to that need.

Photo by ECOFARMS

It operates across multiple production contexts and includes WFL suppliers **De Keur** in the Koue Bokkeveld and **Dennegeur** in the Elgin Valley, alongside the Rooiberg Breede River Conservancy. Each nursery partner works within a very different landscape and set of operational realities, but all are contributing to a shared effort to strengthen practical restoration capacity.

By developing shared nursery infrastructure and trained Nature-Based Solutions teams, the project also creates a more cost-effective model for restoration, reducing duplication of effort and enabling resources to be used more efficiently across participating farms.

For WFL, the involvement of De Keur and Dennegeur is especially meaningful. Both growers have already featured in earlier case studies focused on regenerative farming. Here, their participation shows how existing sustainability journeys can begin to extend into more practical Nature-Based Solutions work, linking environmental stewardship more directly with restoration capability, workforce development and future livelihood opportunities.

Photo by ECOFARMS

Building the Foundations

The first phase of the project has focused deliberately on laying the groundwork.

Over the initial months, participating teams have undergone practical training in seed collection, plant identification and propagation methods. Training began with a shared session at Intaba, followed by in-field support led by ECOFARMS to help teams apply and reinforce what they had learned in their own contexts.

At the same time, all three nurseries have begun collecting and propagating plant material. Construction blueprints for nursery upgrades were developed in close consultation with nursery partners, taking account of each site's specific needs and limitations. Progress has also been made in identifying suitable restoration planting sites, particularly in and around local farms.

This work has not been without its constraints. Seasonal labour pressures, delayed contracts, site-specific hurdles and approval processes have all affected the pace of implementation. Yet one of the strongest themes emerging from the project so far is the determination of the participating teams to keep moving forward with what is possible.

De Keur has shown strong proactivity in organising resources, with construction of its new nursery already complete. Dennegeur, despite a later start on its nursery expansion, has significantly expanded its nursery team and has now completed nursery construction. Rooiberg has continued plant collection and propagation while awaiting final approval on infrastructure expansion.

This work also directly supports water security objectives by improving catchment function, increasing water infiltration, reducing erosion, and improving water quality through riparian and wetland restoration, all of which are critical in regions facing growing water scarcity and climate variability.

Funding in Action: Phase 1 Progress

Through Waitrose Foundation funding and strategic support from WWF South Africa, Phase 1 has delivered:

- *Signed funding agreements with participating farms*
- *Nursery planning and construction or upgrade work*
- *Procurement and delivery of vegetable seed stock*
- *Practical training of Nature-Based Solutions teams*
- *Collection and propagation of indigenous plant material*
- *Identification of candidate restoration planting sites*

Although some infrastructure targets have taken longer than expected, existing facilities have enabled the work to continue. This has helped ensure that the project has remained active.

Why this phase matters

This first phase is intentionally focused on building the conditions required for restoration to succeed.

By investing upfront in skills, infrastructure and planning, the project reduces the risk of fragmented or ineffective implementation. Instead, it creates a more structured and repeatable approach that can be applied across multiple farms and over time.

This foundation is critical for enabling restoration efforts to scale in a way that is both practical and sustainable.

Chapter 3: Strengthening Livelihoods Through Nature-Based Solutions

Although the full livelihood impact of the project will only become clearer over time, its direction is already significant. The project is creating value not only through ecological restoration, but through the strengthening of local skills, practical capacity and future economic opportunity.

Building Skills that Matter

One of the clearest early outcomes has been the upskilling of participating teams.

Rather than limiting teams to narrow functions, the project is intentionally building local *Nature-Based* Solutions capability.

What are Nature-based Solutions?

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are actions that protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems to address societal challenges such as climate change, water security and disaster risk. These climate adaptation actions are considered the most cost-effective means of enhancing climate resilience through an adaptive and biodiversity-friendly approach that is respectful of community rights and local cultures.

Examples of Nature-based Solutions activities relevant to agricultural landscapes include: Locally Indigenous Plant Propagation, Indigenous Cover Cropping, Ecological Restoration Planting, Invasive Alien Plant Clearing, Erosion Control, Prevention of Topsoil Loss, Groundwater Recharge, Firebreak Clearing, Establishment of Biodiversity Corridors and Buffer Zones, Riparian Restoration, Wetland Restoration, Peatland Rewetting, River Bank Stabilisation, River Meandering, Reforestation, Afforestation, Regenerative Agriculture, Silvopasture, Sustainable Grazing Management, Wildlife Corridors, Green Roofs and Walls, Protected Area Declaration and Community-led Land Stewardship.

These skills matter. They are emerging skills that address the growing threat of climate change whilst diversifying livelihoods and empowering entrepreneurs in rural communities. At the same time, they restore and protect the ecological goods and services that safeguard human wellbeing, enable long-term economic growth and increase the resilience of the agricultural sector.

As Andrew Purnell has noted, “Good management begins with understanding how the ecosystem functions.” That understanding is not only relevant to farm managers or consultants; it is increasingly being embedded in teams working directly on the land.

Laying the Groundwork for Future Opportunity

The project also creates the conditions for future livelihood diversification.

As nursery systems mature and restoration work expands, there is potential for participating teams to support additional services such as restoration planting for neighbouring farms, plant supply, erosion control and related Nature-Based Solutions activities. In this sense, the project begins to move from grant-supported establishment toward a model that could, in time, support more self-sustaining service delivery.

Vegetable seed propagation adds a further dimension. By supporting seedling production for donation to community food gardens and school feeding schemes, the project begins to connect climate adaption with local food security.

Ecosystem Services and Agricultural Stability

Healthy ecosystems underpin productive agriculture. Indigenous vegetation restoration can improve soil stability, support water infiltration, reduce erosion and strengthen the resilience of agricultural landscapes to drought and other shocks.

These are environmental outcomes, but they are also livelihood outcomes. More stable ecosystems support more stable farming systems, and more stable farming systems are better able to sustain employment and broader local economic activity over time.

This wider perspective is important. Climate resilience funding is not only about responding to environmental risk in a narrow sense. It is also about strengthening the foundations on which agricultural livelihoods depend.

Community Resilience and Worker Wellbeing

The broader resilience discussion emerging around the Bokkeveld also points to another reality: workers and their families do not experience climate and economic pressures only on farms. They experience them in the surrounding communities where they live.

This is why conversations around community food gardens, processing hubs, recycling, beekeeping and local skills development have begun to feature in discussions about future regional resilience approaches. Many of these ideas remain at concept stage, and it would be premature to present them as established outcomes. However, they reveal an important shift in thinking.

The question is no longer only how a project improves a particular site, but how a set of linked interventions might strengthen the wider worker community ecosystem over time.

In this sense, the project contributes to a larger conversation about how climate resilience funding can support not just environmental stewardship, but stronger, healthier and more resilient rural communities.

Chapter 4: Conclusion & Future Outlook

The Growing Climate Resilience: Restoration Nursery Project illustrates how targeted climate resilience funding can act as catalytic capital; enabling growers to take practical steps toward ecological restoration, skills development and stronger long-term resilience.

Its significance lies not only in what has already been achieved, but in what is now possible. With nursery systems taking shape, teams gaining experience and restoration opportunities being identified, the conditions are being created for more consistent and effective implementation in the next phase.

At the same time, the Bokkeveld Regional Climate Resilience Network signals a broader shift in how resilience is being approached within agricultural landscapes. Rather than focusing solely on individual farm-level interventions, there is growing recognition of the value of more connected, regionally aligned approaches that bring together ecological, social and agricultural priorities.

For WFL, this represents an important evolution - from supporting individual sustainability initiatives to helping enable more coordinated, landscape-level resilience within its supply base. Through its partnerships with growers, implementation partners and funders, WFL is playing a role in connecting these efforts and supporting their development over time.

The nursery project should therefore be understood as a practical step within a wider journey. It demonstrates how investment in shared capacity can begin to enable coordinated implementation across multiple farms, creating a scalable model that can deliver region-wide impact and reach a greater number of workers and communities over time, even while the broader regional framework continues to evolve.

Looking ahead, the project is expected to move further into restoration implementation, continued plant production and the development of more self-sustaining operating models. In the immediate term, this includes the implementation of pilot restoration planting, the establishment and maintenance of replanted areas, and the documentation of project learnings to support wider application. This includes exploring how nursery outputs and Nature-Based Solutions services can be extended to other farms, strengthening both environmental outcomes and livelihood opportunities.

This foundation also begins to create a pathway for future development, where scaling nursery capacity, expanding restoration activities and strengthening service delivery models could unlock wider impact.

If aligned effectively, these efforts have the potential to build momentum beyond individual projects, contributing to a more resilient agricultural system in which ecological restoration, workforce development and community wellbeing are increasingly connected.

Photo by ECOFARMS

Sources:

- Information for this case study was gathered from an Interview with Andrew Purnell from ECOFARMS
- ECOFARMS November Progress Report 2025.