

Office agriculture and why every workplace needs it

"Office" and "agriculture" are two words that are hard to imagine together but they describe a new trend designed to improve employee wellness while reducing absenteeism in the workplace.



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Isla Galloway-Gaul, managing director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy, said that as people work longer hours and in more intense ways, many organisations are seeking to prioritise employee wellbeing in the office.

“Good food has always made people happy and increased social connections so why not bring it to the office? The office agriculture trend of growing food at the workplace is an easy way for people at work to cultivate their own food.

“It not only aims to improve the quality of what people eat, but also adds a place for people to connect with nature and with one another.”

Galloway-Gaul cited findings from Steelcase, a global offices services design company which is represented by Inspiration Office in South Africa, that across that world people are worried about the consequences of industrial agriculture such as soil depletion, loss of biodiversity, excessive pollution, genetically modified crops and tasteless food of low nutritional value.

“By the year 2050, the percentage of people living in urban areas is expected to increase to nearly 70%, “ Galloway-Gaul noted. “It is increasingly important to find new methods to keep food production closer to home. Globally people in both urban and suburban areas want to be able to produce food locally.”

She added that approximately 10% of workplaces absenteeism can be attributed to the fact that employees are disconnected from nature, also known as a ‘green disconnect’.

“People in cities and offices have fewer interactions with nature and almost none with food production. With an urban garden in the workplace, people come to work less stressed and with more joy. This can result in improved productivity in the workplace,” she added.

Interestingly large global organisations like Google, Microsoft, Ebay and Paypal are embracing and driving this change. Google’s campus for example includes many gardens, and their Farm to Table programme looks for ways to educate people about the food industry. In Microsoft’s staff canteen, under plasma lights, lettuce thrives in hydroponic towers.

“We expect South African companies to adopt this trend too as it becomes more popular around the world,” Galloway-Gaul concluded.

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