

# TEN YEARS AFTER RECEIVING THE STOCKHOLM JUNIOR WATER PRIZE:

# A REEL SUCCESS

**TEXT** Ms. Victoria Engstrand-Neacsu, Communications Officer, SIWI

**PHOTOS** Reel Gardening

**In 2003, the young South African Claire Reid received the Stockholm Junior Water Prize for the “Water Wise Reel Gardening” system that helped small scale farmers to be more efficient in their use of water in growing crops. Ten years on, she has developed Reel Gardening into a successful, nation-wide business and goes on to win awards for her work. The Water Front caught up with Ms. Reid for an online interview.**

### What was the original inspiration for Reel Gardening?

It all started when my parents told me that I would make my allowance money by growing vegetables and selling them to my folks. I was overwhelmed by the excessive surplus of seed and fertiliser I had to waste my precious money on to plant the small space that I had available. Once I was sitting in the middle of the patch with a tape measure between my knees trying to get the seeds into the ground at the right distance from each other, I realised that I needed help.

I asked my nanny, Meggie, if she could help me by holding the packet of seeds and passing them to me whilst explaining how to plant them. But Meggie turned to me and said that she could not understand the instructions on the seed packets. She explained that even if she could understand, she could never bring herself to pour her precious water, which she walked miles to fetch, onto a bare patch of earth in the hope that it touched a seed.

As Meggie was sharing her past experiences with me in that small urban space, I realised that this garden was a great leveler. Meggie and I come from vastly different backgrounds, yet we were both struggling with the same deceptively simple task.

I decided there and then that there had to be a simple, cost-effective and convenient

solution to the problem – and that solution is now called *Reel Gardening*.

### How long did it take you to develop the project that was awarded with the Stockholm Junior Water Prize?

I was encouraged by my teachers to enter what was then a newspaper- and flour-based invention into the *Eskom Expo for Young Scientists*, where I won first prize. I worked a total of seven months on *Reel Gardening* as a product before entering the Stockholm Junior Water Prize.

### Did receiving the Stockholm Junior Water Prize help you in any way?

Yes! It gave me the confidence that this seemingly simple craft-like high school project had international merit. I was motivated to develop it further in the hope of eventually taking it to market.

### You have developed the project into a national business in South Africa. What were the greatest challenges along the way?

So, now that there was a product that enabled everyone to get growing, there needed to be a simple straight-forward solution to setting that garden out correctly,



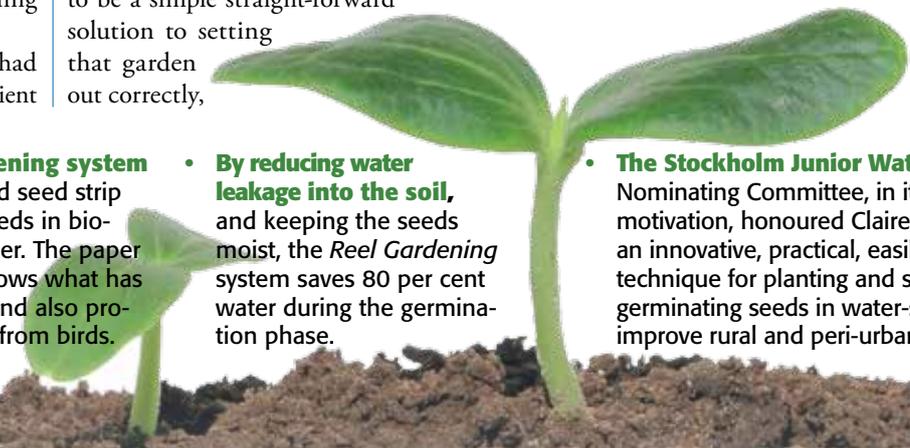
in order to optimise space and nutrition whilst taking the guess work out of varieties and sowing times.

This modular small subsistence farming solution is *Garden in a Box*. Garden in a Box pre-packs a room<sup>2</sup> garden according to location and the month of sowing. All one has to do is plant the garden out according to the colour coded diagram, which takes into account all the technical aspects of planting such as crop rotation and companion planting.

## FACTS



- **The Reel Gardening system** is a pre-fertilised seed strip that encases seeds in biodegradable paper. The paper encasement shows what has been planted, and also protects the seeds from birds.
- **By reducing water leakage into the soil,** and keeping the seeds moist, the *Reel Gardening* system saves 80 per cent water during the germination phase.
- **The Stockholm Junior Water Prize** Nominating Committee, in its official motivation, honoured Claire Reid “for an innovative, practical, easily applicable technique for planting and successfully germinating seeds in water-scarce areas to improve rural and peri-urban livelihoods.”



We have implemented this Garden in a Box concept in over 150 schools and communities nationwide in the last three years.

### How do you hope to further develop *Reel Gardening*?

I have just developed a school work/activity book that links the school garden to the curriculum over a 12-week programme and enables experiential learning.

The children then have to take their pre-packed household garden home and plant as part of their homework – which then enables them to teach their parents the importance of having fresh produce in your diet.

I want to see this rolled out into schools nationally and then have the hope that schools in Europe could partner with a school in South Africa. Both classes, one in Europe and one in South Africa, would

be doing the same 12-week programme and planting the same garden and then the kids can also learn from each other.

### What would be your advice to other young people aspiring to be finalists for the Stockholm Junior Water Prize?

If you have passion and your innovation has relevance you can make a big impact! ■



- **Claire Reid has won several awards** for her work, including the **First Prize** at the *Eskom Expo for Young Scientists*, and the inaugural **SAB Foundation Innovation Award 2011**.
- **In 2008, five years after winning the Stockholm Junior Water Prize**, she secured a business start-up loan, and in 2009 the first prototype was ready.
- **The seed strips are labelled** in seven languages, including English and Xhosa. They are colour coded and illustrated with simple diagrams for those who cannot read. There are vegetable, herb and flower combinations as well as packs, such as salad and soup garden mixes.
- **Ten years after the award**, Reel Gardening ([www.reelgardening.co.za](http://www.reelgardening.co.za)) has a staff of nine, and stock 17 shops across South Africa. There is also an online store on [www.reelgardening-shop.com](http://www.reelgardening-shop.com)
- **Reel Gardening opened the doors** of its first business premise in Illovo, Johannesburg, in February 2010. *Reel Gardening* now operates from its own premise in Blairgowrie, Johannesburg, where trial gardens are conducted and anyone is welcome to pop by.