

Project Splash to test use of 'grey' household water for veg gardens

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THE Unilever group has agreed to fund a series of water-conservation experiments in Durban which involve using recycled household water to nourish subsistence fruit and vegetable gardens.

The trials, at Unilever's Durban head office, are related to a similar series of studies funded by the eThekweni Municipality to assess the implications of irrigating food and vegetable crops with "grey water" (waste water from the laundry, kitchen and bath – but not toilet water).

The latest experiments will

be overseen by the Royal Society of Chemistry and the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Launching the "Project Splash" initiative last week, Unilever SA chairwoman Gail Klintworth said: "Water experts have warned that the clock is ticking for South Africa's stretched water supply. Before 2014, demand would have caught up with supply. It is for this reason that every drop of water becomes more precious."

She said there had been very few comprehensive stud-

ies in South Africa on the safety of grey water for food crop irrigation – although UKZN has recently completed a three-year trial on this subject, with financial support from the eThekweni Municipality's water and sanitation unit.

Klintworth said the latest project might help to guide the chemical reformulation of laundry detergents "to optimise the delivery of benefits to crops and soil without compromising human and animal health".

"We hope the end result of

our research will be that consumers can be given the go-ahead to reuse grey water whilst positively impacting on household diets and saving on the domestic water bill," she said.

Dr Nicola Rodda, of the UKZN School of Biological and Conservation Sciences, said this phase of the research – which focuses on plant growth and soil quality – was imperative before recycling of laundry water could be promoted with confidence in the rural and peri-urban areas of Durban.

