

Mondstuk van die Suid-Afrikaanse aartappelbedryf • Mouthpiece of the South African potato industry

CHIPS

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**ROL VAN BESPROEINGSBESTUUR EN
STELSELDOELTREFFENDHEID IN DIE
OPTIMALISERING VAN AARTAPPELPRODUKSIE**

**DNA-BASED IDENTIFICATIONS:
LATEST TRENDS AND WHAT THEY REVEAL
ABOUT FUNGI ASSOCIATED WITH PED**

Moerkweker van die jaar
finaliste bekendgestel

Role of cover crops
in nematode control

KwaZulu-Natal cultivar trial
conducted at Cedara

Potatoes SA bursary empowers student to soar

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Kgothatso Chauke is known as a go-getter, people-oriented and considerate person who enjoys challenging herself and learning new things. She is also the mother of a beautiful baby girl named Kharendwe.

Kgothatso was born in Pretoria and raised by her grandmother, Christinah Chauke, in the small rural community of Mogogelo in Hammanskraal. At the age of 16, she moved and lived with her parents, Sophy Chauke and Isaac Morudu, in the township of Soshanguve. She has two sisters, Lerato and Lethabo.

After completing her undergraduate degree in biotechnology, Kgothatso wanted to pursue further education but was unable to afford tuition. She searched for bursaries online and found a Potatoes SA (PSA) bursary advertisement. Since she met all the requirements, she decided to apply and was successfully selected for the 2017 academic year.

Potato fissure scab research

Kgothatso became one of PSA's bursary programme recipients and received funding for her master's degree in biotechnology, which she completed in 2019. Her research was based on the genetic characterisation

of *Streptomyces* species associated with fissure scab in potatoes.

A characterisation of isolates from potatoes with scab symptoms was performed and *Streptomyces* was found. Tuber samples displaying fissure scab symptoms were collected from eight potato production regions in South Africa, namely Limpopo, Mpumalanga, the Western and Eastern Free State, KwaZulu-Natal, North West, Gauteng, and the Sandveld region.

Kgothatso recommended that *Streptomyces* isolates causing fissure scab in other South African potato production regions also be characterised in order to understand the distribution of fissure scab in South Africa. She has since presented her progress and findings at several PSA annual research symposiums.

Bursary brightens the future

The PSA bursary has had a significant impact on Kgothatso's life. She was extremely anxious about the costs of her studies but after receiving the bursary she was relieved of all her worries and found studying easier. PSA assisted her with the payment of tuition as well as accommodation closer to the university.

Kgothatso is currently employed by the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) where she teaches molecular biology to second-year biotechnology and food technology students. She describes her job as a dream come true. Prior to this, she worked for the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as a research intern, and later as a lab technician at a Covid-19 diagnostics facility.

Kgothatso aspires to become an expert in the field of biotechnology. She dreams of becoming a manager and executive in the agricultural industry and owning a



Kgothatso Chauke.

business. Taking steps towards realising her aspirations, she has enrolled at TUT to pursue a PhD in biotechnology.

Encouragement to hopefuls

Kgothatso is extremely grateful for the bursary she received from PSA and for the opportunities and exposure it provided. She highlights being able to travel to different provinces to attend PSA events and visit various farms. The most valuable aspect of her experience with PSA was learning about different potato diseases and she is grateful to PSA for contributing to her career success.

Kgothatso encourages other students who face financial constraints to apply for a PSA bursary. "PSA takes care of the students under its umbrella," she says, "and in addition to paying fees and accommodation, they also invite students to their annual conferences where they can interact with role-players and gain valuable knowledge".

PSA wishes Kgothatso all the best as she pursues her future dreams. 🍀

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Kgothatso Chauke hard at work in her current position at the Tshwane University of Technology.