

Lavhelani Tshilongo: Hungry for success

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Lavhelani Tshilongo hails from the village of Vuwani Ha-Ramukhuba, located outside Thohoyandou in Limpopo. Growing up, she shared a home with her parents, grandmother, and five siblings.

Lavhelani started her educational journey at Tshivhazwaulu Primary School and then moved to Sendedza Primary where she completed grade 7. She went on to Kolokoshani Secondary School to complete her secondary education. She was an extremely active student, participating in almost everything from dancing to netball and athletics, although netball was her favourite.

There is no doubt that Lavhelani has many talents, as she also has a small vegetable garden at home and is a hairdresser.

Facing challenges head-on

While growing up in the village, she was exposed to agricultural practices but didn't expect to develop a passion for this industry. When she completed her matric with agriculture as one of her subjects, she decided to pursue a degree in either agricultural management or agricultural economics. However, due to financial difficulties, she decided to rather pursue a diploma in agriculture with a focus on mixed farming, at the Potchefstroom Agricultural College.

Lavhelani began her studies at the college in 2015 as a first-time student. She describes it as the most exciting experience of her life since she was able to learn new things. Over the course of the year, she was informed about the Potatoes SA bursary by the departmental head at the college, who encouraged her to apply since she faced some financial difficulties.

Lavhelani became a beneficiary of Potatoes SA's bursary programme



Lavhelani Tshilongo, one of the Potatoes SA bursary recipients.

in 2016 while she was in her second year of study. Many students in South Africa face financial difficulties while studying, while some do not have the opportunity to study at all.

Lavhelani received funding after her brother, who was paying for her studies, lost his job. She was awarded a bursary for two years until she graduated. As Lavhelani states: "I have always dreamed of becoming an educated individual and achieving my dreams, and the bursary allowed me to achieve that." In addition to tuition fees, the bursary also assisted with the payment of her accommodation, books, and meals.

First-hand experience

The induction programme was among Lavhelani's highlights as a Potatoes SA bursary recipient. There was a number of interesting places she was able to visit, including a potato farm

where she gained a great deal of first-hand experience in the production of potatoes.

Another valuable experience was when she visited the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market where she learned about the requirements of selling potatoes. In order to graduate, Lavhelani had to complete practical work on the farm during her third year of studies which Potatoes SA assisted her with. During this period, she became fascinated with potato production.

Following the completion of her diploma, she was afforded an opportunity through Potatoes SA to gain work experience at the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market under Prokon.

In 2019, she completed a BTech degree in agriculture, specialising in crop production at the Tshwane University of Technology where she studied plant pathology as a project module. Her research topic was powdery scab and bacteria wilt on potato crops.

Greatness awaits

Lavhelani's career interests remain in the production side of agriculture. Although she has gained experience in the handling of fresh produce after harvest, she still wishes to further her education in crop production. It is her goal to become a farmer (possibly a potato farmer) or to work in the potato industry.

Currently, she is pursuing a master's degree in agriculture at the Tshwane University of Technology, where her research focusses on sweet potato leaves. Upon being asked about her long-term career plans, she states that her goal is to pursue a doctorate in agriculture and to become one of the researchers who play a significant role in agriculture. She intends to enrol for a PhD immediately after completing her



Upon completion of her diploma, Lavhelani was able to gain work experience at the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market under Prokon, thanks to Potatoes SA's bursary programme.

master's degree in order to continue her research.

Lavhelani also gained experience in subsistence hydroponic greenhouse farming where Batavia lettuce was grown using the nutrient-feeding technique system. She was working as a volunteer at the project, her main objective being to acquire knowledge.

When speaking about Potatoes SA and the bursary, Lavhelani says she is extremely grateful and wants to encourage other students who are interested in agriculture but lack the financial resources to pursue studies in the field, to apply for the Potatoes SA bursary.

It is clear that nothing will stop this young lady from achieving her goals. You have a bright future ahead of you Lavhelani, and Potatoes SA wishes you the best of luck on your journey! 🍀

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