

Lutendo's Potatoes SA bursary experience

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Lutendo Muelelwa was born and bred in Venda, in the village of Matanda in Nzhelele. She is the third of five children and completed her schooling at Matanda Primary School and Patrick Ramaano Secondary School. After grade 12 she joined the University of Free State where she completed her under- and postgraduate studies.

Lutendo is family orientated and spends as much time with her family as possible. Her passion for agriculture also developed at home. Growing up in a rural area her family, like many others, had a backyard garden where they grew staple foods such as maize and vegetables. These everyday experiences motivated her to acquire more knowledge of agriculture so that she can do her part in improving production and food security.

As part of her undergraduate studies, Lutendo majored in soil science, agronomy, and agrometeorology.

Enter Potatoes SA

The Potatoes SA bursary programme offered by the Potato Industry Development Trust (PIDT) is aimed at

providing financial assistance to students in need who want to develop a career in agriculture, particularly the potato industry. The bursary is awarded to students in their second or later year of studies.

Lutendo learned about the Potatoes SA bursary from her supervisor at the University of the Free State in 2014 and successfully applied. The bursary paid for her MSc degree in Agriculture from 2015 to 2018, when she completed her degree.

Lutendo's studies focussed on the effect of climate change on potato yield and possible adaptation strategies in 12 production regions in South Africa. Her study showed that minimum and maximum temperatures are expected to increase significantly more in the interior than in the coastal regions. It also showed that warmer weather and dry spells are going to increase. Her study recommended the cultivation of suitable potato varieties and changing the planting time to improve the yield and efficiency of water usage.

Life after the bursary

Besides financial support, Lutendo was also given the opportunity to present her work at a congress held in Cape Town in 2017. During this event, she connected with fellow students and learned from other research into potato production. She also attended Potatoes SA's Research Symposium in 2015 and 2017.

She also attended the Potatoes SA induction programme in 2015, where she learned more about the organisation and its activities. During the induction, she was able to visit the Tshwane Fresh Produce Market and learned about potato quality inspection, grading, and packaging.



Lutendo planting crops inside a greenhouse at Falcorp Technologies in 2021.

Currently an agricultural advisor, Lutendo aspires to continue improving her skills and knowledge. She hopes to share different climate adaptation strategies with potato producers which will allow them to enhance their yields. Lutendo gained experience working for agricultural companies such as DMT Kea Batla and Falcorp Technologies. She currently works as an assistant agricultural practitioner at the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development and Land Reform. She plans to further her studies and enrol for a PhD soon.

Start applying!

Lutendo says the entire Potatoes SA bursary experience has been a very rewarding one which allowed her to gain a lot of knowledge and skills. She encourages other students who are passionate about agriculture to apply for a Potatoes SA bursary and enjoy the exposure Potatoes SA provides. "The bursary was a worthwhile investment for me, and I can't wait to see what the future holds." 🍀



Lutendo during the Potatoes SA bursary induction programme in 2015.

For more information about the Potatoes SA bursary programme, email nomvula@potatoes.co.za.

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