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CHIPS

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kultivar-evaluasies
onder die vergrootglas

Sebenzangamandla
on its way to reach
commercial status

Former PSA bursary recipient makes inroads in agricultural research

By Nomvula Xaba and Rotondwa Rathogwa

“The PSA bursary made it possible for me to pull through the hardships faced by many South African students, especially at postgraduate level,” replied Tlangelani Nghondzweni when asked how the Potatoes SA bursary that he was granted for his master’s degree studies, impacted his life.

Born and bred in Burgersdorp village in Tzaneen, Limpopo, Tlangelani developed his passion for agriculture and natural science through his curiosity as a teenager. Agriculture was his favourite subject in high school and this motivated him to pursue a degree in agriculture.

Tlangelani learned about the bursary opportunities offered by PSA during a visit to the Agricultural Research Council. He followed this up with a visit to the Potatoes SA (PSA) website, where he got more information and successfully applied for the bursary. The bursary was awarded in 2013 and allowed him to pursue his master’s degree at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT).

After having successfully completed his master’s degree, he was awarded yet another bursary to complete his PhD. His research focussed on investigating the effect of injury type and packaging material on the incidence and severity of soft rot bacteria on some important potato cultivars in South Africa. He also performed an

investigation into essential plant oils from different seasons and their antimicrobial effect on the potato soft rot bacteria. He also conducted histological studies into potato tuber cells during maceration by soft rot bacteria.

Through the years, Tlangelani presented his progress and findings at the Annual PSA Research Symposium and also had some of his findings published in *CHIPS*.

An academic career

Tlangelani is currently a part-time employee at the TUT’s Department of Crop Sciences. He started as a students’ assistant and mentor while completing his master’s degree,

and was appointed as a teaching assistant when his Ph.D. commenced. He was appointed as a part-time lecturer post which he fills today. He is also co-supervising two master’s projects.

When he is not in class or in the office preparing for classes, he spends most of his time in the laboratory doing his research and helping or guiding new researchers in his research group.

Tlangelani has great appreciation for the bursary he received from PSA and the opportunities and exposure that came along with it. “Being part of the PSA programme allowed me to embark on my first ever trip to the various provinces to attend PSA events and also to research projects funded by PSA. This was an experience I will treasure forever!”

New horizons bring rewards

Tlangelani not only travelled locally, but was also able to travel internationally while pursuing his PhD. In 2018, he attended a conference in Istanbul, Turkey to present his research paper and won an award for the best oral presentation from the International Society for Horticultural Science in Innovative Plant Protection.

That same year, he won the TUT FameLab Science Communication Competition. This is an international competition



Tlangelani Nghondzweni.



Tlangelani at the conference in Istanbul, Turkey.



Tlangelani's field experiment during his PhD studies.

three minutes. This gave him the opportunity to represent TUT at the National FameLab finals.

A bursary that opens doors

We asked Tlangelani whether he would recommend to other students to apply for the PSA bursary and his response was an overwhelming yes: "In fact, I have recommended the PSA bursary to several students and some have been awarded the bursary for their master's programme".

He reiterated the financial struggles that students experience, especially at postgraduate level. They cannot access government funding since the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) only finances students who enrolled for their first undergraduate degree. He commended PSA for assisting students who are academically deserving and in need of financial assistance. Lack of funding, he said, is the biggest stumbling block for many students who

have an interest in pursuing their postgraduate studies.

What does the future hold?


Tlangelani hopes to soon find a permanent full-time job, preferably still in the academia and in an environment concerned with the pursuit of agricultural research and education. He aspires to become one of the most prominent researchers in the agricultural sector and in the potato industry.

It is very clear that this young man is passionate about his career and the progress of students in the agricultural space. His parting words encouraged other students who might be facing challenges with their studies and finances. He concludes: "Even if it feels as though no one is noticing your hard work, don't give up. Keep pushing and give every task your level best effort – one day it will pay off."

PSA wishes Tlangelani all the best for his future dreams and plans! 🍀


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