

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

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**LIMPOPO-KULTIVARPROEF
ONDER BESPROEIING
OP DENDRON IN 2021**

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BEHEEROPSIES
TEEN DIE PAPIES**

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The untold story of Sthembiso Cele: A PSA bursary recipient

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Sthembiso Cele spent his childhood in the deep rural area of Port Shepstone on the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, where his parents raised him and his five siblings. The family's livelihood was solely dependent on his mother, who earned an income by doing piece jobs.

Growing up, Sthembiso would tend to the family's home garden – ploughing, planting vegetables, and tending to the cattle after school and on weekends. Apart from his interest in farming, Sthembiso also enjoyed reading news online and watching reality shows on television. He still enjoys doing this today, and is a great fan of sports, especially soccer and cricket.

A whole new world

Sthembiso is one of Potatoes SA's (PSA) bursary recipients. He learned about the opportunities offered



Sthembiso Cele, Potatoes SA's bursary recipient.

through the bursary programme on the PSA website and decided to apply. His application was successful, and he subsequently received funding from 2016 to 2018 for his undergraduate studies, to complete a national diploma in agriculture at the Mangosuthu University of Technology.

Sthembiso says the bursary eased his financial burden enormously, allowing him to focus on his studies and expanding his knowledge.

When asked where his passion for agriculture stems from, Sthembiso recounts how growing up in rural KwaZulu-Natal, where farming is common practice, agriculture was ingrained in him from a young age. Farming was the only thing he was really exposed to, and he was naturally passionate about it, which led him to choose agriculture-related subjects at high school and university.

Sthembiso describes the PSA bursary award as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Apart from receiving the bursary, he was given an opportunity to work at a potato farm, where he learned everything about seed potato production – from soil preparation to planting, weed control, harvesting, sorting and packaging.

The PSA programme also enabled him to travel outside of the province for the first time, and visit other provinces such as Gauteng and Mpumalanga to attend PSA events. He boarded his first flight ever in 2018 to attend a PSA Transformation Symposium.

Sthembiso says his life has been positively impacted by the PSA bursary. He is now permanently employed, without having had to search for employment. He

will forever be grateful for all the opportunities PSA had awarded him, he says. He wishes to encourage other students to also apply for bursaries, since it provided much-needed support for him to complete his studies and pursue a career in agriculture.

Levelling up

After completing his studies, PSA stationed Sthembiso at the Durban Fresh Produce Market on a twelve-month contract with Prokon SA to gain experience. Through his hard work and dedication, he was offered permanent employment by the same company in June 2021, and today he still works there as a quality control inspector. His duties include performing quality inspections of all fruit and vegetables sold on South African fresh produce markets and by retailers.

Sthembiso is grateful towards PSA, saying if it wasn't for the bursary, he would not be where he is today. He aspires to acquire his own farm one day, where he hopes to plant various vegetables and create job opportunities for other young people like him. Learning new things and coming up with new ideas to improve current situations are what drives him.

Sharing his sentiments with the PSA's Bursary Committee, he concludes: "Your generosity has inspired me to help others and give back to the community. I hope one day I will be able to help other students achieve their goals just as you have helped me." 🗨️

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