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The rise of Nelisiwe Masilela through the Potatoes SA bursary programme

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

The Potatoes SA bursary programme was established to assist students who are interested in pursuing a career in agriculture. Each year, this programme provides financial assistance to tertiary students at different institutions. One of these bursary recipients is Nelisiwe Masilela, a young lady who hails from the small town of Pienaar near Nelspruit in Mpumalanga.

Nelisiwe is the second of three children in her family. As she grew older, she became increasingly interested in agriculture, especially as a result of her family's more than two-decade long involvement in farming.

A new door opens

After matriculating, Nelisiwe decided to pursue her studies in agriculture and enrolled at the University of Mpumalanga for a National Diploma in Agriculture. She stumbled upon a Potatoes SA bursary advertisement on the internet while researching bursaries that could help fund her studies, and successfully applied for it.

She was awarded the bursary in 2020 during her second year of

study. The bursary helped to pay for her tuition fees, accommodation, study materials and meals. Nelisiwe mentioned that her receiving this bursary positively affected her since she did not have to stress about her university expenses, and it allowed her to focus on her studies. Funded by the bursary, Nelisiwe was able to complete her studies in record time and passed her exams with flying colours.

Practical experience

In order to graduate, she was required to complete a mandatory one-year work-integrated learning experience (WIL). Potatoes SA played a significant role in finding Nelisiwe a farm where she could complete the WIL, while paying her a stipend throughout the WIL period. During this time, she learned about seed potato production, including soil preparation, planting, weed control, harvesting, sorting, and packaging.

After completion of her diploma, Potatoes SA gave Nelisiwe the opportunity to work as an intern at the Nelspruit Fresh Produce Market under Prokon, where she gained valuable insight into how fruit and vegetable inspections work.

Among her highlights as a Potatoes SA bursary recipient was taking part in the induction programme at the start of the bursary period. She visited several interesting locations, including a potato farm, where she learned first-hand how potatoes are produced. In addition, she was able to attend a prestigious industry symposium which was also a valuable experience. Nelisiwe says she found these visits and events to be highly informative, educational and helpful, and says it gave her more confidence in the field of agriculture. She believes that she has gained a better understanding

of both the potato industry and agriculture as a whole as a result of these experiences.

Promoting agriculture

Potatoes SA, says Nelisiwe, is one of the best things that has ever happened to her; it nourished her career, and she is now reaping the benefits. She is currently employed by the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) in Pretoria as an agricultural practitioner. Her responsibilities include assisting in the promotion of sustainable agricultural production and providing advice to farmers.

She is overjoyed that things are looking up for her and she is starting to accomplish her life's objectives and goals. She aspires to be an entrepreneur one day and believes that with all of the knowledge and experience she gained through Potatoes SA, she will be able to do so quickly.

Nelisiwe is grateful for the financial assistance she received from Potatoes SA, the industry exposure she received and, most importantly, the manner in which Potatoes SA assisted in cultivating her career. She would like to encourage other students who are facing financial difficulties to apply for the Potatoes SA bursary programme.

"The Potatoes SA bursary certainly is one of the best bursaries in South Africa available to disadvantaged students who are passionate about agriculture and need exposure to the agricultural environment," she concludes. 🍅

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



Nelisiwe Masilela.