

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

# CHIPS

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# Lauretha Mohlala: The sky is the only limit

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Lauretha Mohlala was born and raised in the small village of Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga. Hers was a very disciplined household with her housewife mother playing a significant role in her early childhood development, teaching her how to read and write and ensuring that she never missed a day at school.

Her father, a farmer, was the one who motivated and encouraged her to study agriculture. "My family is such a loving and great source of motivation, and they keep me focused on what I do."

## On to the PSA joyride

Lauretha was a recipient of the Potatoes South Africa (PSA) Bursary Programme, which funded her undergraduate diploma in plant production at the Lowveld College of Agriculture from 2013 to 2015. She applied for the bursary after having been referred by the college administrator. During her years in the programme, Lauretha says she felt a sense of belonging, as PSA did not just treat them like students, but as family.



Lauretha at the Indigo Fruit Farming facility.

A large percentage of students face financial challenges, and for Lauretha the bursary from PSA helped to ease financial stress and allowed her to focus fully on her studies. PSA did not only impact her academically, but she also had the opportunity to attend the acclaimed industry symposium and induction, events she found very informative and effective. They also helped her to understand the overall importance of the potato industry and agriculture as a whole. "These lessons," she says, "cannot be traded for anything."

## Why agriculture?

Lauretha was exposed to agriculture from a young age. Her grandparents were subsistence farmers and, during visits, she would always tag along when they checked on their plots. She was always eager to assist as she was amazed at the vegetables they produced.

It did not stop there; she asked her father to buy her some seeds so she could start farming in their backyard. Her father then began to take her to his farm. "It was such a beautiful experience and I guess the passion for farming runs in the family," she says.

## Work experience

After completing her diploma, Lauretha worked at Champaign Agri from 2014 to 2016 as an assistant junior farm manager on their vegetable project. She gained a lot of practical experience in farm operations and management.

It also motivated her to start her own farming operation called Queens' World Farming, which she registered in 2016. The project operated for a year and did very well planting various vegetables, such

as cabbage, tomatoes and onions, for retailers such as Spar and Boxer. Due to land challenges, however, the project is currently not operating.

Lauretha was also employed as a quality controller for Twypack at Indigo Fruit Farming on a seasonal basis from March to August in 2021.

## What the future holds

She is currently in her second year of BCom Business Informatics studies at the University of South Africa and would love to improve her financial management skills and learn more about information systems, given that we find ourselves in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. What she most aspires to is becoming a successful farm owner and an agricultural business analyst. She wants to make a meaningful contribution to the agricultural industry by assisting small and emerging farmers to make sound economic decisions, as well as to employ the right information systems and technology.

Lauretha wants to encourage fellow students with financial challenges to apply for the PSA Bursary Programme. Through the programme, prospective students do not only receive financial assistance, but also valuable exposure to the potato industry and its stakeholders. Lauretha will forever be grateful for the opportunity of having been considered for the bursary programme and for the experience she gained.

Lauretha, the sky is the only limit. PSA wishes you all the best. 🍌

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