

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

CHIPS

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Potatoes South Africa's bursary recipient achievements: Talana Cronjé

By Rotondwa Rathogwa

Talana Cronjé was born and bred in Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha). At school she excelled in her studies, particularly Biology and Mathematics, and was also actively involved in activities such as netball and leadership. She was the editor of the school magazine and was also a leader in the Christian society.

In 2012 Talana moved to Bloemfontein to pursue her studies in B.Sc. Agriculture (Agronomy and Animal Science) at the University of the Free State. After completing her degree, she decided to move back to Port Elizabeth to be closer to her family, as she was already



Talana at her undergraduate degree graduation in 2016.

married at the time. Another reason that made her to move back to her hometown, was to be closer to the sea – she loves going to the beach and enjoying the outdoors with her son. She is an active member of Christian Revival Church where she leads the children's church ministry.

The PSA bursary programme

Talana joined Potatoes South Africa's (PSA) bursary programme in 2014, while completing the third year of her undergraduate degree. She received funding for different degrees over a period of five years. She first learned about PSA's bursary opportunities on the internet. With PSA's assistance she managed to bag herself three degrees, a B.Sc. Agriculture degree in Agronomy and Animal Science, a B.Sc. honours degree in Agronomy and an M.Sc. Agriculture in Agronomy.

The topic of her masters' study was *Metham sodium for the control of volunteer potatoes in South Africa*. Talana indicated that further research is still required in different regions, as climate and soil properties differ.

Building a career

While on the bursary programme, Talana's life was impacted in different ways as far as her career was concerned. Above all, she was given the opportunity to complete her degrees and enter the industry as a specialist. Through the induction programme and symposiums she attended, she was able to learn more about the industry and broaden her knowledge in this regard. She



Talana Cronjé.

also got the opportunity to liaise with industry stakeholders, other researchers, and students.

She describes her experience while funded as being out of this world. She especially appreciated the staff she worked with at PSA, saying they were very friendly, always helpful and made the application process and administration very easy. "I would like to encourage other students who need assistance to apply to PSA for a bursary, as the organisation not only gives financial assistance, but affords you exposure to the industry and presents you with opportunities to connect with other industry stakeholders."

Why agriculture?

In response as to how her interest in agriculture came about, Talana explains that the industry encompasses her love of both nature and people. "Agriculture offers me the best of both worlds. It affords me the opportunity

to work outside in nature, while applying scientific principles, and to work with people. It allows me to empower people through job creation as well as food production.” She believes that because agriculture supplies us with food, forms the basis of every society.

During her postgraduate studies, she was able to study and work at the same time. From March 2016 to June 2017, she worked for the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries’ inspection services as a technician. Her main responsibilities were to enforce phytosanitary regulations for the export of fresh products. In June 2019, she was appointed to the post of production manager on a farm near Port Elizabeth, where she is currently still working.

This farm focusses on the production of cucumbers and brinjals in a hydroponic system.

Hydroponic systems are a method of growing plants, usually crops, without soil, using mineral nutrient solutions in an aqueous solvent. On the external fields they produce various fresh herbs. They supply to major retailers such as Pick n Pay, Freshmark, Spar and many more.

Talana’s perfect day

When asked what her perfect day at work looks like, she replies: “When I see the smiles of the workers after I complimented them on the good work that they have done, and when we pick a record yield!” It is evident that she loves working with people and it gives her joy when people are passionate about learning, asking questions, acquiring new skills and succeeding.

Although she is employed, her dream is to start her own farm where she will be able to employ and uplift people by teaching

them new skills and where she can contribute to the country’s food production. She will also continue conducting research to find new and innovative ways to increase yields and farm sustainability.

Talana encourages young people who are interested in agriculture to simply go for it, get their degree and start their farming enterprises. They must embrace what they would like to be and use all the opportunities presented to them. “The road is not always easy. It takes hard work, but there is never a dull moment, and there is something new to learn every day. The results are worth it! Luke 16:12 in the Bible reads: Be faithful in what is another man’s, then God can trust you with your own.”

PSA would like to wish Talana all the best on her journey in the Agriculture industry! 🌱

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