

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

CHIPS

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KULTIVARPROEF ONDER BESPROEING:
DONKERBOS 2020/2021**

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A SPUD-TACULAR
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**Potato product exports:
A twelve-month snapshot**

PSA bursary recipient reaches for new heights

By Rotondwa Raligidima, Potatoes SA

Xola Ngceni's life started out in the humble village of Qhiba in the Eastern Cape, later relocating to Sterkspruit. Xola attributes his success to role-models such as his grandmother and uncle, who played a fundamental role in his upbringing and development.

He describes his journey to Potatoes SA (PSA) using the metaphor of a life-giving tree springing forth from a tiny seed. Even when covered, the seed has the potential to emerge and grow, despite hardship. This is the kind of person Xola is: refusing to surrender, no matter the storms.

Deeply rooted

On the surface, one might regard this soft-spoken, humble and smart postgraduate as seemingly ordinary. What sets him apart, though, is his deep connection to nature – from hunting and cultivating various crops, to herding cattle.

Like the life-giving tree, Xola's roots dug deep and because of his passion for agriculture and sustainability, he decided to follow a career path that would play an active role in contributing to food security and job creation.

A tree bears fruit

In 2013 he enrolled for a BSc Agric (crop and horticultural sciences) degree at the University of Fort Hare. During his third year, he was introduced to the PSA bursary programme by a fellow student, and was successfully selected as a recipient. His love of agriculture saw him excelling in his studies and graduating with distinction.

After completing his undergraduate studies, he enrolled

for a postgraduate degree. The PSA bursary programme continued to fund him, and he completed a BSc Agric (Hons) in horticultural science in 2017. He then set out to complete a master's degree in horticulture in 2019. All his degrees were obtained with distinction.

His master's thesis, *The effect of storage temperatures on the postharvest performance and sprouting of selected potato cultivars*, investigated the effect of storage temperature on sprouting incidence, processing attributes, as well as nutritional quality parameters of potatoes.

The study also sought to develop prediction models using near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS), which could be used to determine the quality attributes of potatoes. While the prediction models were developed for some of the quality parameters, more improvements are needed to develop models that are more stable and suitable for all applications and storage conditions.

Powered by potatoes

"My experience with the PSA bursary programme was one of a kind. It helped me to excel in my academic career and presented me with an opportunity to interact with other students in the field of agriculture, specifically in the potato industry," says Xola.

He has since visited various interesting places including a potato farm in Mpumalanga, where he gained valuable knowledge regarding potato production. He speaks enthusiastically about the Joburg Market, where he learned about the requirements for selling potatoes.



Potatoes SA bursary recipient, Xola Ngceni.

In 2021 Xola was awarded an opportunity to gain work experience through PSA at the Tshwane Market under Prokon. "I encourage students in the programme to study hard, so that they can be exposed to the same opportunities I had," he adds.

Xola thanks PSA for the support he received and will forever cherish the knowledge he gained from their symposiums and bursary induction programme. He looks forward to being an agricultural consultant and wishes to close the gap between research and small-scale farmers through participatory programmes. He also aims to encourage rural communities to branch out into agriculture through the lens of entrepreneurship, and help to alleviate poverty in rural South Africa.

Xola continues to upskill himself through online courses and intends to return to university in 2022 to further his studies. PSA wishes him the very best. 🍅

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