
INDUSTRY NEWS



YOUNG AND OLD NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

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By Elise-Marie Steenkamp

More and more young people, many of whom have no farming experience, are drawn to the agriculture sector. With youth month around the corner, we spoke to four youngsters that have found an accidental home in agriculture.



Tristan Dorfling (28) from Durbanville, Anika Kock (24) from Belville, Mthokozisi Sishuba (29) from the Eastern Cape, and Chad van Wyk (27) from Cape Town. Mtho has been appointed as an intern at Provar, while Tristan, Anika, and Chad are horticulture students all busy with their master's degree at Stellenbosch University. All four are currently working on an industry-funded project about fruit-type adaptability and evaluation under the watchful, experienced eye of Dr Iwan Labuschagne from Provar and Dr Esmé Louw from the Department of Horticultural Science, Stellenbosch University.

What do you like about your current work?

Tristan: I am involved in the adaptability project for apples. I am currently investigating what the drivers of adaptability for certain apple cultivars are. We have to investigate the tree architecture and other traits and try to understand how different cultivars grow in different environments, and how the genotypes adapt to that specific area. For instance, we use metrics to understand the cold units supplied in an area and to determine the interactions that occur between the tree traits and cold accumulation. It is very exciting to put all the pieces together and create an understandable science story.

Mtho: I work on table grapes and table grape rootstocks and assist the others with their projects and evaluations. It is very interesting work and very satisfying. I learn a lot every day.

Chad: I work on cherries – a high-value commodity. So everything new we learn is important for the industry.

Anika: Dit is 'n groot voorreg om deel te wees van hierdie projek. Die werk wat ons doen, is eintlik maar net die fondasiefase van 'n heelwat groter, agtjaar lange, projek. Mettertyd gaan ander studente by ons oorneem en die projek verder ontwikkel. Ons gebruik byvoorbeeld statistiese indekse om te kyk hoe sekere kultivars vir verskillende omgewings aangepas is. Dit is baie opwindend om reeds as 'n student deel te wees van so 'n groot projek wat hopenlik tot groot voordeel van die hele bedryf gaan wees.

Why did you choose agriculture?

Tristan: Initially I studied sound engineering. The job market for that was saturated and I decided to study something different. You could say my venture into agriculture is a 'head shift'. I have always enjoyed growing things and decided to see what it would



be like to study plants and understand the way things work in life. I am also very fond of hiking and studying horticulture satisfies both those passions. I am fascinated by the scientific approach and the application of science in agriculture and want to really understand what happens and how to get the plant to respond to what you want it to do.

Mtho: I grew up in a rural area in the Eastern Cape in a farming community. Our family grew maize and tended livestock. So it all started there, but my love for agriculture really developed when I obtained my crop production diploma and started working in the industry. I have learned a lot about the technical side of fruit production, starting out at Raisins SA. I think agriculture is a great and exciting career.

Chad: I kind of stumbled into the horticulture programme by chance. I also started out as a first-year and then switched to the horticulture programme and immediately fell in love with it. The lecturers at the department are inspirational, not just what they teach, but the way they interact with students. I like being surrounded by people that inspire me. And, of course, agriculture is the backbone of our country.

Anika: Ek het eers ingenieurswese studeer maar het redelik gou agtergekom dat dit nie is wat ek wil doen nie. Ek het begin rondkyk na ander kursusse en het onder andere met prof. Karen Theron van die hortologie departement by Stellenbosch Universiteit gaan gesels. Sy het die belang van die studie van plantkunde vir my uitgewys. Aspekte soos voedselsekureit, die volhoubare en veilige produksie van kos vir die groeiende bevolking het met my geresoneer. Ek is nog altyd intrinsiek aangetrokke tot plante en die wetenskap, en het besluit ek wil deel word van die oplossing, om volhoubare voedsel te produseer. Hortologie en landbou is daarom baie belangrik.

How do you see the future of agriculture in SA and the world?

Tristan: I think agriculture needs to embrace and understand big data and the capacity and importance that it brings. Younger people are important in agriculture because it is easier for us to use technology and that it could grow the general knowledge base for the future.

Mtho: We need more time to do research properly and do things differently. As a country, we have to work together to improve agriculture. We have to leave politics out of agriculture, as politics could destroy agriculture. Also, I think the youth have to be open-minded about agriculture. Their expectations should be realistic. You don't



become a farmer and then get a big salary. You have to work hard and have the right mindset to farm. Otherwise, you will lose interest. But farming is a great opportunity for our youth.

Chad: It is more of what I hope to see. I want to see agriculture change and really use the applied sciences to make more impact. I want to see the industry change its often old school methods, to really connect on a global scale and apply technology and science to ensure larger outputs. Agriculture is science and there are so many exciting opportunities, not just in production, but also in IT, legislation, communications and other fields. People don't always know how wide the sector is.

Anika: Ek wil ook graag by Mtho aansluit en stem saam dat die jeug 'n belangrike rol kan speel om landbou vorentoe toe vat. Mens moet oopkop wees, gretig wees om te leer dan is daar baie geleenthede. Ek leer elke dag iets nuuts. Daar is ook nog 'n wanpersepsie dat net mense wat van plase af kom landbouers kan wees. Dit is nie so nie. Enigeen kan 'n landbouer word, jy moet ervaring kry en selfvertroue opbou, deursettingsvermoë kweek en karakter ontwikkel. Landbou is 'n langtermyn ding. Ek wens ook dat leerders op skool meer blootstelling aan die verskillende geleenthede binne landbou kry. Dat jy op skool reeds begin dink oor hoe goed groei, hoe werk 'n boom en waar kry jy jou kos vandaan. Landbou het 'n uitstekende toekoms want die bedryf groei en pas die heelyd aan. Daarom is navorsing ook so belangrik. Ek sou graag wou sien dat die jeug en die ouer generasie meer saamwerk in landbou. Daar is baie geleentheid en maniere hoe die verskillende generasies mekaar kan aanvul en by mekaar kan leer. My hoop vir die landboubedryf is dat ons minder en meer volhoubaar hulpbronne sal gebruik. En dat landbouers die wetenskap sal gebruik en vertrou, want so kan ons ons ekonomie groei.

Your opinion about the impact of agriculture on climate change?

Tristan: I think we have to optimize what and where we use materials and protect our natural resources. And use the applied sciences to fine-tune farming practices.

Mtho: A lot has been written about climate change, and I think agriculture and the private sector should sit down and discuss how to prevent it. All the sectors need is to work together as a team. But it shouldn't just stay with talking, we also need implementation. Action.

Chad: Climate change has a big impact on agriculture there is no doubt about that. But it is bigger than just agriculture. Maybe agriculture should focus on smaller production



units and produce for local communities first. Use fewer chemicals and plant cultivars that have adapted to a certain environment?

Anika: Ek dink daar moet balans wees. Bevolkingsgroei beteken meer mense moet eet. Maar klimaatsverandering is almal se probleem. Almal moet 'n verskil maak en hulle deel doen, al is dit hoe klein. Landbou moet spesifiek daarna streef om minder hulpbronne te gebruik en te luister na die wetenskap om produksiemetodes effektief toe te pas.

Pictured here: Mtho, Chad, Tristan, and Anika.

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