

Young and old

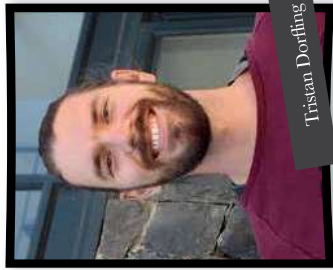
Working together

More and more young people, many of whom have no farming experience, are drawn to the agriculture sector.

By Elise-Marie Steenkamp

We spoke to four youngsters who have found an accidental home in agriculture: Tristan Dorfling (28) from Durbanville, Anika Kock (24) from Bellville, 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 studying towards their master's degree at Stellenbosch University (SU). All four are currently working on an industry-funded project about fruit-type adaptability and evaluation under the watchful, experienced eye of Dr Ivan Labuschagne from Provar and Dr Esmé Louw from the Department of Horticultural Science, SU.



Tristan Dorfling



Mthokozisi Sishuba

Q What do you like about your current work?

A adaptability project for apples, currently investigating the drivers of adaptability for certain apple cultivars. We 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. The work is very interesting and satisfying – I learn a lot every day.

Chad: I work on cherries – a high-value commodity. So, everything new that 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, agtjaarlange projek. Mettertyd gaan ander studente by ons oorneem en die projek verder ontwikkel. Ons gebruik byvoorbeeld statistiese indkese 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 hopeik tot groot voordeel vir die hele bedryf gaan wees.



Q Why did you choose agriculture?

A 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 was 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 working 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 think agriculture is a great and exciting career. 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.

Chad: I kind of stumbled into the horticulture programme by chance. I also started out studying towards a different degree and then switched to the horticulture programme and immediately fell in love with it. The lectures at the department are so inspirational, not just in what they teach, but the way they interact with students.

I like being surrounded by people who 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 US gaan gesels en sy het die belang van die studie van plantkunde vir my uitgewys. Aspete soos voedselsekuriteit, en 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.

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

A 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 could grow the general knowledge base for the future.

Mtho: We need more time to do proper research and to do things differently. As a country, we have to work together to improve agriculture. Also, politics could destroy agriculture – we have to leave politics out of agriculture. 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 mind-set 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 of an 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.

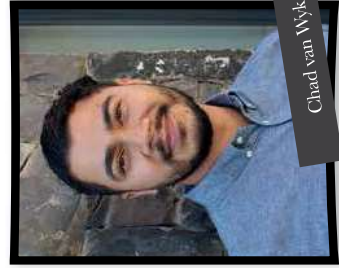
Anika: Ek wil ook graag by Mtho aansluit en stem saam dat die jeug 'n belangrike rol kan speel om landbou vorentoe toe vat. Mens moet oopkop wees, greig wees om te leer, dan is daar baie geleenthede.

More and more young people, many of whom have no farming experience, are drawn to the agriculture sector.

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 enarig kry en selfvertroue oppou, deurstellingsvermoë kweek en karakter ontwikkel. Landbou is 'n langtermyn ding. Ek wens ook dat leerders op skool meer blootstelling aan die verskillende geleenthede binne landbou kan 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 toekomst, 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 geleenthede en maniere hoe die verskillende generasies mekaar kan aanval 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.

Q Your opinion about the impact of agriculture on climate change?

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



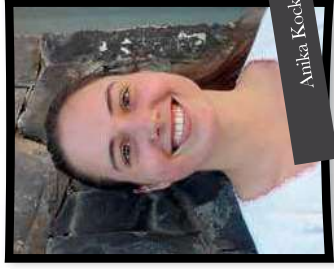
Chad van Wyk

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 to work together. But it shouldn't just stay with talking, we also need implementation. Action.

Maar klimaatsverandering is almal se probleem. Almal moet 'n verskil maak en hulle deel doen, al is dit hoe klein.

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.



Anika Koek

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Why should an orchard supervisor need to know how pollination and fruitset work on apple and pear trees? Or the difference between "kruisbestuiver" and "bestuiver"? Or how much an apple costs in Europe? Or the significance of "koubehoefte" and "rusbreekresepte"? By **Elise-Marie Steenkamp**



Why develop critical thinking skills at all when most of your day is spent following instructions and trying to get your team of workers to do the same?

For more than 40 years well-known pomologist and fruit technical advisor Chris Jurisch has seen the same default patterns on farms over and over again. The supervisor (and sometimes his work team too) are given instructions on what to do in the orchard. The reason for an instruction and the hoped-for outcome are seldom understood. The result is distorted communication and the effect is frustration, dissatisfaction, demotivation. The result and

effect limit the growth of the supervisor's potential and that of the work team. And it directly impacts the grower's profitability, given that labour costs are 50% or more of total production costs per hectare.

Chris believes that developing the reason behind what we do in our orchards will go far in helping our growers and their workers fulfil the true potential of their farming businesses. He created a training course to arm orchard supervisors with knowledge so they can develop confidence, critical thinking and leadership skills; and pass on their "new" knowledge to their teams.