

# Y Agriculture Leaders - Top 5 / 2018

The National Agricultural Marketing Council launched Y- Agriculture in 2016. Behind the pomp and gloss ceremony laid the manifestation of a sector heading towards extinction. All agricultural industries represented shared similar views. Numerous attempts and resources in the past have been injected in media programmes focusing on youth involved in agriculture. It was hoped, ideally, that it will attract youth to agriculture.

Sadly, the supposed youth, the sector designed programmes for did not seemingly understand or comprehend the direction of these programmes. A lull period ensued and nothing of youth agriculture worth appetizing came forth. Suddenly, the 2013/2014 drought phenomenon awakened young journalists in news board rooms to report on agriculture. Slowly, a trend began to emerge covering successful youth agriculturalists. More manner rained down because of the land redistribution without compensation debate.

From this vintage point, agriculture will be a hot topic in the 'new dawn' of President Cyril Ramaphosa tenure. Crucially, there has not been a better time than now to embrace young farmers, youth agriculture professionals and youth agribusiness.

The Y Agriculture Top 5 Leaders ceases this moment. It celebrates youth in agriculture who have shaken the foundation of the sector, changed and shaped how things were previously done, parachuted agricultural innovation in their communities, challenged agricultural norms and naysayers. Excellence is something not easily celebrated in agriculture. These youth have proven that it can be done and look to inspire others that come after them.

*Cheers to them that refused to fail, refused to be tied to stigma, against all odds persevered.*

# #1

## Agricultural Entomologist

*Dr Nomakholwa Stokwe (33)*

University of Stellenbosch

*South Africa is experiencing an invasion of army fall worms. These insects are ravaging staple crops around Southern Africa and can destroy 70% of a farmer's crop. If enough attention or priority is not given to the invasion of these species South Africa's food supply could be affected. This duty lies in the hands of experts like Dr Nomakholwa Stokwe, an entomologist lecturer at the Stellenbosch University who discovered a new species of nematode also known as a roundworm.*



*“You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.”*

Born and bred in Eastern Cape – Middledrift, her entry into the field of entomology was by divine grace. While at Fort Hare University she received a bursary to study BSc Entomology and Biochemistry and since then fell in love with the science.

“In 2004, I was enrolled at Fort Hare University where I was meant to study Microbiology and Biochemistry. In my 2nd year however, I did Entomology as an additional course but ended up loving it. I graduated with my BSc degree (Entomology and Biochemistry) in 2008 and BSc Honours (Entomology) in 2009. I then joined Stellenbosch University as a Masters student in 2008 and graduated with MSc (Entomology) in 2009.”

Dr Stokwe is passionate about youth development as she also lectures third year students in Nematology. She describes the profession as ‘agricultural entomologists’ where young people can ‘study how to protect crops from pest without harming beneficial insect species like bees. They may even develop

new types of ‘integrated pest management’ that uses some species to control others, reducing the need for pesticides.’

In 2017, Dr Stokwe was nominated member of African Academy of Science Affiliate. Currently, she is spearheading two research projects; ‘efficacy of entomopathogenic nematodes and fungi as biological control agents of woolly apple aphid, *Eriosoma lanigerum* (Hausmann) (Hemiptera: Aphididae) under South African conditions’ and ‘entomopathogenic nematodes: Characterization of a new species, Long-term storage and control of obscure mealybug, *Pseudococcus Viburni* (Hemiptera: Pseudococcidae) under laboratory conditions.’

She previously worked at the Agricultural Research Council as a researcher and later joined Stellenbosch University to pursue her PhD which she completed in 2016. She has written and published extensively in publications such as African Entomology, Nematology and International Journal of Pest Management.

A portrait of Kgadi Senyatsi, a woman with short dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved button-down shirt over a black top. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a solid green color.

# #2

## *South African Pork Producers Organisation*

*Kgadi Senyatsi (32)*

*Globally, South Africa accounts for about 0.2 percent of total world pork production. The country slaughters less than 3 million pigs a year, averaging 54 000 pigs a week. According to the Sappo database, there is currently 125 commercial producers and 400 smallholder pig producers registered. Some of these upcoming pig farms are youth and knocked on Kgadi Senyatsi's door for advice.*

# *“Try again, and never stop believing”*

Kgadi Senyatsi like any other teenager growing up in the rural areas was surrounded by agriculture. It was a norm for every households to be allocated a hectare - 'previously called morgans' - to plant and breed animals for consumption. Her interest in agriculture was aroused by a segment on TV News showing commodity prices. 'The maize shown on TV was completely different from the maize we planted at home' and the ensuing question was 'why.' Thus, begun the hallmarks of entry into agriculture first at an agricultural high school.

A self-described piggery advocate, in 2005 she did her in-service training at a feedlot while in her final year at TUT. In 2007, she joined a 1600 sow farrow to wean farm (Burnett Pork Alliance) in Australia. Thereafter, in 2010 she joined the Department of Western Cape Agriculture as an Agricultural Advisor until 2014 where she joined SAPPO.

Kgadi is an M-Tech graduate who heads up the Business Development Unit of SAPPO and works with five team members. They assist aspiring/ upcoming

developing and smallholder pig farmers.

Mainly, their job is to transfer industry knowledge with the aim of developing successful and sustainable pig enterprise. This is achieved through capacity building in the form of training through the industry/ organisation training centre, information days where a group of farmers come together for the exchange of information, mentorship and farm visits. She and her team also assist with planning of new projects.

There are opportunities youth can directly access. Youth can find a niche in production or agro-processing such as being an Animal Nutritionist, Veterinarian etc. Kgadi will like to see more women involved in her industry and progress is been made albeit slowly. 'Women in the industry tend to make a success when joining the industry wholeheartedly, either directly as producers or indirectly as employees.'

# #3

## *Senior Agricultural Economist; Grains & Oilseeds*

*Abongile **Balarane** (30)  
National Agricultural Marketing Council*

*South African tax was increased by 1% in 2018. Such an announcement had bearing for agriculture and public i.e. increase in agricultural products versus affordability. More closely, weather conditions, drought, army fall worm, bird flu etc. affect agriculture and ultimately South Africa's food supply. To explain and dissect all these implications to society, farmers, agribusiness, retailers and government it is the responsibility of agricultural economists like Dr Abongile Balarane.*



# *“Born poor, but rich in mind”*

Dr Abongile completed his Phd in Agricultural Economics at just the age of 27. Currently he serves as a Senior Agricultural Economist: Specializing on Grains and Oilseeds with the area of responsibility being forecasting availability of major grains and Oilseeds in South Africa including convening Maize, Wheat, Sorghum, Soybean and Sunflower steering committees and forums.

He has published widely and contributed chapters in books like Sustainable Irrigation and Drainage V. Dr Balarane was also instrumental in managing the Western Cape Ceres Abattoir, developing SIP 11 business plan for Port Nolloth and Hondeklip Baai communities in the Northern Cape and being involved in Water Research Commission project between UNW and UKZN.

His journey into the field of agricultural economics was encouraged by his best friend father Dr NJ Mazibuko (a clinical psychologist). The engagement left an indelible mark with a shift of focus. ‘My plan after matric was to join the labour market and become a mine worker.’ Fortunately for Dr Abongile, he received a NFSAS grant and enrolled for a BSc Agricultural Economics with the North West University.

His first job was working as an Agricultural Advisor in North West later downgrading his pay to be an intern first at Land Bank and moving to NAMC in the same year of 2013. During this period, his aim was to complete his MSc Agricultural Economics which he acquired in 2013.

‘During varsity recess travelling from Mafikeng to Welkom things slowly started to make sense.’ When they passed through commercial farmers he started to relate to what he was studying. ‘Every time we passed through the Maize belt of South Africa, NAMPO in Bothaville and see new innovations within the sector that’s where the drive and eagerness to learn what Mother Nature provides us with, the land and the ability to produce food for our nation.’

After completing his internship with the NAMC, Dr Abongile pursued his studies and he came to specialize in grains. He alludes that agriculture has various career opportunities and the youth can do well to investigate these options. ‘Agriculture is the way now that the issue of land debate and climate conditions are affecting the sector and dominating the public discourse. Surely, our country will now more than ever require more black grains specialists and other also in other specializations’

# #4

## *Business Support Manager: Agricultural Economics & Advisory*

**Nontobeko Ndaba (27)**

*Land and Agricultural Bank of South Africa*

*Entry into formal agriculture markets requires cash injection. Usually, the quickest possible route is banks and development finance corporations for agriculture. It is however not easy to get an agricultural finance loan especially for new farmer entrants. Key decision makers that determine and structure agricultural finance loans and grants are the likes of Nontobeko Ndaba.*



“Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what is still possible for you to do”. – Pope John XXIII

Fresh from completing her BCom Honours Agricultural Economics, in 2013 Nontobeko walked into Land Bank as an intern unaware how agricultural finance will shape her career. As a Business Support Manager, her role today is to develop the business strategy and plan for the financial year in terms of objectives and deliverables. ‘I have to track these targets to ensure that they are achieved and manage all projects undertaken by the division and report to the Executive Manager.’

Land Bank provided her an all-round exposure to agricultural finance. Starting as a Junior Agricultural Specialist where she was responsible for industry insights and publications to assuming a role as a Business Analyst. While in this role, she reported to the Commercial Development Business Unit responsible for the analysis of the Land Bank’s loan book and performance thereof. ‘In 2016 my career took a change in direction when I joined the Corporate Banking team as a Business Coordinator assessing the quality of applications sent through to the Credit division and ensuring that divisional objectives are met. Fast forward to 2017 I was appointed as Business

Support Manager in the Agricultural Economics & Advisory division.’

Her association with agriculture stems from childhood. ‘I would always visit my grandparents in the rural areas during school holidays and we would wake up early each morning to work the fields and the boys would take out the livestock for grazing. This is where my love for agriculture started. The feeling of being united and belonging. It fascinated me how the community would gather and boast about each household harvest for the season as if it was a competition. People never went hungry and they existed in their own economy.’

Young, ambitious and swimming with the current, what Nontobeko enjoys about her job is providing ongoing technical advice and information sharing to the Bank’s team to ensure submission of high quality accurate applications.

‘There’s definitely endless possibilities and opportunities in agricultural finance that youth can explore and encourage them to look into them.’



# #5

*Chief Executive Officer;  
Origins Foods Holdings (OFH  
– Africa)*

*Yongama Skweyiya (33)*

*Two thirds of shoppers in South Africa prefer to buy organic food. This is according to a 2017 survey conducted by IRI Survey which indicated that more South Africans were opting for healthier and fresh foods. With this niche market beginning to open, Yongama admits to have seen this market growing in quantum leaps and he discovered an opening.*

# “Random is not cumulative”

OFH has a foot-print across the townships of Cape Town Metro and the Boland. It supplies the consumer market with quality, organic products with clear statements of origin. One of its product range is the Outeniqua Milk which is earning a sizeable market share. A BComm Stellenbosch University graduate, Yongama also sits on the board of Peninsula School Feeding Association.

He never thought for once he will be in the agriculture space and actually avoided it. ‘Funny enough, my background is not in agriculture. I was very lucky to have fallen into the agri space through identifying opportunities when delivering competitive products to consumer markets, in need and demand for it. I spent 2 years travelling between the 3 Cape provinces to find, start and develop agri enterprises trying to link

the market with the production nodes.’

Yongama’s business background is rooted in technology and innovation. ‘What I came to realise after some years in the technology space was my desire to be part of something tangible, that I can touch, feel and experience’ he adds. Agriculture provided that home and set him on course to ‘deliver products that focus on user experience through packaging’ he says. Providing the consumer market with food is his second greatest honour as a person.

Competing with established food suppliers is not an easy feat. He admits that agriculture business space is difficult to penetrate. He has some advice for his fellow youth ‘one needs to see where you can play in the various value chains whether in agri-marketing enterprise, packaging enterprise, and transport entity, etc.’