

New Hortgro bursaries top R3.7 million

This year, Hortgro is contributing R3.7 million in bursaries and training at higher education institutions nationwide, including Stellenbosch University, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Elsenburg and the universities of Limpopo, Pretoria and Free State.



From L-R: Andrew van Lingen (MSc), Werner Truter (MSc), Philip Rebel (MSc), Nicholas Dicey (Hortgro Chairperson), Dr Xolani Siboya (Hortgro Science Researcher).

It currently funds 68 students, consisting of 27 undergraduate students and 41 postgraduate students. The postgraduate students are also linked to 32 of the 108 research projects conducted by Hortgro Science.

The bursary scheme is joint venture between the pome and stone fruit industries, Agriseta and the Deciduous Fruit Development Trust, as the deciduous fruit industry is dedicated to investing in South Africa's future agricultural workforce.

At a recent event for the bursary holders, Hortgro executive director Anton Rabe, emphasised that a skilled workforce is vital to expand the R11 billion deciduous fruit industry. "Agriculture, and the deciduous fruit industry specifically, is a major contributor to South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP). It is also responsible for providing many with employment. Therefore we believe it is necessary to provide support in discovering and training the best minds and developing a strong labour force.

“It is also important that the industry stays ahead with technology and develops people. We have some serious work to do in convincing young people that a career in agriculture is beneficial. The horticultural industry and technology is evolving and, in the next 20 to 30 years, many great opportunities await.”

Dr Xolani Sibozza, Hortgro Science fruit production researcher and guest speaker at the event, encouraged the students to keep working toward their goals. Sibozza, who grew up in a rural setting and was heading towards becoming a livestock farmer, told students he knew he wanted to further his education and persevered until he achieved his goal.

“There is a scarcity of skilled agricultural labour. Our current industry experts have been in the game for a while now. We need new energy in the field, young people who will take over, renew and expand our trade.”

Over the past 14 years, Hortgro has invested close to R35 million in bursaries as contribution to a skilled and sustainable agricultural workforce. For more information, go to www.hortgro.co.za.

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