

Women forces to be reckoned with in agriculture

Women have had to face many challenges within the workforce, particularly in the agriculture sector, which has traditionally been dominated by men. This changing, however, as more women are establishing themselves as forces to be reckoned with within the industry.



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Two such women are Pumeza Nkala and Ineke Vorster who are making a name for themselves at McCain South Africa.

Although in different parts of the business, both women are focused on making the company and industry more sustainable. Nkala started her career at McCain South Africa through the company Graduate Trainee Program in 2004. Since then she has been promoted into different positions including being the first ever female production manager at the Springs plant, a position she holds today. Vorster followed her interest and passion for genetics and extension to McCain South Africa, where she is currently the only female Agronomist.

Both women have pioneered different techniques and implemented strategies to help McCain South Africa become more sustainable as a business.



Pumeza Nkala

Coming up with a strategy to reduce water wastage

Nkala was tasked with creating a strategy to help reduce water wastage at the plant. “This project was incredibly important for the business and sustainability. This was largely due to the long-lasting effects of the drought and how McCain could combat the effects of this problem,” says Nkala.

Educating colleagues and employees on water became incredibly important. “By making people aware of the drought and its effect, we were able to ensure that water usage was handled effectively and efficiently,” explains Nkala. The water reduction strategy looked at technical elements like water cascading, process refinements and different process technologies. The result of this is that each of the plants now has a dedicated water usage team that reviews water usage results daily and proposes gap closing measures.

Since implementing this strategy there has been a 42% reduction in water wastage at the Springs plant and a 23% reduction at the Delmas facility over the past two years.



Ineke Vorster

Ensuring sustainability of farms

Vorster's work sees her working in the fields with her trials and farmers. She analyses the suitability of foreign and local varieties for the industry and assists field officers when farmers experience challenges.

As an agronomist, she plays an important role within the business. She looks at how varieties can help to optimise yields on the field and in the factory. This is made possible when crops are planted in the correct place and in the correct way. If the soil isn't perfect or the conditions are not favourable there could be a negative impact on the crops and this, in turn, will affect stock and what consumers will be able to buy. Not only could this affect the business and consumers, but the farmers as well.

Vorster goes above and beyond to ensure that the farms are sustainable and that the landscape can handle the planting in order to preserve and look after the growing crops and farms. "I absolutely love everything about my job, the trial work is quite repetitive and you need to constantly look for answers and solutions. By actively being out there in the fields, you pick up on things that can sometimes be missed in theory," says Vorster. She says that it is the interaction with farmers, field officers and trying to find a solution to problems that they are facing that really gives her a thrill.

Taking on every challenge

Both of these women have travelled a road that not many have dared to. They have taken on every challenge that this dynamic industry has thrown at them and they have come out on top. Helping them to do so, McCain constantly invests in education and training. This is incredibly important in an industry that is always changing.

Both Nkala and Vorster want to encourage young women to follow their dreams and to not let anything stand in their way. "We have all faced challenges in our lives but it is how you overcome them and rise above them that really matters. If you love what you do and are following your passion every day it really does make a difference, so don't settle for anything less than what you want," concluded Vorster.

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