

# For the love of farming and making a difference



By Cari Van Wyk

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We recently had an interview with Judy Stuart, the founder of the Future Farmers Foundation. These young farmers learn valuable farming skills, work ethics and have opportunities to gain real work experience, either in South Africa or abroad. Stuart says "The best of our future farmers are ready to farm in their own right." I decided to get the details from the horse's (or rather young farmer's) mouth and spoke to one of the Future Farmers, Mzwandile Duma.



Mzwandile Duma

## ■ Tell us a bit about yourself.

**Mzwandile Duma:** I was born in Underberg and grew up on a family farm with both my parents, four sisters and three brothers. I have always been interested in farming, from when I was a young boy. I am currently working for The African Conservation Trust as regional manager and at Future Farmers as a mentor and ambassador for other young students. I am 28 years old, and I'm a self-reliant kind of a person.

## ■ Tell us more about what you do. What does your average day look like?

**Duma:** I had always wanted to make a contribution to communities and this was my opportunity to put something back into rural communities. I am a regional manager with 82 people working for me. Their job is to teach rural communities to produce their own food. The focus is on vegetable production for own use, with a surplus produce to sell. By the end of this year, this project will be responsible for 10,000 vegetable gardens which are making a difference to food security in the province. My role is to ensure that everything is working properly, to train mentors and supervisors and check that all of the work is being done properly.

In the meantime, I have been studying project management through the University of South Africa through a correspondence course. It is difficult to work for two organisations at the same time and study. Everything I do requires a lot of my time, which means that I hardly get time for myself, family and people around me.

## ■ Why did you choose a career in agriculture?

**Duma:** I grew up herding cows and hand milking from a young age, so my parents inspired me to farm and gave me an opportunity to attend Zakhe Agricultural College in Baynesfield. I was exposed to real/proper commercial farming there and

realised that I could make a real life from it – it is where my love for farming grew even bigger.

■ ***What are some of the challenges young people face in the agriculture industry? What were the biggest challenges you faced?***

**Duma:** I think the young people are lazy and do not want to work – that is one of our major challenges. Back in school, we are not being taught how to farm rather we are taught how to look for a job, so that is another problem. The government is also not doing enough to support those individuals with great potential for farming, which is where Future Farmers comes in.

■ ***What has your journey been like with Future Farmers? Any highlights to share?***

**Duma:** The biggest highlight of my life was when Future Farmers sent me to America to do an internship at North Florida Holsteins. On this farm, I was exposed to top quality stud and learned how to do pregnancy testing. Other tasks were milking, treating sick cows, feeding using TMR, calving and all other work related to dairy. This was a truly a fantastic experience for me.

I had never been on a plane before and the experience I got from America changed my life completely. I am what I am today because of Future Farmers. Judy Stuart is still playing a big role towards my success in my new ventures, I am very grateful to be mentored by her and she seems to have enough time for all of her Future Farmers.

■ ***Where do you see yourself in 10 years?***

**Duma:** I would like to own my own dairy farm.

■ ***What has been your greatest achievement so far?***

**Duma:** It is the job I have and assets like vehicles.

■ ***What motivates you?***

**Duma:** My motivation is to see that I am really making an impact on people's lives. For example, there are young farmers that I have worked with and mentored and all of them are managers and some are doing very well overseas. I want to be able to help them so that they can have the opportunities that I had - that alone motivates me.

■ ***Words you live by?***

**Duma:** Never give up.

■ ***Words of advice for SA's youth on pursuing a career in the industry?***

**Duma:** My message to the youth out there is to work hard in everything that they do... and also to stay away from drugs.

## ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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