

STEPHANO HAARHOFF

AGRONOMIST

Yara Africa Fertilizer

BScAgric Plant and Soil Sciences

MScAgric (Agronomy)

PhD (Agronomy)

MY STORY

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER PATH?

I developed a love and passion for agriculture and the functionality of nature by spending lots of time on our family farm and by planting my own crops in my mom's garden. The high number of opportunities on offer in the agriculture industry allowed me to make my passion a daily activity – despite all the challenges at university and in the industry itself.

WHAT DO YOU DO?

I work as field and research agronomist in the maize/soybean/sunflower/potato production regions in the North West, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Free State Provinces. In this role, the primary role is to advise farmers regarding the most appropriate crop nutrition programme thereby addressing the crops' needs while keeping the farmers' needs in mind. The specific soil and climate conditions is another critical factor to consider. I'm also responsible for the scientific field research where we investigate the effects of various practices (fertilizer, soil tillage, crop rotation, etc.) on crop growth, development and yield. This enables us to advance our knowledge regarding current practices and where we can improve to sustain better crop yields.

WHAT PART OF THIS CAREER DO YOU ENJOY MOST?

Having the opportunity to serve farmers on a daily basis and have a positive impact on their business and daily life. Building relationships with farmers, other scientists and colleagues is another very satisfying factor the career offers. And to be able to spend A LOT of time outside in nature!

DO I FIT THE PROFILE?

Someone looking to serve other people (farmers, scientists, industry role players) using their passion for nature and agriculture. Again, be curious!

CHALLENGES

Long working days where one spends time alone to get the work done and to develop new ideas to follow – thereby allowing myself to learn new things every single day. It is important to trust and especially enjoy the process. And be patient and grateful.

SOME ADVICE

Opportunities might present itself, however, the majority of 'opportunities' should be created by oneself and then pursued. If you love what you do you will be very good doing it – use this as your secret weapon. Be willing to learn every single day and be curious. Use mentorship to guide you but don't follow bluntly – build your own story!

SKILLS, TALENTS AND QUALITIES A LOVE

for nature, be curious, enjoy working with people, problem solving, critical thinking, patience.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE

Agronomy/crop production is always evolving due to new technology and society needs in terms of food and fibre production, hence unknown opportunities can be developed by oneself to address these needs.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS TO DATE?

Having the opportunity to attend and present my work at international congresses and tours in Canada, Argentina and Switzerland. Being able to work with South African farmers and see how they succeed when specific challenges are faced as a team. Discussing challenges and opportunities regarding crop production on national radio, magazines and TV programmes thereby developing further opportunities to serve farmers and the crop production society.

