



WILMA VAN DER WESTHUIZEN

TECHNICAL
ADVISOR

AT KROMCO

BScAgric Plant & Soil Sciences
(Plant Pathology & Genetics)

MSc Plant Pathology



MY STORY

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE THIS CAREER PATH?

I have always been fascinated by nature and the intricacies of how everything works. With my love for plants, and wild imaginations of breeding an exclusive, big blue tomato, it was suggested that I follow a career in agriculture/ plant breeding. I therefore enrolled for the BScAgric Plant and Soil Sciences degree. In my fourth year, I realized I would rather try and figure out why a plant is sick, than try and breed a big, blue tomato. So I enrolled for a Master's degree in Plant Pathology.

SOME ADVICE

One has to be inquisitive and realise that in fact, you do not know everything. The thirst for knowledge and aiming to better oneself, is a good driving force to go to work. Being able to communicate well with people, asking the right questions and listening attentively all help to solve problems in the field when diagnosing a problem. From experience I have seen that if you let the grower come to the right conclusions, they will sometimes solve their own problem!

What type of person / personality would enjoy this kind of career?

Energetic, passionate, inquisitive person. Someone with an eye for detail, but also being able to see the bigger picture.

What do you enjoy most?

I feel very passionate about nature, in particular fungi and insects. So if I can transfer some of that wonder, excitement and knowledge to other people, it is extremely satisfying. Spending time on farms, as well as at the office, is a nice balance as I enjoy being outdoors and indoors.

What are your responsibilities?

I am responsible for supporting the technical manager and giving technical assistance to the packhouse and the group of growers that deliver fruit to Kromco.



ENVIRONMENTS I ENJOYED WORKING IN

1. Working in the Disease Clinic - Plant Pathology Department, Stellenbosch University (exposure to plant diseases on a wide variety of crops)
2. Working at Citrus Research International in Nelspruit
3. Working on a raspberry and blueberry farm (exposure to farm activities)

IS THERE A FUTURE in this career?

Climate change has had such a big impact on crop production, pests and diseases worldwide. As a plant pathologist, it is our job to ensure food security for our growing population by helping growers to farm optimally. New diseases will immerge as a result of climate change, and pathogen population dynamics may shift globally. Practicing sound scientific principles will help plant pathologists to navigate these ever changing waters.

CHALLENGES

Not being a natural public speaker, it is hard to sometimes get your message across. I had to learn to be more confident in what I was saying, especially if you are trying to convince a grower to see your point of view. But backing your statements with scientific facts, always give credibility to your message. Be assertive in what you are saying, but also be able to admit when you are wrong.