# QA with Gina Swart

# Plant Pathologist

## Why did you choose this career?

The career chose me actually. I wanted to get into Medical School, but looked at other options after my application was not successful. I initially enrolled for a BSc (Agric) in Microbiology, thinking I could get into the medical field as a medical microbiologist. I quickly realised that this was not what I wanted to do, and doing vacation work with the Plant Pathology group opened a window to a fascinating world that I never knew existed but wanted to be a part of!

## What training did you undergo, and Where?

I have a PhD (Agric) majoring in Plant Pathology. I did all my formal training in the Department of Microbiology and Plant Pathology at the University of Pretoria.

## What does your job entail?

I am responsible for leading Global Disease Control Product Biology team in close partnership with several functions to efficiently deliver chemical and biological solutions that fit the company's portfolio requirements to ensure innovative and sustainable offers to growers. I also provide strategic direction to manage efficient and timely development of new active ingredients from research through

## Describe an average day?

I have two types of average days – one in the office, where I would attend meetings that would cover any topic related to our research and development activities and projects. I also have face to face meetings with my team to catch up with what they are doing, and support with any issues they may have. If I am travelling, then my typical day would involve spending a fair amount of time on an aeroplane, train or bus and then visiting field trials and having in depth discussions about what we have observed in the plots. I would also meet with local colleagues, and visit growers and customers.

## What do you enjoy most?

I enjoy the technical challenges that the constantly evolving market presents. I also enjoy the diversity of the various activities with which I am involved.

## What are the least enjoyable aspects?

At certain times of the year, there are a lot of varied activities going on concurrently, and it can be tricky to juggle everything and not drop any balls!

## 3 important qualities that your position requires?

Tenacity, resilience and lots of energy!

## In 1 sentence, describe your job?

Playing an active role in providing sustainable disease control solutions to growers thereby helping to ensure people have access to safe, high quality food.

## Experience vs. Training?

Both. Training is very important to ensure you have the technical knowledge needed to do this job well. That is just the first layer, time on the job and in the field cement this knowledge and then add lots of additional components that are not possible to learn in a classroom or lab.

## Advice for grade 11 and 12 learners considering this career?

Focus on your studies and try to do the best you can. Science (Physics and Chemistry are important as well as Biology of course) are key. Every little bit that you do in school, will help make the transition to university easier. A culture of hard work and commitment will pay off later.

## What are the most enjoyable aspects of your position?

One day, I could be having a discussion on the molecular mechanism of resistance of a particular pathogen to a type of chemistry,then to having discussions to understand activity relationships of new chemical classes in the research labs, and finally meeting with growers and showing them field trials at our research facility.

## Gina Swart

### Head: Global Product Biology Fungicides

**Type of personality that would enjoy this kind of career?**

Somebody who is focused, detail oriented but able to step back and see the bigger picture, flexible, resilient and should like working with people.

**What challenges have you had to overcome ?**

The biggest challenges I have had to overcome was to get growers to accept that I was not the secretary, but somebody who understood their business and could have a technical conversation with them and adapting to working in the global headquarters of a company.

**What qualifications do I need?**

To be a Global Technical Manager, you need at least a Master's degree in Plant Pathology/Agronomy, although a PhD is preferable. To lead such a team and research and development activities, a PhD is a must.

**Does the industry (and your type of position) that you are in, face gender bias?**

While there have been significant improvements in the industry in general, with some women now in key positions, women are still underrepresented, and this becomes more evident, the higher you move through the ranks.

**Is continuing education and further studies important in your type of career?**

Absolutely! Being at the cutting edge of research and development means that things move very quickly and it is important to keep abreast of developments.

Plant Pathology