

Douglasdale Dairy – no substitute for quality

by Izak Hofmeyr

The biggest threat to the dairy industry in South Africa is the few dairies that are being used to benchmark the milk price and yet are selling milk containing hydrogen peroxide, or rather 'toxic waste', to unsuspecting consumers.

So said Douglasdale Dairy's MD Mike Matthews at the handing over ceremony of Douglasdale's HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) certificate by the SABS last year.

Located in the heart of Sandton, Douglasdale is very serious about the quality of the product it provides to its customers, he said. "We are continuously challenging ourselves to adhere to the absolute strictest of standards in our business. This is why we are so proud to have received an A rating in the Pick 'n Pay Suppliers Audit Assessment recently, and now also this certificate, to confirm that we are HACCP compliant. This makes us one of the first Gauteng based fresh milk dairies to achieve this international food safety standard."

The HACCP certification, he said, not only identifies potential hazards, but also stipulates what controls must be in place to prevent potential hazards. "These controls are carefully managed at every step of the milk production process at Douglasdale Dairy."

Edna Law is the microbiologist at Douglasdale Dairy, and as such the first and last line of defence to ensure uncompromising quality of the products leaving the dairy premises. She has held this position for the past 20 years. "Our aim is to produce the absolute best quality milk possible, and in order to do that, we have implemented several tests at various stages of the process. The first tests are already done on the milk producer's farm, even before the milk is pumped into the bulk tanker that will transport the milk to us."

Testing

Arriving at the dairy, both a sensory test (smelling and tasting the milk) and a resazurin test (establishing whether or not there are bacteria in the milk) are

conducted while the milk is still in the tanker. Then follows an antibiotic test, a butterfat test, as well as a check whether water had been added to the milk on the farm. If all these tests are negative, the milk is pumped into the holding towers from where the processing process starts.

"What is different in our process is the use of a bacterfuge, which removes 99,9% of bacteria and bacterial spores from the milk." Douglasdale, according to Matthews, is one of very few dairies in the country that uses a bacterfuge. This, explains Law, is what enhances the superior keeping quality of Douglasdale's milk.

Otherwise the milk is subject to the standard pasteurisation, separation and homogenisation processes. The separator clarifies the milk and separates the milk into skim milk and cream. Depending on the specific demand, the milk is recombined into the correct percentages of cream in full-cream milk, low-fat milk and skimmed milk. The last process before packaging, is the homogenisation process that concentrates all the molecules, so that the cream does not separate from the milk.

After packaging, a batch of finished product samples is taken and laboratory tested. Bacterial tests to check for evidence of coliform and *E.coli* are performed, as are a phosphatase test to confirm the product has been properly pasteurised and a butterfat test to confirm compliance with the relevant standards. Douglasdale produces full-cream, low-fat and skimmed milk, cream, buttermilk and amasi.

Procurement

Duncan Dewar is production manager at Douglasdale Dairy, and responsible for milk procurement. He has been with Douglasdale for 25 years. "During the time of the old Dairy Board, milk sourcing was easy. You just bought it from the Board at an established price. Since 1987, however, each dairy had to establish its own milk source. In the case of Douglasdale,

we initially sourced our milk through Nestlé. Eventually, however, the decision was made to buy milk directly from farmers."

They soon found that it was much easier and more effective to deal with organised groups, rather than individual farmers. Currently they truck in milk from as far afield as Mooi River in KwaZulu-Natal, Ficksburg in the Free State and Middelburg in Mpumalanga.

Although they use the services of a professional haulier, the bulk tankers are their own. The haulier thus only provides the horse, while the trailer is the property of Douglasdale.

"Initially we tried to encourage smaller farmers to grow and provide us with milk, but for some reason these efforts never came to fruition. It became clear to us that most of the constraints preventing farmers from developing into decent sized dairy producers are not in the domain where we as milk buyer can play a constructive role."

Pricing

The price to producers is largely based on what Douglasdale can get in the market place, but the price other dairies are paying also plays a role. The milk has to adhere to the quality requirements as prescribed by law.

"I am interested in a delivered price here in Sandton. It is between the farmer and the transport company to work out the transport cost details. This makes the whole pricing process relatively simple. The current milk situation is that Douglasdale has experienced a big shortage of milk from the end of March, through April and May. The cheap price of maize, however, will most likely cause a much higher production of



Douglasdale Dairy's MD Mike Matthews with Sara Cooper, food safety and quality manager

milk towards the end of winter, which could affect availability profoundly."

The dairy's distribution area spans from the northern suburbs of Johannesburg through Midrand and the whole of Pretoria, as well as the area to the east of Pretoria as far as Middelburg in Mpumalanga and to the west, as far as Rustenburg and Thabazimbi.

Standards

Food Safety and Quality manager Sara Cooper points out that the high standards of Douglasdale milk starts on the farm, even before the milk leaves the udder of the cow. "I think it is important that our farmers are all subjected to on-farm audits to ensure that all practices and procedures on their side are in line with the highest standards, but it is also important that the same criteria are applicable to all farmers." In this respect, she said, Douglasdale is working closely

with the Dairy Standard Agency to assist in developing a standard audit for farmers.

Looking back over the history of Douglasdale Dairy, Mike Matthews pointed out that the dairy started in the 1940's, when the Douglas family produced about 240 bottles of milk per day. Initially the milk was delivered by mule cart and later by deliverymen on bicycles. "Today we process in excess of two million litres per month. Looking at our growth over the years, it is clear our uncompromising attitude towards quality has stood us in good stead." **M&J**