

Learners at Westerlig Primary School in Pretoria West received the gift of milk as part of the school milk day initiative to promote dairy as part of a healthy diet. From the left are Morongwa Nthile and Makoma Selowa

Processing in pursuit of excellence

by Liza Burger

Nkunzi Milkyway is one of those rare regional dairy processors with a passion for quality it shares with its milk farmers and chief retail client.

The dairy is situated on the outskirts of Pretoria East on the old Ayrshire farm of the famous Malleson brothers at Hazeldean. The Mallesons have been milking Ayrshires here since 1920 and have been supplying milk to Woolworths for the past 21 years, and are still involved in the business. The partnership with the Nkunzi group brought many changes to the farm and its processing facilities, but this only expanded operations and raised the bar a few notches higher for this pocket powerhouse dairy.

What makes this dairy processor special is the fact that, for its size, it has made a huge impression on both the high end and lower end of the markets in Gauteng. As a supplier

to Woolworths of Ayrshire dairy products, the level of operations at the processing plant is right up there with the best in the country.

The processor also packages and distributes dairy under its own label to selected retailers in Pretoria but also to spaza shops and smaller supermarkets in the nearby township of Mamelodi.

The product range includes fresh milk, cream, yoghurt, soft cheese, amasi, drinking yoghurt and fruit juice blends.

To produce such high-quality products, Nkunzi sources milk from a group of handpicked processors from Gauteng, Mpumalanga, North West and the Free State.

"We are proud to be associated with the Ayrshire breed and the fine quality products this exceptional group of milk producers allow us to make," said Boeta Venter, managing director of Nkunzi Milkyway at the group's recent dairy producers' day.



Rewarding excellence: The top producers of Nkunzi Milkyway are at the back Deon van Zyl (Producer Ambassador Award), Casper Swarts (Butterfat Content Award), Casper Lamprecht (Top Turnover Award), Abraham Celliers and Meiring Haward (Nkunzi Milkyway producer of the Year Award, Lowest Somatic

Cell Count Award, Highest Protein Content Award). On the right is Boeta Venter, managing director of Nkunzi Milkyway. In front are Pitso Sekhoto (Business Ambassador Award), Hesta Beyendach (Lowest Micro Results Award) and JB Magwasa, chairperson of Nkunzi Milkyway.

Partnering with producer and retailer

One of the secrets to Nkunzi Milkyway's success is attention to detail and maintaining the highest quality standards.

Nicola Malan, who represented Woolworths at the producers day, said that the supplier, farmer and retailer partnership that exists between themselves and the Nkunzi Milkyway producers and processor, is really something special.

"At Woolworths, we are passionate about Ayrshire dairy products and we have renewed our commitment to the Ayrshire brand. The Ayrshire milk we sell are sourced from only 45 carefully selected farmers we know and trust through processors like Nkunzi Milkyway," she said during her presentation on the day.

She added that Woolworths is committed to sustainable retailing by paying attention to efficient transport, 'green' packaging, recycling and assisting BEE farmers and targets. "We are proud to be associated with a processor like Nkunzi Milkyway that is as committed to our common goals as we are.

Recognising excellence

To encourage raw-milk quality, incentive schemes for quality are in place. Added to this is the annual prize-giving during the Nkunzi Milkyway producers day. This year, the categories included the best performances regarding microorganism content, somatic cell count, protein and butterfat content and volume produced. Special awards for 'producer ambassador' and 'business ambassador' were presented to Deon van Zyl and Pitso Sekhoto for their efforts in the industry.

Social responsibility

Giving back to the community is one of Nkunzi Milkyway's passions. They have been active in the Milk Producers' Organisation's school milk day initiative as one their main sponsors.

Free milk provided by Nkunzi was distributed to some 2 000 children at various schools in Pretoria West. This was done in conjunction with Milk SA's campaign to encourage a healthy, balanced diet for children that includes three portions of dairy a day. **M&J**