



A commitment to dairy quality and safety

by Karien Slabbert

“Quality can be judged by means of sensory evaluation, nutritive value and according to its chemical, physical and microbiological characteristics. Cases of food-borne disease and food poisoning are becoming increasingly common throughout the world”

Continuous product monitoring enhances the nutritional and quality value of the consumer's food basket. Whether you are a retailer, dairy or juice processor, if you want to talk quality, talk to Dairy Standard Agency (DSA). All role-players stand to benefit greatly from the quality monitoring role the DSA fulfils by ensuring safe products throughout the production chain.

To date, DSA has played a pivotal quality role in the primary and secondary dairy industry. As an expert and objective monitoring body, DSA has ventured to improve milk and dairy product quality, by monitoring the products for compliance with the legal standards and regular liaising with authorities pertaining food safety and quality issues.

DSA faces a very challenging task. To fulfil its role as quality monitoring body, it continuously strives to act in an objective and scientifically sound manner. With regard to technical matters within the dairy industry, for example, DSA makes use of a technical committee, comprising of experienced technical experts.

With the DSA quality monitoring platform proving to be a great success in the dairy industry, the possibilities within the greater retailing sector seem endless. DSA endeavours to continuously set higher standards for relevant input suppliers. Additionally, it separates responsible suppliers from irresponsible suppliers and simultaneously identifies distributors who are willing to enhance the quality and safety of their products.

A question of quality

Quality can be judged by means of sensory evaluation, nutritive value and according to its chemical, physical and microbiological characteristics. Cases of food-borne disease and food poisoning are becoming increasingly common throughout the world.

Both public health problems and microbiological food spoilage can be minimised by carefully choosing raw materials, as well as correct manufacturing and storage procedures. Achieving these objectives require careful monitoring at various stages to assess microbiological load or to look for deficiencies in the manufacturing processes.

As milk, dairy products and fruit juice play an important nutritional role in South Africa, all consumers should be able to share in the benefit of quality products. Poor-quality products not only harm the image of, and demand for the products, but also the South African consumer's confidence.

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The official dairy watchdog

Food safety programmes are essential for food/dairy product manufacturers – especially with special events such as the 2010 Soccer World Cup on the horizon. To promote quality products that comply with legal standards, a variety of actions are necessary.

Consequently, DSA undertakes different projects aimed at improving the retail industry. Projects also aim to assist government institutions to reprimand regular offenders of legal standards.

Major DSA projects include:

- The local authority project
- Facilitating the prosecution of regular offenders of legal requirements for fresh milk and other dairy products
- Investigating complaints received regarding compliance with requirements for dairy products (other than milk)
- The laboratory implementation programme
- Food safety auditing of processing plants in co-operation with local authorities
- Food safety auditing requested by processors
- The Code of Practice
- The Dairy Quality Club
- The technical committee.

DSA is formally acknowledged and supported by the organised dairy industry, comprising of Milk SA, the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO),

the South African Milk Processors' Organisation (Sampro), as well as the South African National Consumers' Union. Additionally, the DSA is acknowledged by the retail sector and various government institutions responsible for determining and enforcing different legal standards.

A Code of Practice

One of the most important projects the DSA has undertaken, is food safety audits on dairy processing facilities. As the official representative body of the organised dairy industry, the DSA has taken the first steps in establishing quality control over local producers by launching the Code of Practice.

The DSA Code of Practice has been developed to assist industry and retailers in fulfil their legal obligations and protecting the consumer, by providing a common basis for the inspection of companies supplying branded food products.

It has encompassed the fundamental principles of the industry current standards and is intended to be incorporated into the standards that third party inspection bodies, such as the DSA, use. It is not intended to replace the requirements of any legislation, where this legislation requires a higher standard for a specific industry.

The system provides an inspection certificate to be awarded at levels 1, 2 and 3 under the SQF 1000 for primary producers and SQF 2000 for the secondary industry.

Why food safety auditing?

Food safety audits can be conducted at various levels. In essence, all audits are independent appraisals and assessments of an operation, activity or control. A compliance audit is an inspection, appraisal and assessment of compliance with an industry's Code of Practice.

The auditing system is a systematic approach to lead the industry to a food safety system as recommended by the Department of Health in Regulation 908 and regulations relating to the application of the hazard analysis and critical control

point system (HACCP system) of 27 June 2003, issued in terms of the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectant Act (Act 54 of 1972).

Only auditors registered at the South African Auditor & Training Certification Association (SAATCA) are used.

The project's immediate purpose is that over a 24-month-period (November 2005 to November 2007), DSA should carry out food safety audits at all dairy processing plants that supply dairy products in the jurisdiction of the local authorities of South Africa. **M&JR**