

# Playing for the milk team

by Karien Slabbert

“The best investment for a country is feeding its children well,” Dr Michael Griffin from the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in Barbados told delegates at the 4th International School Milk Conference. School milk programmes not only have the ability to fuel economic growth – it can also spark sustainable social development. However, certain critical factors are required to ensure the success of these programmes.

“There is a definite link between the government and the dairy industry in establishing a school milk programme.” Dr Griffin added that World School Milk Day is a good starting point for future endeavours. However, for these programmes to be successful and sustainable, various role players should work together towards one common goal.

## Programme or promotion?

School milk can be a public or private endeavour. There seems to be distinct differences between school milk programmes and milk in schools. The former can be described as milk that is part of a national school feeding programme. Milk is provided to the children free of charge. These programmes are usually partially or entirely funded by the government. Cleas Nermark from Nerkla Consulting in Sweden, noted that of the 46 countries that run school milk programmes, 38 are entirely or partially dependent on the support of government.

“Milk in schools” refers to the promotion of milk in schools. Children can either buy dairy products or parents pay an annual levy. Alternatively, government can set the standards and regulations, but should not necessarily be responsible for funds. Donor support and stakeholder partnerships can also ensure the success of the programme.



## Critical areas for sustainable school milk programmes:

- ▶ Milk producers, processors, government departments, non-governmental organisations, trade and industry, and the private sector have to be involved to ensure success.
- ▶ Government can play a role in policies, standards, markers and certifications. School feeding initiatives should be accompanied by a school health policy, including a firm policy on school feeding.
- ▶ Nutritionists or dieticians should be available at a district or regional level to provide technical information on school feeding menus and balanced diets.
- ▶ An implementation mechanism should be well thought out and should involve a lot of planning. Details on infrastructure and necessary resources should also be included.
- ▶ Getting the community involved from the beginning and giving them ownership of school feeding, greatly increases the chances of success and sustainability.
- ▶ If publicly financed, government should ensure that funds are provided on a regular basis to prevent interruption in the programme.
- ▶ All children should benefit. Schools should be monitored to ensure that they follow the laid down school feeding guidelines. **DMA**