



Heading for Success

by Karien Slabbert

“Every country interested in dairy development and improved nutrition of its population, should promote the consumption of milk in schools. This is the future of the dairy industry.” Dr Nathan Twinamasiko, executive director of the Dairy Development Authority in Uganda, presented this key message at the 4th International School Milk Conference from 6-8 November at Spier Wine Estate near Stellenbosch in South Africa’s Western Cape Province.

The South African Milk Producers’ Organisation (MPO), with the support of the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), hosted the conference. International packaging company, Tetra Pak, sponsored the event. Representatives from 26 countries, including China, Egypt,

Great Britain, Afghanistan, China and Kenya attended the conference.

The conference focused on realising the nutritional and economic benefits of school milk within the global arena. International school feeding programme administrators, milk producers, processors and delegates from government and private spheres, used the conference to initiate debate, share successes and failures, highlight workable strategies and generate ideas on how these programmes could be sustained in their countries and beyond.

It presented a platform for international participants to exchange experiences, examine successful models, investigate possible pitfalls and to discuss strategies and trends. It also provided an open forum for dialogue on the benefits of well-implemented school



milk programmes from an administrative and financial perspective. The following key aspects were discussed:

Custom-fit solutions

Michael Griffin from the FAO in Barbados propagated the idea that every country should take it upon itself to create workable strategies to custom-fit its unique needs. He said that there are no one-size-fits-all solutions when it comes to school milk: "We must therefore look at individual solutions for countries."

A milk-drinking culture

Long-term strategies for establishing a milk-drinking culture among children, were also up for discussion. Three important factors emerged:

- ▶ Milk's strength lies in its health attributes. This offers an array of developmental and educational opportunities. On the other hand, milk does not have the financial resources to match those of the soft-drinks industry
- ▶ Children are discerning consumers. One delegate aptly noted that dairy's most profound nemesis is fizzy carbonated drinks. When given the choice, children would rather sip on sugar-saturated soft drinks. Thus milk should be presented attractively
- ▶ Children are tomorrow's adult consumers. Numerous speakers touched on the subject that habits instilled during a child's formative years are likely to persist throughout adult life. "If milk is given to school children, it will

ensure that habits established in early years persist throughout life,” Dr Twinamasiko noted

- ▶ School milk programmes are directly linked to dairy development – especially in countries with a low level of progress. While school milk programmes provide privileged access to an important market, this opportunity also implies responsibilities.

Improved cognitive development

The conference emphasised the important role of school milk programmes in promoting good nutrition among children. All delegates agreed that properly-designed and administered programmes can significantly improve the health status of children. This helps pave the way towards better academic performances and increased work productivity.

In his presentation, Dr Twinamasiko stressed the critical link between learning and school children’s health and nutrition. “Hunger and malnutrition are among the major explanatory factors contributing to poor performance among children. The situation is further compromised if a country lacks an approved national school feeding policy and guidelines,” he said.

“Milk is not a medicine, but a food. It must be part of a balanced lifestyle,” Bertus de Jongh, chief executive officer of the MPO, cautioned during one of the panel discussions. Apart from improving school enrolment and attendance, school feeding programmes also serve as a means of introducing healthy habits and basic hygiene practices.

Safety

Jien Li, a representative of the Chinese School Milk Programme, stated that safety, hygiene and high-quality milk are the key elements determining the success of any school milk programme. “It is necessary to strengthen quality control and adopt strict monitoring over every step such as producing, processing and delivery of school milk.” Furthermore, he said that all suppliers should be HACCP certified. In addition, school milk must be made from liquid raw milk and not from powder, said Li.



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- 1 International delegates share in the excitement of the International School Milk Conference activities
- 2 Prof Salome Kruger from the University of the North West addresses delegates on children’s nutritional needs
- 3 Fawzy Aly, a delegate from Egypt, chats to learners at the National School Milk Day celebrations



Mapping the future

The conference highlighted that a handful of countries have well-established school milk programmes. Others are lagging due to logistical, financial and organisational obstacles. These countries still have a long way to go before school milk initiatives address the heart of the problem – feeding hungry children on a continuous basis. For delegates from these countries, the 4th International School Milk Conference presented a roadmap that will hopefully pave the way towards future successes.

National School Milk Day

The conference incorporated a South African National School Milk Day into its programme. Some 8 900 primary school learners in the Somerset West and Hermanus areas in the Western Cape, each received a 250 ml carton of UHT milk on this day.

The eight primary schools that participated in the festivities, rolled out the red carpet. Local and international visitors were welcomed by a myriad of smiling young faces bubbling with enthusiasm – all eager to receive their freebee carton of milk. Dairy companies and milk buyers provided the 250 ml cartons free of charge. **DMA**

Zam Milk unveils new filling line

Zam Milk, the dairy division of ZamBeef, and Zambia's largest milk producer with an annual production of eight million litres a year, recently unveiled its state-of-the-art K178,5 million new filling machine at its Chisamba dairy. The bottles used are produced from high density polyethylene (HDPE), are ultra hygienic and have the added value of being capped with Snap-Cap tops which ensure there is no product contamination of any kind.

"We are very happy with the line as we have a world-class facility that needs world-class equipment, which Nampak Zambia supplies," said Murray Moore, Zam Milk general manager.

"Nampak Zambia prides itself on providing its customers with packaging solutions and systems that will enhance their businesses. Zam Milk's bottles are a case in point. They are lightweight but sturdy and, because less raw material is used in the production process, there is a cost saving for Zam Milk," said Stewart Lamb, Nampak Zambia managing director.



Stewart Lamb (left) and Murray Moore at the official opening of the new line

Nampak Zambia is "Proudly Nampak, Proudly Zambian".