

Esada News

by Fidelis Zvomuya



The African dairy industry and continental governments must join hands for the introduction of successful national school milk feeding programmes so as to help improve the health of the continent's billions of under-nourished children.

Addressing the 3rd Esada Conference and Exhibition, Parmalat CEO Theo Hendrickse said that a successful school milk programme is a direct intervention that will result in promoting a milk drinking culture. This will increase *per capita* consumption, which will in turn help sustain dairy producers.

“The dairy industry can play an important role in reducing the number of children suffering from extreme hunger and at the same time assist in the improvement of learners’ ability to perform in class. We need to remind ourselves at the outset of this conference that drinking milk or eating yoghurt on a regular basis, can dramatically change the future of our children in the region,” he said.

It is the duty of the industry with the support of all governments on the continent, to see to it that school milk schemes flourish Hendrickse said. “So much is written on the subject and it has been deliberated at length at various conferences around the world. Yet we have only small pockets of success. This is not good enough. We need less talk and more action,” Hendrickse said.

He said Parmalat Botswana is very proud to be associated with one continental school milk programme success story where the government is tackling the challenge of reducing the number of people suffering from extreme hunger, head-on.

“The government of Botswana started a national school feeding scheme in 2003, involving about 320 000 learners at more than 600 schools throughout the country. Parmalat has been one of the suppliers to the Botswana

School Feeding Programme which has been running successfully since its inception. It is not surprising that Botswana is on track to achieving the goals of universal primary education and reducing the number of people who suffer from extreme hunger,” he said.

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In Kenya, through the government school milk programme, the people are now consuming between 30-95 litres per year. The challenges of establishing successful school milk programmes across the continent, are much more readily achievable than many of the other development challenges confronting Africa. “Let’s get it done. When Esada next meets, I hope that there will be many more success stories,” Hendrickse said.

Professor Girja Pandey of Zambia’s Golden Valley Agricultural Research Trust (Gart) says there must be some incentives for secondary producers to become involved in this programme, as it will not yield any profits.

Professor Pandey said the school milk programme is common in many countries and called other African states that have not introduced such programmes, to consider the introduction of this programme to improve the attendance of pupils in the schools and contribute towards the health and mental empowerment of the future generation. **DMA**