

# A NEW DIRECTION

## CREATING A CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

by **Dr Linda Pretorius**

“The future is going to look different, because it will have to,” said Jonathon Hanks, facilitator at the South African Society of Dairy Technology (SASDT) symposium days in July 2019. And with sobering figures showing rising food demand amid increasingly constrained environmental resources, the statement could not be more accurate.

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## SASDT SYMPOSIUM 2019

The symposium, hosted first in Johannesburg and then in Cape Town, on 16 and 18 July respectively, brought together industry leaders to talk and think about what sustainability means for the South African dairy industry. With 140 delegates attending the events, from producers and processors to input suppliers, and from retailers to food scientists, it is clear that sustainability is a topic that cuts across all sectors of the industry. As the presentations showed, the dairy industry views sustainability as more than being green or being compliant; rather, it's about staying relevant in a climate of changing dietary trends and consumer demands. To achieve



## WATER USE

Central to the discussions was water use, not unexpectedly given the severe water shortages in many dairy-producing areas in South Africa over the past couple of years. But there was none of the doom and gloom that might have been expected. In fact, Henk van der Hyde of Danone said, "The recent drought in the Western Cape has been a blessing in disguise". Presenters shared inspiring case studies, insightful perspectives, and innovative ideas, showing that sustainable production is possible despite the pressures the industry faces.

this requires rethinking on how resources (natural, human, and financial) are used and shared along the value chain, and appreciating the relationships between resources.

## START SOMEWHERE

It was especially enlightening to see how small changes can lead to impressive results, just as long as one starts somewhere. That 'somewhere' could be as simple as measuring water use, fixing leaking pipes, recycling waste, repurposing grey water, or rethinking packaging. In time, this initiative gains momentum, as more people start to notice the changes and want to be part of the process. A mind shift occurs in gradual stages. An event like the symposium is, therefore, an opportunity for people across the industry to share their experience and learn from others, which in turn stimulates collective action. In this way, a seemingly overwhelming challenge is broken down into manageable steps, and so sustainability becomes an achievable goal regardless of the size of one's operation.

## A PRE-COMPETITIVE ISSUE

There was ample opportunity for discussion, debate, and thought-provoking questions during the symposium days. It was encouraging to see that sustainability is viewed as a pre-competitive issue, which affirms the industry's commitment to a change in direction – not for the sake of being green, but because sustainability is a fundamental business issue. Delegates at both the Johannesburg and Cape Town events agreed that the symposium was a catalyst for directing change, and that structured follow-up to the discussions in the form of a consensus or standards document is needed to drive the issue of sustainability forward.

To this end, a body such as Milk SA is well positioned to be the link between the local industry and international strategies, to ensure that the South African dairy industry can be part of the solution to the global challenge. And with the enthusiasm, commitment, and collaboration shown during the symposium, we can look forward to a future that will indeed look different – because we want it to. 