



Bright Future of Dairy takes centre stage at SASDT Symposium 2022

On the sunny morning of 24 March 2022, there was an air of eagerly getting back together as almost 100 delegates of the South African dairy industry arrived for the South African Society of Dairy Technology (SASDT) Symposium 2022. “We were delighted to host our first in-person event in two years,” says Christine Leighton, National President of the SASDT. “Held at the gorgeous, oak-lined Lanzerac Wine Estate in Stellenbosch, it was a day packed with thought-provoking presentations and fruitful discussions deftly facilitated by Drs Thulani Sibanda and Rodney Owusu-Darko, Food Science experts from the University of Pretoria. We were also pleased to have a stellar line-up of speakers who came with ideas, innovations and inspirations for the future of dairy in a more sustainable world.”

A collaborative ‘Rethinking Food Systems’ presentation by New Zealand’s Professor Steve Flint of Massey University and South Africa’s Dr Tertius Cilliers, CEO of Synercore Holdings set the scene for the day. While there are interesting points of difference between the two countries’ dairy industries, as they surveyed the historical perspectives, both presenters were in agreement that the nutritional role of dairy remains crucial to the future of human health and well-being.

In a keynote introductory address, SAMPRO CEO, Alwyn Kraamwinkel emphasised the diversity in the South Africa’s well-developed dairy industry and also highlighted some of the current challenges that are igniting innovation and the further development of national best practices.

The symposium then focused on four key areas: consumer insights in sustainable eating; environmental management and animal health; the future of packaging and the future-proofing of the dairy industry.

Consumer insights in sustainable eating

There was a stand-out presentation from Dr Stephan Peters of the Dutch Dairy Board who joined the event virtually to present his research into sustainable diets by taking a deep-dive into the ecological and health impacts of removing animal foods from the diet. Using unique software, Dr Peters demonstrated that while there are certainly both ecological and health benefits to eating less red meat and more whole-grains, limiting dairy actually does not reduce ecological footprint, and would lead to a more expensive diet. His assertion is that what makes for a truly sustainable diet is a lot more complex than the current consumer message of ‘eat less animal- and more plant-based foods’. Anneke van Niekerk consultant to the Regulations and Standards Project of Milk SA gave participants an important update on the review of regulation R1510 which deals with the revised definitions of ‘modified & imitation dairy products’.

Environmental management and animal health

In this session, Dr Colin Ohlhoff, Environmental Officer for Fair Cape Dairies focused on environment stewardship as South Africa strives for a sustainable dairy industry. This fascinating talk focused on important issues such as Greenhouse Gas emissions from

livestock, regenerating soils, water availability, waste, biodiversity and animal health and welfare. Dr Ohlhoff looked at the promising gains made in South Africa but stressed that these were coming from the voluntary actions of some players, and more advances would come from collective drive and action. Case study presentations from both Colbourne Farm and Springvale Farm gave attendees unique and inspiring insights into what is possible on dairy farms when farmers are committed to regenerative agricultural practices.

The future of packaging

Packaging choices are playing an increasingly important role in the businesses of SA's dairy producers and processors. Don MacFarlane, a Senior Technologist at Woolworths South Africa, responsible for the Technical, Sustainability, New Product Development and Compliance unpacked the latest news on the Extended Producer Responsibility legislation. Michelle Penlington, National Marketing Executive of Polyoak whose focus includes sustainability, presented latest innovations in dairy packaging, from transit through to post-consumer waste, which will enable the industry to reduce its Extended Producer Responsibility liabilities and better support the country's recycling industry. This session also included a plea from Lorren de Kock, project manager for the Circular Plastics Economy programme, for the dairy industry players to support The SA Plastics Pact.

Future-proofing of the dairy industry

By this last session of the symposium, it was clear to the attendees that the future outlook for SA's dairy industry is indeed, bright. Alignment with global compacts, such as the Dairy Sustainability Framework and Dairy Declaration of Rotterdam moves the industry as a whole towards a positive future where dairy continues to play its historical role as an excellent source of high-quality nutrition for the modern world's population. With a focus on the health of both people and the planet, the signs are that industry is moving in-step with increasing consumer demands for good food that promotes well-being and a productive environment for future generations.

To access the recordings of the SASDT Symposium 2022, visit <https://sasdt.foodfocus.co.za/>