

South Africa's finest dairy products awarded at SA Dairy Championships 2023

South Africa's top-rated dairy products were recognised at the 190th edition of the SA Dairy Championships, the biggest and oldest dairy competition in Africa.



The 2023 SA Dairy Product of the Year: Woolworths Ayrshire Mozzarella 600g made by RFG Foods. Credit: Hennie van Loggerenberg/Octa 5

An Ayrshire Mozzarella, made especially for Woolworths by RFG Foods, was crowned the Dairy Product of the Year at the prestigious ceremony, held on 25 May 2023 at Eensgezind outside Durbanville.

The winning Woolworths 600g Ayrshire Mozzarella was one of 929 dairy products from 71 producers that competed for the attention of a team of 80 judges. From the high number of entries, 106 products were named SA Champions, standing out as winners in each championships class. This year, a total of 23 products were honoured with the Qualité mark of excellence.

“For a product to be chosen as Product of the Year in a competition of this nature is the dream of every dairy producer,” says dairy expert and chief judge Alan Fourie. “The 600 g Woolworths Ayrshire Mozzarella is an exceptional pizza mozzarella and worthy of this accolade. It is a firm and smooth cheese with a slightly creamy appearance that grates well and melts perfectly. Its creamy, soft, and caramelised flavour is out of the books.”



From left to right: Dr Tertius Cilliers, CEO of Synercore (platinum partner); Robert Sudell, operations manager of RFG Foods; and Pieter van Wyk, president of Agri-Expo pose with the SA Dairy Product of the Year trophy. Credit: Agri-Expo/Andrew Gorman Photography

Robert Sudell, operations manager of RFG Foods, says the team is delighted to be recognised for their signature line. “Mozzarella has been the core foundation of RFG Foods for over 25 years. Our small, artisanal cheese team, under the guidance of cheesemaker Kerwick Boonzaaier, are true experts. They use a very manual process, cutting cheese by hand, supported by Italian ingredients and equipment, to create mozzarella that is on par with the best in the world,” says Sudell.

Other notable Qualité awards winners included Fair Cape Dairies, which won five awards; Lactalis South Africa, which took home four; De Pekelaar, which won three, and Polar Ice Cream Company, which walked off with two.

The dairy industry has been an important pillar of Agri-Expo since its inception in 1831 as the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society, according to Breyton Milford, general manager of Agri-Expo. “We are fortunate to have been the host of the SA Dairy Championships since 1834. However, it is important to acknowledge the effective collaboration within the dairy industry in South Africa. We appreciate the input and guidance from industry leaders to maintain a high standard and continuously adapt to the needs of the industry,” says Milford.

Suzy O’Regan joins Dairy Roll of Honour

At the 2023 SA Dairy Awards, Agri-Expo honoured dairy specialist Suzy O’Regan for her exceptional and dynamic leadership in the dairy industry.

O’Regan, product development manager for Woolworths Food, is the second woman whose name is inscribed on the list of

industry stalwarts on the Agri-Expo Roll of Honour. She has been a judge at the SA Dairy Championships for over 20 years and she is a member of the Super Jury of internationally recognised experts at the World Cheese Awards.

“The decision to develop the Agri-Expo Roll of Honour in 1992 was to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of industry leaders to our dairy projects. Only nine individuals received this award in 31 years, which indicates the extremely high requirements of the nominations,” says Milford.

O'Regan was nominated for her admirable contribution to the growth, development and long-term success of the SA Dairy Championships. “Her commitment to excellence, her extensive knowledge, and her willingness to share her expertise have significantly advanced the industry's standards, fostered innovation, and inspired a lasting legacy for future generations to build upon. She is more than deserving of this accolade,” says Milford.



Qualité award winners. Credit: Agri-Expo/Andrew Gorman Photography

2023 Qualité Award winners

Fair Cape Dairies (5)

The Menu Vanilla Flavoured Custard

The Menu Chocolate Mousse

Woolworths Low Fat Yoghurt with Salted Caramel & Chocolate coated Honeycomb

Vital Medium Fat Strawberry Yoghurt

Royale Full Cream Yoghurt with Peaches & Cream Flavoured

Lactalis South Africa (4):

Melrose Glass Jar Spread Cheddar Flavour

Woolworths Mature Cheddar 20 months

Woolworths Mature Gouda 10 months (Black)

Président Gouda Mature 6 months

De Pekelaar (3):

Boerenkaas Matured Gouda

Boerenkaas Mature Extra Hard

Boerenkaas Semi Hard Black Pepper

Polar Ice Cream Company (2):

Polar Signature Ice Cream Salted Caramel - Caramel Ice Cream

Polar Dairy Ice Cream - Blueberry Cheesecake Buttermilk Frozen Yoghurt

Babylonstoren:

Halloumi Skewer

Cookhouse Creamery:

Pizza Mozzarella

Dairy Corporation:

Royale Full Cream Yoghurt - Mixed Fruit and Custard

Fairfield Dairy:

First Choice Full Cream Peach Yoghurt

Fairview Cheese Company:

Woolworths Blue Pearl

Klein River Cheese:

Danbo

Meze Foods:

Braailoumi Cajun

RFG Foods:

Woolworths Ayrshire Mozzarella 600g

Underberg Dairy:

Pizza Mozzarella

Healthy competition driving product innovation

According to Milford, this year's high number of entries and excellent results testify to an innovative industry and healthy competition between bigger manufacturers and smaller entrepreneurs.

"The South African dairy industry needs to focus on innovation and adapt continuously to stay relevant in a highly competitive commercial and trading environment." This is according to Dr Tertius Cilliers, a judge at the SA Dairy Championships and CEO of Synercore, an investment company focusing on innovation and total solutions in the food industry in Southern Africa.

"Despite the challenges we face within the dairy industry and in general as South Africans, this event is a reminder that change can be positive. The SA Dairy Championships is one of the annual highlights of the dairy industry calendar. Inspiring this year were the various new producers, innovative product entries and first-time judges who participated. It was fantastic to witness the growth in what has become a world-class event!"

All the SA Dairy Awards winners [can be viewed here](#).