

191st South African Dairy Championships breaks entry records

This year at the 191st South African Dairy Championships, new benchmarks were set by the dairy sector. On Thursday, 7 March 2024, at Eensgezind outside Durbanville, the judging of this national dairy competition, the largest and oldest in Africa, began and will continue until Friday, 8 March.



The cream of dairy experts in the country gathered in Durbanville for the judging of the 191st SA Dairy Championships, the largest and oldest dairy competition in Africa | Photo: A Gorman Photography

A record number of 78 dairy producers entered a record number of 1,029 dairy products this year. A panel comprising 86 judges has the task of evaluating this large number of entries over two days.

Breyton Milford, general manager of Agri-Expo, the host of the championships since 1834, expressed the association's privilege in showcasing the dairy industry's top quality through this esteemed agricultural event. Milford remarked: "The record-breaking number of entries underscores the confidence industry stakeholders place in this competition to set a benchmark for excellence."

Chief judge, Graham Sutherland noted the championships' fierce competition, stating: "Our entries surpassed the 1,000 mark for the first time." Sutherland added: "After the first day, I can report that the cheese entries demonstrated a commendable standard. The championships stimulate innovation, and this year once again highlighted the tireless efforts of our passionate manufacturers dedicated to exhibiting their products here."



From left to right: Chief Judge Graham Sutherland, Alrina Fourie from the platinum partner DSM, Breyton Milford, General Manager of Agri-Expo and Hanzubeth Labuschagne from the platinum partner IMCD during the judging of the 191st SA Dairy Championships | Photo: A Gorman Photography

Sutherland emphasised the complexity of a competition of this magnitude, saying: "That's why we have five judges per category selected from various sectors of the dairy industry, including cheese makers, quality managers, food technologists, and marketing experts." As a seasoned food technologist, Sutherland brings many years of international experience in the sensory evaluation of dairy products. He highlighted, "Due to the record number of entries, we now have to process more than 5,000 scoresheets to determine the final results."

Qualité – the sole mark of excellence in the dairy industry

The SA Dairy Championships features over 100 classes for cheese, yogurt, milk, cream, ice cream, butter, and other dairy products. Each class yields a winning product awarded the title of SA Champion. The Qualité Mark of Excellence, the dairy industry's sole mark of excellence, is reserved for select products of exceptional quality that have achieved a specific minimum score on the international scorecard. The product securing the highest score is crowned Product of the Year.

Milford expressed Agri-Expo's gratitude for the support of partners facilitating the SA Dairy Championships. "We are pleased to announce a new three-year platinum partnership with IMCD and DSM, alongside our diamond partners Chr.Hansen and Synercore, gold partners Checkers, Orchem, IFF, Woolworths, and the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, silver partners Condio and Pick n Pay, as well as bronze partner Mane."



A total of 1 029 products from 78 South African dairy producers competed for the attention of 86 judges over two days | Photo: A Gorman Photography

Linda Segalla from IMCD South Africa expressed their commitment to supporting excellence in the dairy industry and promoting innovation and quality. Segalla stated: "Committing to the South African Dairy Championships for the next three years reflects IMCD's long-term dedication to fostering growth and recognition within the dairy community. With our expertise and commitment to the industry, IMCD is the ideal partner to help elevate the market to new heights."

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