

MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

30 April 2019

The 18th SA Cheese Festival an ever-innovative success

The 18th South African Cheese Festival from 26 to 28 April 2019 was a huge success according to the organisers, exhibitors and visitors. Everyone agrees: This was the best festival ever. It is not every day that the Dairy Product of the Year and the Gin of the Year visit together at one festival!

Johan Ehlers, Chief Executive Officer of Agri-Expo, says the SA Cheese Festival is established as South Africa's most popular outdoor food experience. This celebration of cheese and related products is offered by Agri-Expo since 2002 and presented at Sandringham outside Stellenbosch for the past nine years. "This year's festival was an ideal gathering of innovative products, good organisation and a great atmosphere."

According to Ehlers, a highlight was the high standard of products – of which the SA Dairy Product of the Year and the Gin of the Year for 2019 testify. Belnori Boutique Cheesery's St Francis of Ashisi (a 50/50 goat's and cow's milk cheese) and Deep South Distillery's Cape Dry Gin could be tasted during two Tasting Room sessions. "This gin won a gold medal at the London Spirits Competition on Tuesday 30 April 2019, and was also awarded Gin of the Year 2019 out of more than 300 entries."

Ehlers says the festival, with a capacity of 10,000 people a day, was sold out the earliest ever for the Saturday. "Agri-Expo, along with the exhibitors, is delighted with the tremendous buying power at this year's festival. We attribute this to the quality and affordability of the products." The great variety of exhibitors is, according to Ehlers, an important reason for the growing success of the festival. "We had a record number of more than 170 exhibitors this year. In addition, about a third of them were new participants."

New festival experiences: From buffalo mozzarella to boutique gin and insect ice cream. Annually, commercial and artisanal cheeseries from all over the country as well as from abroad bring more than 20 tonnes of cheese to the SA Cheese Festival. This year, one of the highlights for festival goers was the increased participation of international cheeses, especially from Italy and the Netherlands, with which local products could be compared. A brand-new addition to the Cheese Emporium was the Food Lover's Piazza with everything Italian – offering Italian cheeses, olives, Provolone, Prosciutto di Parma, pasta and pesto, as well as Italian hospitality in abundance.

Ehlers says exhibitions of artisanal cheesemakers, from across the country, are unique to the SA Cheese Festival. "A number of small cheesemakers have again been invited to showcase their unique handmade products as part of our #Support #SmallCheeseMakers project in partnership with the Western Cape Department of Agriculture (WCDoA) and Absa."

One of these participants was Ciao Ciao, a brand-new cheesemaker that opened only ten days before the festival. According to co-owner Maurizio Odiema, their buffalo mozzarella and fior di latte sold very well. "We have already received interest from a well-known retailer as well as assistance with the application for an export permit."

Another novelty was the dedicated Craft Canopy exhibition area with a wide variety of wines, beers, sparkling wines and boutique gins – available at the festival for the first time.

The Tasting Room was a great favourite among visitors. Well-known chefs such as Pete Goffe-Wood, The Food Fox Ilse van der Merwe, Lapo Magni and The Kate Tin Katelyn Allegra offered six pairing demonstrations daily. Visitors could enjoy cheese with wines such as SA's top Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc, beer and even chocolate, as well as experience what makes Prosecco different to Champagne.

Visitors could test and buy innovative creations of some 50 exhibitors' niche and alternative products as part of the Cape Made Taste the Alternatives project this year, thanks to a partnership with the WCDoA. Interesting innovations included abalone pie, kombucha vinegar, free-range chicken biltong, pickled periwinkle, rooibos vodka and insect ice cream made from EntoMilk™! More than 30 recipes combining cheese, bread and alternative products were specially developed for cooking demonstrations offered daily in the Cape Made Kitchen. Visitors who attended these sessions each received an exclusive recipe book as a gift. Interested parties can download the recipe book from the SA Cheese Festival website.

An exhibition masterpiece

The SA Cheese Festival was awarded several times as the 'Best Consumer Exhibition in Africa' (larger than 12 000m²) by AAXO (Association for African Exhibition Organisers), as well as the Cape Winelands 'Festival of the Year' in 2018.

Ehlers says it is a privilege for Agri-Expo to be honoured by the exhibition as well as the tourism industries. "This year, we were also overwhelmed with positive feedback from many visitors, exhibitors and partners about new festival experiences created, the grounds layout and the atmosphere," says Ehlers.

First-time festival-goer Theo Kleinhans of the Helderberg summarized many festival-goers' experiences with his comment: "It is one of the best organised festivals we have ever attended. From arrival to parking and security was excellent. The stalls were neat and there was enough seating."

Exhibitors awarded

The organisers awarded the best exhibitions in six categories – including a new exhibitor, Diesel & Dust Craft Beer. The winners were Ladismith Cheese (Commercial Cheese); Kasselshoop Cheese (Boutique Cheese); Diesel & Dust Craft Beer (Alcoholic Products); Las Paletas Artisan Lollies (Related Products); Busy Bee Apiaries (Alternative Products); Piroshka's Flammkuchen (Gourmet Lane); and Western and Southern Cape Angus Club (Milk Factory/Animal Lane). Ehlers praised all the exhibitors for their innovative products, festival discounts and personal interaction with visitors.

The 19th SA Cheese Festival will take place from Saturday 25 April to Monday 27 April 2020 at Sandringham Estate outside Stellenbosch. Visit www.cheesefestival.co.za for more information, follow the SA Cheese Festival on Twitter @SACheeseFest, Facebook @SACheeseFestival or Instagram @sacheesefest, or contact Agri-Expo at tel 021 975 4440 or admin@agriexpo.co.za.

RELEASED BY

Isabeau Botha

Corporate Communication Manager

Agri-Expo

isabeau@agriexpo.co.za

021 975 4440 / 072 247 5868

www.agriexpo.co.za