

R32m boost for dairy trust

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A partnership of 15 years between black and white dairy farmers in Kouga has received a welcome R32m boost from the government in the form of a state-of-the-art dairy parlour.



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The new parlour at the Wittekleibosch Dairy Trust has been operational since June, but Rural Development and Agrarian Reform MEC Mlibo Qoboshiyane visited the community on Thursday, 21 September, to officially open the milking facility.

"We applaud these commercial partnerships and want to use this opening of the facility to encourage other farmers in the province, black and white, emerging and commercial, to see sense in forging partnerships to continue agricultural production in the land," he said.

In the 1970s, the AmaMfengu were removed from their land between Humansdorp and Kareedouw and relocated to the eastern parts of the Eastern Cape. After 1994, they were among the first groups to regain ownership of their historic land.

At that time, the Du Plessis family, commercial dairy producers on a neighbouring farm, leased the land from the owners, until 1997 when the land owners approached Du Plessis to propose a joint venture rather than a simple lease agreement.

In 2002, the Wittekleibosch Dairy Trust (WDT) was established. The Du Plessis family provided the cows and equipment,

while the landowners, consisting of more than 150 families, supplied the land. The venture only employed community members and, over time, a skills transfer from the commercial farmers to the landowners took place. The trust is run on a 60-40 split, in favour of the landowners.

Last year, the provincial government undertook to assist in the development of the project, culminating in yesterday's handover.

During a demonstration yesterday, about 100 cows were milked in about 15 minutes. The cows were led from a holding area into a shed-like structure and onto a massive turntable where suction equipment was attached to their udders. After one full rotation, the cows had been milked and then exited the shed through a scale where they were weighed and their electronic tags were scanned. These tags store information that show how much milk the cows delivered and suggests dietary changes to maximise their production.

Since operation started in June, the WDT has increased its production from 10,000l of milk daily to upwards of 16,000l a day. Between 1200 and 1500 cows are milked daily, and annual turnover has shot up from R25m to about R33m. The facility, which solely supplies Parmalat, provides 40 permanent jobs.

Johan du Plessis, who supplies the cows and assists in overseeing operations, said their vision was for the landowners to take full ownership of the operation in the future.

"When they approached us in 1997, we saw it as a great opportunity and knew a partnership with black landowners was the way of the future," he said.

"And now with government's assistance we are operating at a much higher level."

Representing one of the beneficiary families, Nowethu Msizi said their long-standing partnership with the Du Plessis family had been invaluable to their success.

"They have taught us how to be dairy farmers on a commercial level.

"Working alongside them has provided us with the opportunity to leave behind a legacy for our children, and their children."

The Eastern Cape produces about 985-million litres of milk a year, and Qoboshiyane said this created massive opportunity for future developments. "Our vision is to create more dairy-based business in this area, for example cheese factories," he said.

"We can bring people from all over the country to our region to sample our products.

"There has been too much talk about the transformation of the economy, with little or no actual transformation of the elements of the economy at times.

"Projects like this one are catalysts for change."

Source: Herald