

Joint venture between KZN farmers, unemployed drivers ensure uninterrupted milk supply

Following a labour dispute between Clover/Dairy Farmers South Africa (DFSA) and their drivers which halted the transportation of milk in the area last week, farmers from KwaZulu-Natal's "milk-bowl" - Creighton, Ixopo and Donnybrook - have rallied together to protect community and consumer interest.



falovekids via [pixabay](#)

With very little notice that transportation of their milk would not be available for at least a 48-hour period, and realising the financial and environmental impact this would have on the farming community at large, farmers immediately took matters into their own hands.

Temporary 'depot' ensures ensured consumers not short of milk

A temporary 'depot', consisting of a gazebo, desk and a couple of chairs, was erected by Macston Dairy farmers Craig Macfarlane and Darran Stone at Loch Buighe dairy in Ixopo. Local unemployed drivers arrived at the makeshift depot where they were vetted and given a course on how to run the pumps on the trucks. Together with farmers and their employees, they took over the driving and management of the milk pumps.

This depot became the central facilitation point for the transportation of around 800,000 litres of milk a day across Southern KZN - running 24 hours a day, over four days, from Tuesday 26 to Friday 29 September, ensuring the end consumer would not be short of milk in their local store.

Avoiding an ecological disaster, losses

"Without transportation, farmers would have been forced to dump their milk," explained Stone. "This would not just have resulted in a financial loss to the farmer but would have been an ecological disaster as milk is a known environmental pollutant and on such a scale it would have been extremely difficult to get rid of," he said.

CEO of Dairy Farmers South Africa (DFSA), Jacques Botha, said that, as a result of the strike, dairy farmers “faced a potential loss in terms of milk income and DFSA and Clover stood to lose significant amounts due to market share losses and losses of revenue by not being able to supply in the consumers’ demand.”

Botha credited the “insignificant volumes” of raw milk that were lost over the four days to the “major role” milk producers played in the transportation of milk.

Bruce Allwood, another dairy farmer in Ixopo, who assisted in planning the transport routes, added that at some point down the line, “the consumer would have had to pay for it too.”

Calling the overall exercise “remarkable”, Allwood said: “As farmers, we are proud of the fact that no milk was dumped and overwhelmed by the tremendous amount of goodwill shown by everyone involved. Our priority is to farm responsibly and ensure there is no damage to the environment.”

Joint venture pushes money back into the community

The real success story said Allwood, “is the joint venture between farmers and unemployed drivers which has given highly skilled and competent drivers the opportunity to showcase their skills, gain confidence and earn a decent wage. In the bigger picture, this has pushed money back into the community and indirectly assisted unemployed individuals who are deserving of an opportunity to hopefully find gainful employment.”

Sandy La Marque, CEO of the KZN Agricultural Union, Kwanalu, said: “Farmers who have played a part in this mammoth exercise should feel extremely proud of their efforts, not just in taking action to protect the dairy farming industry in their area but also for uplifting the community and providing employment, albeit temporarily, to those so willing and able to assist.”

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