

## UFS to investigate implementation of quality-monitoring system for SA food industry



Some of the guests who attended the workshop were from the left Prof James du Preez (Chairperson: Department of Biotechnology at the UFS); Prof Lodewyk Kock (Head: South African Fryer Oil Initiative (SAFOI) at the UFS)); Mrs Ina Wilken (Chairperson: South African National Consumer Union (SANCU)); Prof Herman van Schalkwyk (Dean: Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the UFS) and Mr. Joe Hanekom (Managing Director of Agri Inspec).

Photo: Stephen Collet

### UFS to investigate implementation of quality-monitoring system for SA food industry

The University of the Free State (UFS) will be investigating the implementation of a quality-monitoring service for the South African food industry.

This was decided during a workshop to discuss the external quality monitoring in the edible oil industry of South Africa, which was recently held at the UFS.

Major role players in the fast-food sector like Nando's, Spur, Captain Dorego's, King Pie Holdings, Black Steer Holdings, etc and various oil distributors like Felda Bridge Africa, Refill Oils, PSS Oils and Ilanga Oils attended the workshop. Also present was Mrs Ina Wilken, Chairperson of the South African National Consumer Union (SANCU) and key-note speaker of this workshop. She represented the consumer.

These role players all pledged their support to the implementation of this quality-monitoring system for the whole food industry.

The decision to implement this system follows the various malpractices reported in the press and on TV concerning food adulteration (eg the recent Sudan Red Scare), misrepresentation (eg olive oil scandal exposed in 2001) and the misuse of edible frying oils by the fast-food sector.

"One of the basic rights of consumers is the right to safe food. Consumers must be protected against foods and food production processes which are hazardous to their health. Sufficient guarantee of the safety of all food products and food production processes should be implemented. It does not help to have adequate food standards and legislation and there is no manpower to do the necessary investigation or monitoring," said Mrs Wilken.

The South African Fryer Oil Initiative (SAFOI), under the auspices of the UFS Department of Microbial, Biochemical and Food Biotechnology, currently monitors edible oils in the food industry and makes a seal of quality available to food distributors.

"Last week's decision to implement the quality-monitoring system implies that we will now be involving also other departments in the UFS Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences who are involved in various aspects of the food chain in an endeavor to implement this quality monitoring system," said Prof Herman van Schalkwyk, Dean: Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the UFS and one of the main speakers at the workshop.

Prof van Schalkwyk said that the main aim of such a system will be to improve the competitiveness of the South African food industry. "It is clear that the role players attending the workshop are serious about consumer service and that they agree that fraudulent practice should be monitored and corrected as far as possible. Although some of the food outlets have the capacity to monitor the quality of their food, it may not seem to the consumer that this is an objective process. The proposed external monitoring system would counteract this perception amongst consumers," said Prof van Schalkwyk.

The workshop was also attended by representatives from SAFOI and Agri Inspec, a forensic investigation company collaborating with inter-state and government structures to combat fraud and international trade irregularities.

Agri Inspec has been working closely with SAFOI for a number of years to test the content of edible oils and fats. "Extensive monitoring and control actions have been executed in the edible oil industry during the past four years to ensure that the content and labeling of oil products are correct. Four years ago almost 90% of the samples taken indicated that the content differed from what is indicated on the label. This has changed and the test results currently show that 90% of the products tested are in order. However, to maintain this quality standard, it is necessary that quality monitoring and educational campaigns are continuously performed," said Mr. Joe Hanekom, Managing Director of Agri Inspec.

"The seal of quality presented by SAFOI should also be extended to include all the smaller oil containers used by households," Mrs Wilken said.

The SAFOI seal of quality is currently displayed mainly on some oil brands packed in bigger 20 liter containers, which include sunflower oil, cottonseed oil, palm oil etc which are used by restaurants and fast food outlets. "Any oil type is eligible to display the seal when meeting certain standards of authenticity. In order to display the seal, the distributor must send a sample of each oil batch they receive from the manufacturer to SAFOI for testing for authenticity, i.e. that the container's content matches the oil type described on the label. This is again double checked by Agri Inspec, which also draws samples countrywide from these certified brands from the end-user (restaurant or fast food outlets). If in breach, the seal must be removed from the faulty containers," said Prof Lodewyk Kock, Head of SAFOI.

"It should however be taken into account that oils without a seal of quality from the UFS can still be of high quality and authentic. Other external laboratories equipped to perform effective authenticity tests may also be used in this respect," said Prof Kock.

"It is also important to realise that any oil type of quality such as sunflower oil, cottonseed oil, palm oil etc can be used with great success in well controlled frying processes," he said.

Further discussions will also be held with the Department of Health, the SA National Consumer Union and Agri Inspec to determine priority areas and to develop the most effective low-cost monitoring system.

More information on the UFS oil seal of quality and oil use can be obtained at [www.uovs.ac.za/myoilguide](http://www.uovs.ac.za/myoilguide)

#### **Media release**

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