Consumers rely heavily on sensory perceptions when purchasing dairy products. The evaluation of dairy products at the South African Dairy Championships, can assist manufacturers who want to satisfy consumer expectations and desires.

In March 1834, the Cape of Good Hope Agricultural Society staged the first dairy competition in the former Cape Colony. Nine entries were judged and premiums were awarded for Dutch- and English-style cheeses. In March this year, the society will present the 176th SA Dairy Championships and over 800 dairy products will be entered.

**Competition improves quality**
Competitions stimulate, educate and inspire people – which is what the SA Dairy Championships does for skilled dairy technicians who, through the championships, show the South African consumer what can be achieved.

Competitions create better products and there cannot be any doubt, that the championships have helped to create better everyday dairy products in South Africa. Product and service quality are the aspects which sets one company apart from another, but in the dairy industry it is product quality which differentiates them.

**Judging and evaluation**
Local and international dairy scientists, technicians and artisans judge at the championships and use an international scorecard to evaluate the products. Judges are selected for their knowledge of products and specifications, impartiality and knowledge of sensory evaluation. The evaluation is based on an analytical approach, which measures the characteristics and specifications of the product and compares it to other products.

Teams of three judges use a 30-point scorecard to evaluate characteristics individually, such as appearance, texture and flavour, and it is a special ability to convert the evaluation opinion into a numerical system on a consistent basis.

The winner of a class is the SA Champion of that specific type of product. Products obtaining 90% or higher, obtain a Qualité Award. The product that scores the highest marks in the championships, is crowned as Dairy Product of the Year. These awards may be exhibited on that product for the ensuing year.

The results of the championships are announced at the prestigious Danisco Qualité Dinner on 29 April, two days before the start of the well-known SA Cheese Festival. A full set of results will also be published in the June 2010 edition of *Milk & Juice*.

More information about the championships can be found on www.cheesesa.co.za