



**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**29 March 2019**

**Artisanal cheese triumphs over 800 products as dairy product of the year**

**An artisanal cheese made from equal parts goat's and cow's milk is South Africa's 2019 Dairy Product of the Year.**

**St Francis of Ashisi**, made by **Belnori Boutique Cheesery** from Bapsfontein, Gauteng, was crowned as the winner out of 882 dairy products from 76 manufacturers at the **Agri-Expo Qualité Awards Gala Dinner** on 29 March 2019 at GrandWest.

"For a product to be awarded the prestigious title of Dairy Product of the Year in a competition of this nature is a long and difficult journey and the dream of every dairy technologist," says chief judge and international dairy expert Kobus Mulder. "Not only is it an extraordinary performance, but also a proof of sustained good manufacturing knowledge and practices as well as quality control."

According to Mulder; St Francis of Ashisi, with its beautiful appearance, its soft, melt-in-the-mouth texture and creamy taste deserves a place on every cheese board. The cheese is made with the lactic acid coagulation method which is well known in France. The cheese is covered in white edible fungus and vegetable ash. The ash helps to curb the lactic acid development in the cheese.

Belnori Boutique Cheesery has received several Qualité awards at previous Championships, but this is the first time they are awarded the Product of the Year. The owners of Belnori, Rina and Norman Belcher, are world-renowned cheese makers who have won many international awards, including the Agri-Expo Award for "Best South African Cheese" at the 2018 World Cheese Awards in Bergen, Norway.

Rina Belcher was honoured on the Agri-Expo Role of Honour in 2016 for her contribution to the dairy industry. According to Belcher; St Francis of Ashisi – as a mixed goat's and cow's milk cheese – epitomises what Belnori stands for as they produce a range of goat's as well as cow's milk products. The name is a play on words referring to the use of ash. "The Product of the Year award is an exceptional honour for Belnori's small team of 13 people," says Belcher. "Thank you to Agri-Expo for this world-class platform."

The SA Dairy Championships has been presented by Agri-Expo since 1834. Johan Ehlers, Chief Executive Officer of Agri-Expo, says this year's entries indicate progress, innovation and creativity within the industry. "It is good news that several new products have been entered, including cheeses enriched with squid ink, activated charcoal and truffle sauce, and Halloumi presenting itself as a

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CAPE OF GOOD HOPE  
AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

TEL: +27(0)21 975 4440/1/2/3

P.O. BOX 988, DURBANVILLE 7551 | 11 QUEEN ST, DURBANVILLE 7550 | | Fax: +27(0)21 975 4446 | E-mail: [admin@agriexpo.co.za](mailto:admin@agriexpo.co.za)

Braailoumi. It is also good news that 13 "new" manufacturers entered for the first time this year. "

The championships' 75 judges, ranging from dairy technologists to cheese retailers to chefs, this year named 101 products as SA Champions. Only sixteen products were honoured with the prestigious Qualité mark of excellence (full list of the *crème de la crème* below).

"This year's results once again reflect healthy competition among larger manufacturers and smaller entrepreneurs," says Ehlers. "Congratulations to Parmalat and Lancewood who both received three Qualité awards."

Agri-Expo expresses its appreciation to the partners of the Qualité Award Gala Dinner for their commitment to the development of the SA dairy industry: Synercore, Woolworths, Santam Agriculture, Lake Foods, Condio, MANE, Guth, the Milk Producers' Organisation (MPO), The Dairy Mail, ORCHEM and Octofin.

### 2019 QUALITÉ WINNERS:

#### **Belnori Boutique Cheesery (1)**

- St Francis of Ashisi

#### **Parmalat SA (Pty) Ltd (3)**

- Woolworths Matured Gouda 10 months  
- Woolworths Extra Matured Cheddar 12 months  
- Président Extra Matured Cheddar - 12 months

#### **Lancewood Holdings (Pty) Ltd (3)**

- Medium Fat Plain Cream Cheese  
- Mascarpone  
- Double Cream Vanilla Flavoured Yoghurt

#### **Clover SA (2)**

- Tulip Salted Butter

#### **Fair Cape Dairies (Pty) Ltd (2)**

- Feta – Tub

- Woolworths Chocolate Mousse Dessert  
- Lunchbox Mixed Berry Dairy Snack

#### **Ladismith Cheese Company (Pty) Ltd**

- Salted Butter

#### **Rhodes Food Group**

- Woolworths Mascarpone Duetto - Fig & Pecan Nut

#### **Klein River Cheese**

- Havarti

#### **De Pekelaar**

- Boerenkaas Jonk

#### **Klippiesveld Kaas**

- Chèvre Balls with Garlic and Herbs

For more information and full results please visit [www.cheesesa.co.za](http://www.cheesesa.co.za) or contact Agri-Expo at +27 (0)21 975 4440 or [cheese@agriexpo.co.za](mailto:cheese@agriexpo.co.za).

Dairy lovers will be able to taste many of these outstanding products at the SA Cheese Festival held from Friday 26 to Sunday 28 April 2019 at Sandringham outside Stellenbosch. Visit [www.cheesefestival.co.za](http://www.cheesefestival.co.za) for more information.

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*From left to right is Norman Belcher (Co-owner, Belnori Boutique Cheesery), Johan Ehlers (CEO, Agri-Expo), Rina Belcher (Co-owner, Belnori Boutique Cheesery) and Bongi Nondzama (Cheesemaker, Belnori Boutique Cheesery).*

**ISSUED BY**

**Isabeau Botha**

Corporate Communication Manager

Agri-Expo

021 975 4440/072 247 5868

[isabeau@agriexpo.co.za](mailto:isabeau@agriexpo.co.za)

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