

Official launch of dairy 'celebrates unity of races'

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Business Reporter

SMILES, song and sweltering heat were the hallmarks of last week's official launch of the Middledrift Dairy – a project borne from a partnership between skilled white farmers and black land owners.

On Friday, a joyous atmosphere prevailed among commercial farmers and the community as they celebrated in the company of Agriculture and Rural Development MEC, Mbulelo Sogoni, and Minister of Rural Development and Land Reform, Gugile Nkwinti.

School children sang praises of the R17 million project which converted over 200 hectares of bush, owned by 65 members of the community, into a successful dairy farm.

"I am so happy," dairy worker Siviwe Gqangeni said.

Milking cows at the dairy was the first job this 25-year-old has

ever had.

His is a story shared by almost all the other 30 workers who now spend their days on the farm – and who spend their wages in the local economy.

The farm located about 20km outside Alice is the result of a partnership between the community, Amadlelo Agri and the National Empowerment Fund (NEF).

It is supported by sponsors such as Clover, who provided trucks to transport milk free of charge over the past year.

Funding was provided by the NEF to the value of R9.9m and R8.2m by Amadlelo Agri, which also provided 600 cows and additional operational and working capital required for development of the farm.

Shareholders include the University of Fort Hare, which enables interns to learn hands-on about dairy farming.

Working together, the area has

been turned into a thriving farm, empowering not only people but also uplifting the area.

"Today we are celebrating unity between the black people and the white people of our country," Amadlelo Agri chairperson and former National Director of Public Prosecutions, Bulelani Ngcuka, told the crowd sweating in the marquee.

Sogoni said: "Here today we are coming to celebrate what people are doing for themselves, not just asking what government can do for them."

The farm started production in November 2008 and has produced 2.1 million litres of milk to date and is projected to produce three million litres a year once it reaches full production.

It employs 30 workers from the community and is managed by black graduates from the Amadlelo/Fort Hare training initiative. —
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