



**New trends** in plant-based meat alternatives

Sustainable food labelling solutions

Innovations in beverage processing technology

## SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION

TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



# Sustainable innovation - Together we can make a difference

Sustainable development and innovation are central to Synercore Holdings' belief and value systems. **Dr Tertius Cilliers**, CEO of Synercore, and **Joalien Katerinic**, business developer at Synercore, explain how their company strives to make these two aspects an important part of the everyday activities at the business.

**S**ustainability often forms a part of many companies' corporate vision and mission statements and is arguably one of those values that are integral to any relevant organisation or enterprise today – but what does sustainability really mean? According to the Oxford dictionary, it's "...the degree to which a process or an enterprise is able to be maintained or continued while avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources." For Synercore, the only way to ensure longevity, success and ultimately the significance of any company, is to ensure that you act responsibly, are accountable and look after all resources (not only those deemed as natural).

Since its inception in April 2016, Synercore has set out to make a difference within the communities and to the customers it serves. Synercore is a food solutions service provider, offering unique products and services that are both sustainable and innovative. As a proudly South African company, they recognise that the company is competing within an extremely competitive global market and there is a need to remain relevant, not only by understanding the needs of their customers and local market, but to have the competence, speed and agility to serve these needs. It is in fact their customers (and ultimately the consumers) that help Synercore to fulfil their sustainability promise, and this is recognised in the

company's culture statement:

"To foster passionate, innovative and like-minded individuals to create sustainable business based on respect, trust and compassion towards each other, our customers, our community and our environment."

As a customer-centric organisation, Synercore focuses on three key areas of investment:

"Synercore is far from ordinary. We pride ourselves on being entrepreneurial, innovative and forward-thinking, which is why sustainable development and making a difference is so important to us."

## INVESTING IN RESOURCES – "CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST"

Investment in resources is loosely categorised into three main areas:

### • People:

At Synercore, they recognise that their main asset is their people. "Our employees

remain the cornerstone of the continued success of the business, and therefore it is important to create an environment in which they are motivated to learn, excel and be productive," says Katerinic. The health of the company starts with the health of each employee. They have highly skilled sales and technical sales specialists, application specialists, scientists and supply chain specialists with vast experience in the dairy, bakery and beverage industries. Currently, they are also expanding their efforts and investments into the fats and oils, meat, and alcoholic beverage categories.

### • Places:

Over the years the company has invested in building a modest yet functional and resilient infrastructure that promotes inclusive and sustainable innovation and industrialisation. The Synercore Innovation Campus, a farm just outside Paarl, is home to their very own dairy, beverage and bakery pilot plants, micro-brewery as well as general research & development (R&D) and quality control (QC) laboratories. Synercore has a full blend and pack facility in Midrand, which is FSSC 22000-accredited, SANHA halaal and kosher, and RSPO (Roundtable of Sustainable Palm Oil)-certified.

### • Partners:

At Synercore, they collaborate with leading international ingredient and technology



## DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN,

Synercore developed an online Innovation Shop. This platform showcases Synercore and its international partners' capabilities in formulations and functional ingredients for use in commercial products and playful brands. The Innovation Shop affords Synercore the opportunity to engage with end consumers to test concept ideas and trends on a commercial basis to ultimately enhance their service offering to customers – whether it is a functional ingredient, complete formulation or even a brand offering.

companies to provide specialised food solutions to the dairy, bakery, beverage and related industries within Southern Africa. The collaboration allows Synercore the unique opportunity to benefit from leading international food companies' experience, expertise and research infrastructure to ultimately provide innovative solutions to their customers. Cilliers confirmed the importance of these partnerships during the latest partnership agreement with Tetra Pak in South Africa. "We face unique challenges on this continent, but then again, as we live in a global village, we can learn from the experience, talents and competence of leading organisations around the world," explained Cilliers.

## INVESTING IN INNOVATION – "INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AGAIN AND EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS"

Being entrepreneurial and innovative is essential to the business at Synercore. They foster innovation by investing a minimum of 10% of their revenue into R&D. Behind the scenes, they have a dedicated New Product Development (NPD) team under African Food Industries (AFI), which is the sales and application division of the business. Furthermore, Synercore invested in Innovative Research Solutions (IRS), a company with highly educated scientists and dedicated researchers based at the Department of Food Science at Stellenbosch University. Their focus is on applied research and breakthrough products and technologies under the excellent leadership of Prof Pieter Swart, Emeritus Professor at Food Science and Biochemistry at Stellenbosch University.

Over the past couple of years, research conducted by AFI and IRS have focused on various relevant and topical projects, for example: the reduction of yeast, sugar and salt in food products; alternatives to dairy milk and dairy proteins; the valorisation of food waste; and new functional hydrocolloid and enzyme application and development, to name but a few.

Yeast reduction technologies remain an ongoing focus in the bakery industry to reduce raw materials and input production costs. Therefore, the research teams at Synercore have been working extensively on yeast adjuncts or yeast food to enhance yeast metabolism during fermentation. Similarly, salt and sugar reductions are other important research areas they focus on, whereby they try to assist their customers in finding the most cost-effective solution that will still provide them with premium quality. Careful complexing of enzymes designed for natural in-situ production of sugar, enables the reduction of added sugars. The careful balance of activity of each enzyme to limit excess gummy dextrans is key to the success of the AFI's sugar reduction offerings.

In line with current food trends, AFI and IRS have also created a unique range of ingredients to improve the quality and stability of not only dairy-based, but plant-based dairy alternatives as well, leveraging some of the unique offerings of their global

partnerships. Ingredients such as vegan cultures and probiotics (Sacco System), bioactives, grains and seed solutions (Glanbia Nutritionals), functional systems and emulsifier blends (Futura Ingredients), flavours and enzymes help manage the challenges of dairy alternatives and give stability to plant-based formulations.

Through effective research and development, communication, technical expertise and technical support, Synercore ultimately strives to effectively translate research and new product ideas into reality.

## INVESTING IN QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY – "INTEGRITY IS DOING THE RIGHT THING EVEN WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING"

Synercore innovates not only with the ingredients and products they formulate, but also with the way they work. Synercore's R&D, NPD and quality teams aim to be at the forefront of innovation by staying current not only with consumer trends, but also with the trends within the food industry. Clean labels, safety of products, the improvement of costs without diluting quality and/or nutritional value, and reducing food waste, are some of the key areas they focus on when developing new products or improving existing ones.

Another two points of focus at Synercore is valorisation and the reduction of food waste. Taking something as simple as bread and converting it into other products such as beer, functional ingredients or animal feed is just one of the ways in which they value engineer.

"At Synercore, we are far from ordinary. We pride ourselves on being entrepreneurial, innovative and forward-thinking, which is why sustainable development and making a difference is so important to us.

We believe that there should be a transition from being a good corporate citizen and company of success, to being a company of significance and impact – and this we aim to create through innovating within the food industry in Southern Africa," said Cilliers. •

Synercore - [www.synercore.co.za](http://www.synercore.co.za)