

Looking back on 100 years of Bokomo

South African breakfast brand Bokomo, maker of Weet-Bix, Pronutro and Nature's Source, marks its centennial anniversary this year.



Source: Supplied

Bokomo began its journey as a farming co-operative in 1922, and today finds pride of place on many local breakfast tables.

“If we reflect on the colleagues and shareholders of the past, and the farmers that started the Bokomo business 100 years ago, they would probably be very proud of what progress the company has made,” comments Tertius Carstens, CEO of PepsiCo sub-Saharan Africa, “and this progress has been based on the collective efforts of everyone involved.”

In 1912, Swartland grain farmers formed a co-operative in Malmesbury called Wesgraan, as a result of the agricultural and financial hardships caused by the Second Anglo-Boer war (1899-1902). The co-op helped farmers collectively boost wheat sales and pool resources, which enabled them to acquire equipment and other requirements more cost-effectively.

In 1920, Wesgraan established a milling company to mill the wheat of its producers into flour and other marketable products, as well as to protect its members against price speculation. The milling company was called Bokomo, which was short for De Boeren Ko-operatieve Molen Maatschappij Beperkt. Bokomo was the first flour milling company of its kind in



Source: Supplied

In 1929, due to a combination of the Great Depression and record droughts in the Cape, there had been a significant decline in agricultural prices. Wesgraan and Bokomo realised they needed the support of other wheat co-operatives to remain viable. Therefore, on 7 October 1930, Sasko (Suid-Afrikaanse Sentrale Ko-operatiewe Graanmaatskappy Beperk) was formed to sell wheat centrally for co-operatives across South Africa, with the goal to stabilise the wheat prices and industry.

But five years later, Sasko had experienced a sizeable drop in the percentage of wheat it was handling, and stabilising wheat prices was still problematic. So, in order to retain control over its produce and remain sustainable, Sasko expanded and entered the wheat milling industry.



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The Wheat Board was later established by the government, and by 1949, it was providing farmers with financial support, standards, quality control and infrastructure, and as a result, Sasko was able to concentrate on wheat milling.

Over the next few decades, Bokomo and Sasko formed a number of ties that would eventually see the two merge and ultimately form Pioneer Foods. “The merger in 1997 was an interesting time – with both companies deeply ingrained in wheat milling and in bakeries. The amalgamation of these created a significant player in the South African food sector,” said Carstens.

Coincidentally, Carstens was the project manager tasked with building the first Bokomo Corn Flakes plant in the country, based in Atlantis in mid-1990s. Felix Lombard, a long serving employee and now vice president of the PepsiCo SSA Essential Foods business reminisces, “To think how far we’ve grown Corn Flakes over the years from scratch, and there are still only two producers of original corn flakes in South Africa.”

Anniversary theme: 'Good Things Never Grow Old'

The centennial anniversary is being celebrated under the theme: 'Good Things Never Grow Old'.

Reinhard Blaauw, who has spent the past 29 years employed at the Atlantis Cereals factory explains: “The goodness never grows old, because we grew up with all those trusted brands, if its breakfast time, its Weet-Bix, Corn Flakes. In winter, its oats, its maltabella, its rusks, and you can always relate it back to that time in the kitchen, with family, and that’s what it means to us.”



Source: Supplied

Amanda Tredway, a buyer at the Wadeville plant, has been with Bokomo for over 35 years, “I’ve stayed in one place for so long, because every person I worked with was someone that made it worth my while to get up in the mornings and come to work.”

There appears to be a sense of pride among the PepsiCo SSA employees who are associated with the Bokomo brand. Bennie Kemp who manages the Malmesbury Mill explains, “If you work for Bokomo, you feed the nation. Whether it’s flour or breakfast cereals, you are feeding our people.”

Abraham Ryneveld, a 30-year veteran of the Atlantis Cereals Factory, PepsiCo SSA agrees, “I have been baking/making Bokomo Muesli for 18 years, and whenever I see it on the supermarket shelf, or in someone’s home, it gives me a great joy to see it there”.

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