

## Pavilion Organizer – South Africa in Tokyo

### AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MANLEY BARNARD COUNSELOR (ECONOMIC), HEAD OF ECONOMIC DIVISION EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA IN TOKYO

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#### **Can you start off with a brief introduction of yourself, including your mission at the Embassy?**

I'm the Counsellor Economic in the Embassy of Republic of South Africa. I came to Japan in 2013, but my relationship with Japan started in 2000, specifically with FOODEX. I'm responsible for trade and investment between the two countries.

#### **What are the main export items to Japan in the food and beverage sector?**

The 3 main areas that we have been effectively working on are fruits, wine, and tea. For fruit based products, we have grapefruits, dried fruits and juices.

We are currently working on bulk and bottle wines, putting an emphasis on bottles and premium brands in order to survive the competition of future proposed TPP. Apart from that, we have olive oil, spices, and avocado oil. We continue to search for new items to introduce to the Japanese market. Last year was our first time to introduce South African confectionery items to FOODEX.

Fish and frozen vegetables are new areas that we would like to exhibit in the future.



## How do you see Japan?

There are limitations in getting products into the market. For example, the custom regulation and procedure takes a long time in Japan. It took 16 years for avocados to come into Japan. This is what makes it difficult compared to China. Also, with China, we have the BRICS agreement and the Chinese government is working together with us. We still have to develop that kind of relationship with Japan. When I look at Japan at the moment, they have a lot of factories running in Asia. Why not move that to South Africa in the future? I believe that is one possibility.

## What are your plans to promote your products?

I was responsible for all the food exports from South Africa in the 2000. At that time, South Africa was only exhibiting in Anuga and I was the person who broke the tendency by saying, "let me take you to Singapore, Dubai, Brazil, to Fancy Food in America and to FOODEX." That's when we changed. We've already exhibited as a National Pavilion for 3 times in Japan. A lot of companies that we brought to Japan managed to get an importer or distributor and they are now focusing to adapt to the market. I think the next step for us is to bring in new products like HALAL, while working on the existing ones.

## **How many companies participated in FOODEX?**

We had about 28 companies this year. We normally need more than 25 companies to be a National Pavilion. For the first time, we had wine, spice, and juice. We started to add dried fruits, fruits, confectionery to keep growing. Next year we will focus on HALAL because we have that specialty and knowledge, and Japan is getting ready for that market.

## **What kind of feedback did you receive from the exhibitors?**

Companies are very happy with their exposure in Japan. Each year, they are coming back. We've always been told that we cannot expect sales on the first year, but we at least connect them to an importer or a distributor. Some got their products directly into Costco for example. That's why we will continue. One company even sold containers of dried fruits before coming to the exhibition.

The South African companies are learning the way that the Japanese think. Being so far geographically, it is sometimes for them a challenge to be just in time. In Japan, a lot of things are in order. Smaller South African companies face the problem of meeting the capacity that Japan wants. Sometimes, they would be introduced to big companies and cannot meet the high capacity demands. It's always a matter of balance.

## **What kind of support do you provide for the exhibitors?**

In South Africa, we give a brief session on how to do business with Japan, providing companies with a country profile of Japan, together with videos of FOODEX so that people who doesn't come to Japan will still have an idea of what it looks like. Then, once they are on board, we make sure that necessary information is filled out on the FOODEX website. We make arrangements with importers who are already doing business with South Africa to come to meet with new companies.

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