

Isegen expands food acids plant

SOUTH Africa's only manufacturer of food acidulants, Isegen, has expanded its cold water soluble (CWS) fumaric acid capacity at its Isipingo, Durban site at a cost of R3.4 million.

The new plant came on stream in April. The expansion is due to increased demand locally and overseas for fumaric acid. The company's food acidulants, such as malic acid, fumaric acid and fumaric acid, are exported to 50 countries worldwide. The new plant will be using the tried and tested technology developed in South Africa in the 1970's.

"The increase in demand is attributed to Isegen's quality consistency and reliability in the face of an ever growing list of problems related to quality and trustworthiness of some food acidulants emanating from the Far East," says managing director Robert Fowlds.

According to food technologists and food manufacturing companies, he added, CWS fumaric acid is an excellent food acidulant. Normal fumaric acid, known as hot water soluble (HWS), unfortunately suffers from a slow dissolution rate in ambient water.

Although it is satisfactory when used in products such as jellies, canned foods, marmalades and jams, where the processing involves higher temperatures, it is not ideal for use in dry powder beverages.

"Isegen has overcome this problem by manufacturing a CWS grade of fumaric acid which dissolves rapidly in cold water that can be used in dry powder beverages with great success. Fumaric acid is the most powerful of the food acidulants where savings of up to 40% can be achieved compared to the quantity of citric acid that would be required to achieve similar

results," says Fowlds.

Another advantage of fumaric acid is that it is non-hygroscopic and does not absorb moisture from the surrounding atmosphere. This means a further saving by using packaging materials that do not require expensive films and liners to exclude moisture. Neither is an anti-caking agent required in the formulation of the end product, adding to more savings.

Fumaric acid imparts a far longer-lasting tartness to end products than any of the other food acidulants. This makes it ideal for use in sour candies, sherbets, sorbet and fruit-flavoured ice-creams.

In other news, Isegen presented four second year students studying for their B.Sc. in chemical engineering at the School of Chemical Engineering at the University of Kwazulu-Natal, Durban, a bursary of R500 000 to see

them through their studies. The students were screened in-house by the university.

"There is a shortage of chemical engineers in the country. We need more chemical engineers. This is our contribution towards meeting the demand and at the same time assisting previously disadvantaged students," said Robert Fowlds, managing director of ISEGEN. He added that the chemical industry in South Africa had a positive history of innovation, import replacement and export generation and needed support from the private sector to alleviate the skills shortage.

Fowlds offered the students part-time employment for their practical training. When they had obtained their degrees, he would consider offering them full-time employment or assist in finding them employment in the industry.

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