

GWK building rockets, winning awards and innovating for agriculture

 By Cari Van Wyk

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South African agribusiness, GWK recently scooped a Gold at the 2016 Loerie Awards for their groundbreaking animated TV and online advert, developed by MullenLowe SA, highlighting the important role that farmers play in society. The advert, called 'This man is building a rocket' equates farming to 'building a rocket'. We spoke to Neil de Klerk, executive manager: corporate marketing at GWK, who played an active role in the coordination and production of the advert, about its message and how a dedication to innovation inspired it.



Neil de Klerk

What was the aim of the ad, what did GWK hope to achieve?

Neil de Klerk: We embarked on a journey to tell the beautiful story of agriculture and the people involved in agriculture and food production. The objective of the campaign is to highlight the innovation, imagination, and passion that are intrinsic to being a farmer while emphasizing that farmers really are the thread that keeps the modern food chain together. The world needs farmers who work in ways that no one ever thought was possible to meet the growing demand for food, and we want to share this beautiful story of continuous innovation in agriculture with everyone in South Africa.

What was the inspiration behind the ad?

De Klerk: We understand that farming is a noble profession and that every farmer and farm worker is actually making a meaningful contribution to the world's challenges around food security and sustainability. Nothing is possible without the people who produce our food. And nothing is possible without the innovation that is necessary every day to continue to meet the growing demand for food.

Kirk Gainsford, chief creative officer for MullenLowe South Africa, explains it best by saying, 'without farmers there would be no doctors, no students, and no scientists because without food we cannot progress as a people.'

This is how the idea was born for "This man is building a rocket". Because without farmers the scientists and engineers will not have the food to feed their minds to be able design the rocket that will fly into space. We see farmers as the modern explorers of our time who have to find new ways and means every day to supply food to the world.

■ **How does the ad reflect GWK and its relationship with South Africa's farmers?**

De Klerk: GWK as a company is owned by farmers. We provide farmers with the inputs they need, we support them with the best solutions on the farm and we ensure the best channels to market for their products, locally and abroad. We ensure quality and sustainable supply for our clients in the agri-commodity markets and niche products for multinational clients with specific needs. Our premium branded food products for the consumer have origin on the farm, linking consumers to the value of the work farmers do.

That's why we say in the advert that GWK supplies farmers with tools and technology, ploughs and biscuit mills and pasta factories, and new and smarter ways and means to keep the world growing and dreaming. We feed the people who feed the people.

■ **GWK is known for its innovative approach to farming and agribusiness. As Kirk Gainsford from MullenLowe South Africa says "They are an innovative and visionary organisation providing cutting-edge research and solutions in agriculture. GWK endeavours to be on the forefront of technology, to innovate agriculture." How important is this to GWK and what drives this mindset of the organisation?**

De Klerk: Our positioning as a company is to continuously discover new and smarter ways to do business. Discovery is the softer side of innovation. It is about doing things differently, to be more effective in everything you do. It is a leadership philosophy rooted in strong entrepreneurship led by a strong leadership team. This, however, does not mean that we are not involved in hard innovation. Our research and precision farming team, for example, does ground-breaking work to improve yields with sustainable farming practices and techniques.

Another example is the recently commissioned GWK Farm Foods factory near Kimberley at Modder River in the Northern Cape. Designed and built with energy efficiency and water sustainability in mind, the factory includes state of the art technology in its silos, mill and production plants, and is the most advanced facility of its kind on the African continent.

We also strongly believe in the right partnerships, such as our collaborations with John Deere and Valley Irrigation to ensure that we are able to supply the latest and best technology to farmers.

■ **Tell us a bit about some of the innovative things GWK has been up to and its plans for the future.**

De Klerk: We are very excited and proud of Nature's Farms, our new South African farmer brand for the premium consumer foods market. The new brand's origin on the farm is signified by packaging that showcases images of farming in a very unique way. To honour our roots, each product line is also named after one of the farms where the raw ingredients are sustainably grown. The Nature's Farms ranges of pasta and biscuits, white and brown bread flours, cake flour and maize meal produced by GWK Farm Foods is already available in Pick n Pay and other retail outlets nationwide while extensions of the product lines are already planned.

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

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