

Longwarry set to open UHT plant

LOUISE PREECE

06 Oct, 2011 04:00 AM

MILK processor Longwarry Food Park is gearing up to open a brand new UHT plant, expanding on its Gippsland-based factory.

Milk supply and domestic sales manager Shane Murphy says the one-litre product is less than a month away from the marketplace.

It is expected the UHT milk, which has a shelf-life of nine months, will be sold both domestically and internationally.

He says the move is great news for Longwarry Food Park and its 120 Gippsland dairy farmers.

While the business has a strong history exporting milk powder to 37 different countries, the UHT decision follows the company's successful move into fresh bottled milk 12 months ago.

"The key is to diversify and that's what we are doing now," he said.

"There's been a lot of interest from overseas and Asian regions for the UHT milk.

"We are one of the few players making a big move into that market."

For Longwarry Food Park, it's about meeting demand for milk, in whatever form.

The "Gippy" brand has been a success story for the processor, which sells two-litre full cream and light milk to Woolworths supermarkets through Gippsland, SA and Northern Territory.

"It is a very region-specific product, so it's fantastic that's it been accepted in the market-place," he said.

"People want to support local farmers."

In a time when the "milk wars" continue to push the sales of cheaper home-brand products, the Gippy brand is breaking new ground in increasing sales.

There are now plans to expand the distribution and product range to include skim and flavoured milk.

At the moment, the company is on target to process 150 million litres by the end of 2011/12 season.

"We've been growing at a rate of 30 per cent per year," Mr Murphy said.

But like most Victorian processors, the pursuit has begun to source enough milk to meet demand.

"As we continue to grow, we will be in the market for more milk," he said.

"Everyone is looking at the moment - so that seems to be the burning question, but I think we can find it."

With most processors thirsty for more supply, he says dairy farmers can remain confident of their future.

The dairy business itself was founded in 2001, with the purchase of the facility from Bonlac by Longwarry Food Park's parent company Saurin Group.

Ever since, it has been focused on building its Gippsland-based operation.

Saurin Group renamed the business Longwarry Food Park right from the beginning to establish its association with the community, while several efforts have gone into making the factory environmentally friendly.

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Longwarry Food Park milk supply and domestic sales manager Shane Murphy holding up the branded milk “Gippy” at the South Gippsland Dairy Expo last week.