



Wilmar edible oils refinery in Richards Bay IDZ celebrates Phase 1 operationalisation

Wilmar is a Singaporean-listed multinational company that has operationalised R1.27-billion Phase 1 of its edible oils refining plant (Wilmar Processing SA) located in the Richards Bay Industrial Development Zone (RBIDZ) Special Economic Zone.

The company selected the location because Richards Bay has a deep-water port that allows for imported oils to be received through the pipeline connecting from the port to the tank farm, to which the company can unload the raw materials and crude oils contents from large vessels directly to its plant via a pipeline, said Wilmar Processing South Africa GM, Theiva Muthu.

On December 7, the company unloaded its first large Panamax-sized vessel directly from the berth to 40 000 t storage tanks in under 24 hours. The deep-water port can also handle larger ships, he noted.

Further, this diversifies the company's use of ports, with its manufacturing plant in Randfontein typically trading through the Port of Durban, he highlighted.

Wilmar Group has more than 400 soyabean crushing plants worldwide, and extensive technical and commercial understanding of the commercial crushing of various oil seeds, including palm and lauric oils, the refining and fractionation of edible oils, the production of oleo-chemicals, specialty fats, palm biodiesel, and consumer pack oils.

Eight local enterprises have been integrated into Wilmar's supply chain, thereby benefiting in sectors such as agro-processing, chemicals and logistics.

"This engagement not only supports Wilmar's operations, but also encourages local enterprise development and industrial diversification," he said.

To complement its use of imported crude palm oil, Wilmar will source at least 20% of its raw materials locally, specifically sunflower oil.

This policy will support approximately 30 000 t/y of local sunflower oil production, providing substantial opportunities for local farmers and reinforcing the agricultural supply chain within South Africa, said Muthu.

KwaZulu–Natal Leader of Government Business and MEC for Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, Siboniso Duma, and Department of Trade, Industry and Competition (dtic) Deputy Minister Nomalungelo Gina were taken on a tour of the operationalised Phase 1 of the Wilmar plant.

Duma praised Wilmar for investing in South Africa, and said the region and the province aimed to complement the company and create a conducive environment for business.

“We are supporting Wilmar thoroughly and holistically, but our people want to be involved in the value chains and the company is duty-bound to complement local businesses.

The RBIDZ boasts a R137-billion investment pipeline and the RBIDZ has been declared an energy hub. We should be producing 750 MW in this area in the near future.

“As this happens, our people can maximise the use of their skills for what is required by the new industries. It is important that our people gain the maximum benefit owing to the high unemployment rate.

“As long as our people, youth and students understand that they derive benefits from industries, they will defend the infrastructure. Government wants to create a space where businesses thrive and where people benefit,” said Duma.

Meanwhile, dtic Deputy Minister Nomalungelo Gina said Wilmar was one of the first companies to pledge R1.5-billion in investment into South Africa through the construction of this refinery at the Presidential Investment Conference in 2018.

“A commitment to build a large refinery in Richards Bay represents significant investor confidence in South Africa and KwaZulu-Natal. The RBIDZ did good work to attract this investment, and our job at the dtic is to offer support, track investments and unblock any challenges investors face,” she said.

“Government is focused on achieving higher levels of economic growth, new investments and job creation to pull our youths out from dependency on social grants. We must pool our investments and create jobs so that we open opportunities for everyone to have a slice of the economy,” she said.

The Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan directs the government and the country to create new economic enterprises and new industries, and rebuild those that fell.

“Statistics show that the country has returned to pre-Covid-19 levels of economic activity, but this is not enough and we have to push back harder against poverty and unemployment,” Gina said.

Meanwhile, Phase 1 of the Wilmar plant includes four tanks, capable of holding 40 000 t of crude palm oil, that have been commissioned, as has the 2.6 km pipeline from the port to the tank farm. Wilmar has also completed the pipelines to the loading bay and has commissioned the water, steam and airlines, fire protection, boiler and compressor systems, said Muthu.

Phase 2, which is scheduled to be completed in December this year, will see the tank farm capacity increase to 80 000 t of crude palm oil, and the dry fractionation and packaging lines will be commissioned.

The refinery will also be commissioned to refine crude palm oil into various products and to package the products for sale to retail customers.

The completed plant will have a 500 t/ day refinery, a 500 t/day fractionator and a 6 800 m² warehouse. It will also have an electrical substation, a 10 t/h oil-fired boiler, a 250 kℓ/day water treatment plant, and a 600 kℓ/day effluent treatment plant, as well as a nitrogen generator and a compressor.



Operationalised R1.27 billion Phase 1 of the Edible Oils Refinery located in RBIDZ Phase 1A Industrial Estate