

Incorrect information on mageu

To the Editor: I refer to an article published in a recent issue of *SAJCN*.¹ It was interesting to read, but a huge disappointment that information was incorrectly presented. In their article the researchers stated that mageu (a drink made from fermented cooked maize meal porridge and other ingredients) was 'the most popular alcoholic drink'.

Maheu (magou, mageu, amahewu or aramrewu) is not an alcoholic beverage. It is a lactic acid-fermented maize drink and undergoes the same fermentation process as yoghurt. The SABS Standard Specification for the production of magou (UDC 663:663.15 SABS 1199-1990 p. 5) states the following:

2.1 Definition: Magou. The beverage produced by the lactic acid fermentation of maize meal (the fermentation being carried out without the addition of any acid other than lactic acid without the addition of any cereal or grain other than wheaten products added in accordance with good commercial practice) and that consists wholly or partially of gelatinised maize meal acidified by the acids introduced or produced during the fermentation process and that may contain permitted sweeteners, edible protein, minerals or vitamins.

4.2 Definition: Lactic Acid: Lactic acid shall comply with the requirements of the current British Pharmacopoeia. (Lactic acid fermentation implies fermentation without the formation of alcohol.)

5.6 Chemical requirements: The total solids and alcohol content of magou shall comply with the following requirements: Alcohol content % m/m max 0.25.

From the above it should be clear that magou/mageu is non-alcoholic.

The commercial product, of which Mageu Number 1 is the brand leader, is distributed by Clover SA and other dairies and merchandised in the fridge area next to milk and juice. The product is used as a quick meal/snack and is classified as a food/drink because of the satiety and thirst-quenching value. In the mines the product is used as a mid-shift meal and in hospitals as an energy supplement in special diets. It is ideal for people who lack appetite. Marathon runners use the product to carbo-load.

Mageu Number 1 is a traditional product, and a visit to the archives at Johannesburg Library will show that the early missionary annals referred to mageu as a product used by non-drinkers, women and children. It was used to welcome people and was taken on journeys as food. Today it is an affordable food drink and quick meal and still forms part of the daily diet of many South Africans.

Last but not least, the Food Finder programme used for the nutrient analysis classified mageu as non-alcoholic.

On behalf of a company that endeavours to be responsible in its advertising and nutritional claims and that has a huge financial investment in brand-building marketing activities, I request that this misleading information be corrected and this letter published in *SAJCN*. Should you require additional information please contact us.

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1. Mbenyane XG, Venter CS, Vorster HH, Steyn HS. Nutrient intake and consumption of indigenous foods among college students in Limpopo province. *South African Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2005; **18**(1): 32-38.