

# AUSTRALIAN MeatNews

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VOLUME 18 | NUMBER 3 | AUGUST 2020



Keeping connected  
with lamb

Open network  
supply chain

COVID changing how  
we work and operate



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*A recent online event hosted by Butchers Alliance brought together butchers from around the world to showcase skills in lamb. In third place globally, Brett Laws, Sydney. Read more on page 11*

## Giveaway

Win a copy of *Charcutéria – The Soul of Spain*.  
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## Provenir gets Victorian go-ahead

Provenir's mobile abattoir concept has been granted a licence to operate by the Victoria's PrimeSafe, the first in the state.

Launched in NSW in 2019 the concept was developed to improve animal welfare and produce the best quality meat. Provenir's mobile abattoir eliminates the stress to animals associated with live transport prior processing. By processing livestock on farm, at the point of production, where they were raised, Provenir ensures the most sustainable production system possible.

The consolidation of abattoirs in recent times has required livestock to be transported, often over long distances to the processors. The effect of live transport on cattle can increase stress and consequently have a negative effect on meat quality. Accordingly, Provenir believes that eliminating the stress associated with live transport to a fixed abattoir produces improved meat quality for the consumer and a better outcome for livestock.

It's been a long road to licensure for the current Provenir founding team, four of whom live in Victoria, who were determined to gain a licence to operate in their home state. Since setting out on the journey in April 2014 the team have participated in a novel meat supply study, consulted with industry experts, liaised with all levels of Government, worked with Agriculture Victoria to change the law, to include the word "vehicle" to the definition of abattoir in the Meat Industries Act 1993 (Victoria), and consulted with PrimeSafe (the Victorian Food Safety Authority) to develop a new Vehicle Based Abattoir licence category.

Provenir co-founder and farmer, Chris Balazs will be the first farmer in Victoria to have his cattle processed on his property, SageFarm at Bannockburn, located in the Golden Plains Shire of Victoria.

Consumer support for the on-farm processed meat has been strong since day one and this was clearly demonstrated through a pre-launch crowdfunding campaign in which the company raised over \$68,000, securing more than 220 pre-sales of the Company's highest welfare Meat Packs, and many of these supporters are still loyal customers today.

In commenting on the achievement, Chris Balazs, Farmer, CEO and co-founder said: "On-farm processing is the holy grail of animal welfare and the production of the highest quality meat. For me personally achieving our Victorian abattoir licence is the culmination of seven years hard work, and it would never have been possible without the support, guidance, dedication and sheer tenacity of the Provenir founders.

"I am extremely proud to be the first farmer in Victoria to have my cattle processed on my property SageFarm in Bannockburn, and humbled to work with such an elite team that has changed the red meat industry for the better." ■

## Pork's quest to be Australia's preferred protein

Aussies are increasingly getting more pork on their forks, but the industry has set an ambitious goal: to be the nation's preferred protein.

The new five-year plan for the pork industry's peak body, Australian Pork Limited (APL) is bold in this statement but CEO, Margo Andrae, said butchers had witnessed Aussies fall in love with the versatile meat.

"Pork is a favourite around the world and Australia's appetite for pork continues to increase," she said. "People are becoming more familiar with how to use it, realising how versatile it is and also understanding that right now it is also great value for money."

The Australian pork industry may be smaller than some of its rivals, but that can also be an advantage. Ms Andrae said it allows the industry to be more agile and innovative saying that the industry has a lot to be proud of in terms of consumption growth, improved productivity, animal welfare and reduced environmental impact.

"We worked with the industry to develop this plan and it has a focus on creating new opportunities, improving industry stability and helping people get more pork on their forks. We have realigned our activities and our team to be more producer-focused and proactive, to better serve our producers and industry."

A number of priorities have been identified for the first year, including improving producer engagement, working on the industry's social licence and improving eating quality.



*Pork sausage & button mushroom stroganoff, for the full recipe go to [www.pork.com.au](http://www.pork.com.au)*

"Butchers and retailers are an important part of our supply chain. In difficult times, people turned to their local butchers and we hope you've been buoyed by that support," she said.

"That said, it has been a difficult year and we know the impacts have not been evenly spread and will continue to be felt for some time. Our producers have also been impacted and we'll be working with them and you as we navigate through ongoing restrictions and recovery."

To review the APL Strategic Plan 2020-25, visit [www.australianpork.com.au](http://www.australianpork.com.au) ■

## Bloom under the microscope

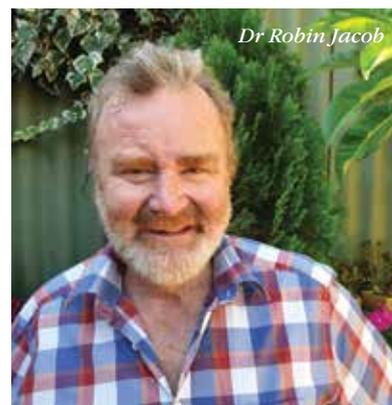
WA researchers are seeking a reliable way to measure the rate of bloom in red meat.

The scientists say using initial bloomed meat colour is not a reliable way to predict its eventual browning, but believe measuring bloom depth might offer a better option. They are keen to develop a rapid method to correlate bloom depth to browning meat.

Bloom is critical to surface colour. Red meat develops a bright red colour with blooming as oxygen binds with myoglobin to form the red pigment oxymyoglobin. This oxidative reaction influences both the bloomed colour of meat and its colour stability during the time it is on retail display.

However, earlier research by the scientists from Murdoch University and the WA Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIRD) found that initial bloomed colour was a poor predictor of colour stability and browning in lamb loin meat.

DPIRD Senior Research Officer Dr Robin Jacob explained: "Despite common mechanisms influencing bloomed lamb meat colour and its stability over retail display, initial bloomed loin colour was poorly correlated with subsequent meat colour measured over a 72-hour simulated retail display." Instead, he led a research team investigating whether bloom depth might offer a more dependable predictor.



*Dr Robin Jacob*

"Bloom depth of red meat varies in the range of about 1-12mm due to a range of factors – notably oxygen partial pressure, temperature and time post-slicing," he said, adding that measuring these sources of variation could be used as the basis of prediction protocols. ■

# Positive outlook for Thomas Foods International

Thomas Foods International has received planning approval for its new Murray Bridge meat processing facility.

The Rural City of Murray Bridge Council Assessment Panel has granted planning approval for the state-of-the-art plant which is to be built on a greenfield site approximately 10km outside of the town centre. The new plant will replace the original facility destroyed by fire on January 3, 2018.

Thomas Foods International Chief Executive Darren Thomas said planning approval represented another key milestone for the family company's long-term investment at Murray Bridge.

"We continue to progress our plans for what will be a world-class multi species processing facility," Mr Thomas said.

"Our project team is currently evaluating tenders received for the construction of the new plant and we expect to make a decision on awarding the contract in due course. We expect work on the build to commence in the second half of this year.

"We're very excited about the new Murray Bridge plant and the range of benefits it will bring to the local community and farmers as well as TFI."

The plant build will be undertaken in stages with Stage One being the beef processing facilities.

The good news continues to strengthen with the announcement that Thomas Foods International has joined forces to grow national and global markets for high quality Australian meat with a 50% stake in the Victorian-based Frew Group.

Based in Adelaide, TFI owns meat processing plants in Tamworth and Lobethal along with the soon-to-be rebuilt Murray Bridge plant as well as leading national domestic wholesale, foods service and export business Holco.

The Frew meat processing company, now renamed Frew Foods International, was established by the late Arch Frew in 1984 with his son Robert Frew managing the company since 1999. It owns and operates a modernised meat processing facility in Stawell, Victoria with daily capacity to process more than 6,000 lambs, sheep and goats sourced through saleyards and directly from farmers throughout eastern and central Australia.

The formal partnership provides second generation livestock and meat processing sons, Darren Thomas and Robert Frew with a unique opportunity to build further on the platforms created by their respective fathers Chris Thomas and Arch Frew. Under the arrangement, both companies will continue



*Robert Frew*



*Darren Thomas*

to operate independently with Robert remaining as Managing Director of Frew Foods International and Darren joining its Board as Executive Chairman to help guide global growth and future strategy.

Darren Thomas said the investment into Frew provided great benefits to both companies over the long term and in particular to Frew's longstanding livestock suppliers and customers.

"Both companies have had a mutual respect for each other over many years. We are both family owned and family grown

which means a lot in our industry, particularly to our customers and livestock suppliers. For us, it was important to partner with a company that has a similar focus on quality and running a business based on strong family values. This investment is not only aimed at helping facilitate Frew's exciting growth prospects but also enhancing TFI's offering across the meat industry including some of Frew's existing key markets that TFI has not served in recent years," Mr Thomas said.

Robert Frew said he was excited with the partnership and can only see benefits to the company's customer relationships, commitment to service, quality, team and community under the new Frew International banner.

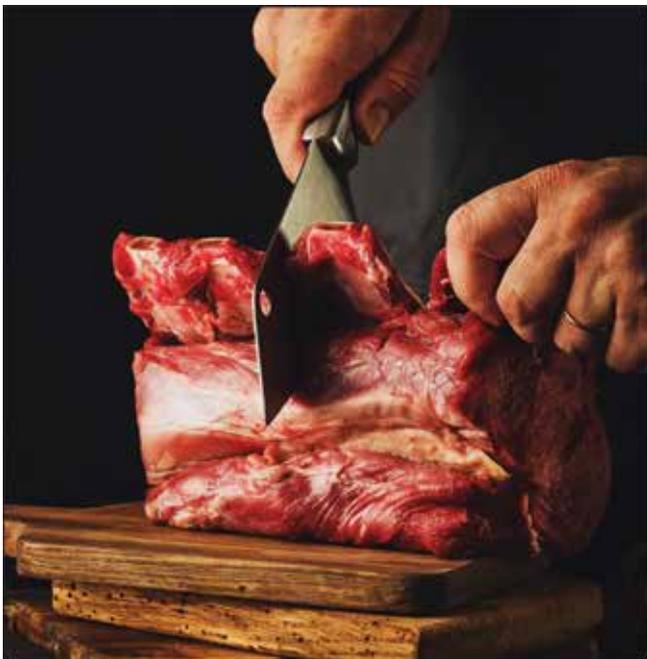
"Our well-established and focused national retail domestic customer relationships and export markets, in particular the Middle East, will benefit substantially through combining our



*Thomas Foods International new Murray Bridge facility.*

increased procurement, supply chain, access to markets and processing volumes. Our two companies had already established a great working partnership, with Holco purchasing products from our company for many years. This announcement strengthens our companies' high quality 'farmgate to plate' offering for consumers right across the globe," Mr Frew said.

The new corporate structure took effect from 1st of July 2020. ■



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# MLA looks forward to the next five years

**M**eat and Livestock Australia's new five-year plan aims to double the value of Australian red meat sales, with more research and development to focus on data, integrity and value-add.

The latest plan accounts for a global economic slowdown. Coupled with ongoing impacts of drought and floods, less transactional levies and tighter Government funding, MLA will seek more partnerships 'within and beyond the food and agricultural sectors' and promises to tighten its belt while delivering 'fewer, bigger, bolder' programs.

## Data and Integrity

MLA's Integrity Systems Company's data platform will be developed into a central repository for industry data and MLA aims to simplify data collection, including carcass feedback from processors. It also wants increased compliance to QA and integrity systems, benchmarked in 2019/20 at 50%, as well as better market specification compliance from the 2019/20 benchmark of 94% to MSA requirements. It will investigate new pathways to MSA beef grading, including for cattle transported by rail.

## Value Add

A future focus is earning more out of each carcass. Currently, 20% of the carcass delivers 80% of its value, with some carcass parts considered waste. Previous work has identified a potential \$100m/year opportunity to upcycle production waste into valuable products and endorses 'enterprise level' and early adopters to help remap the carcass. Additionally, red meat byproducts, coproducts and hides could attract premiums in the pharmaceutical, cosmetic, medical and biofuel sectors.

MLA anticipates income will hit \$245.5m in financial year 2025 compared to an anticipated \$265.7m in FY21. That

income will comprise \$94.5m from levies and \$84.7m from other sources; the balance being Government funding. By FY25 those inputs are expected to shift – upwards for producer levy contributions (\$106.1m) and downwards for Government (\$76.1m) and 'other' (\$63.2m).

Projected expenditure over the five years shows no increase in post-farmgate projects, although some relevant projects will see their funding stabilised:

- Product and packaging innovation \$4.5m to \$5m
- Eating Quality \$7.5m to \$8m
- Domestic market \$23.3m to \$23.3m
- Value chain information and efficiency \$7.0m to \$7.6m

Meanwhile, others will see cuts:

- Feedlot from \$9.1m to \$7.8m (- \$1.3m)
- International markets \$47.6m to \$40m (-\$7.6m)
- Integrity systems – \$27m to \$24m (-\$3m)
- Objective measurement \$17.9m to \$11.2m (-\$6.7)
- Productivity (off-farm) \$9.4m to \$8.2m (-\$1.2m)

The strategy plan explained: "Changes in consumer behaviour and lifestyle choices are affecting how, when and why consumers eat certain foods. Current and emerging global trends around convenience, snacking, personalised nutrition and wellness offer new usages and occasions for red meat beyond the traditional centreofplate protein." MLA says it will be seeking to understand and remap the carcass to "command the highest possible premium for each part ... whether that be through cut, valueadded food product or coproduct. ■

## Winners May 2020 Find a Word

Congratulations to the winners and thank you to our sponsor BUNZL. Bunzl will contact all winners and make arrangements to deliver your prize.



### Simitar Steak Knife and Lesnie's Steel

Jenny Bialosowski, Augusta Butchering Co, Augusta WA

### Victory Narrow Curved Boning Knife

Ben Freeman, Barraba Beef, Barraba NSW

Laurie Jones, Mountain View Meats, Woonona NSW

Ron Stapleton, Stapleton Family Meats, Gympie, NSW

Jordana Schutt, Teys Australia Tamworth NSW

Harden White, Penrose Prime Meats, Tamworth NSW

## BOOK COMPETITION WINNER

Congratulations to Annette Wanty, from Christchurch, New Zealand based Byrne & Wanty Consultants Ltd. Annette has won a copy of *PÂTÉ, CONFIT, RILLETTE* by Brian Polcyn and Michael Ruhlman.

Annette manages the office for her husband John who has been a consultant to the food industry in general and specifically the meat industry for the past 30 years. John specializes in the design, construction and operation of abattoirs and cold chain processing facilities.

Congratulations Annette – the first New Zealand winner of our book competition!

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## Wow what a business!!

Owner and Director Rod Sellers knows the market extremely well and has proven so, by adding cooked/ready to eat meals and products to his butcher shop, it not only adds something different for his customers, it also makes money.

Unox Australia met with Rod and Head Chef Karen to discuss their needs as they wanted to add more to the menu and speed up some of the processes.

Now, Rod is introducing new display counters and a hot bay area for a holding section with a quick grab and eat section also.

Sellers are currently using standard gas burners and a drop-down electric oven, by adding a 7 tray UNOX MIND.Maps™ PLUS Combi Oven to the mix they have increased their production immensely.

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# Virus a community and public health issue, not a meat industry issue

From as early as January 2020, the Australian Meat Industry Council (“AMIC”) commenced implementing robust risk management guidelines, to incorporate COVID-19 safety plans and measures, for the industry’s total supply chain and independent retail network.

The meat industry is uniquely positioned as one of the premier industries where food safety and hygiene is part of our core business. Our members operate to very stringent standards including HACCP, Good Manufacturing Practice, and Australian Standards, which are verified by state and federal food safety authorities.

As an essential service, our industry has continued to operate across the entire supply chain during the coronavirus pandemic knowing that the supply of food is our community’s most basic need and this has been reflected in increased sales of red meat during the pandemic.

AMIC has noted the negative reporting by media agencies recently, particularly in Victoria, and disputes any commentary alleging the meat industry as being a responsible party in the transmission of coronavirus, due to recent cases being brought into processing plants in Victoria.

Australia’s Food Standards agency (FSANZ) and well-respected international agencies including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), and World Health Organization (WHO) have publicly stated that there is no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is transmitted in food, and no reported cases from human contact with food.

“This is a public health issue and a community transmitted virus, not a meat industry or food safety issue,” said AMIC CEO, Patrick Hutchinson.

“There has been an over-emphasis of cases being linked to the Australian meat industry, yet the virus is being transmitted in the community, not generated from within any particular industry,”

“The Australian meat industry has extremely controlled measures in place and should not be viewed through the same lens as meat industries in other countries.

“The actual percentage of staff that make up the total amount of cases within a “cluster” linked to a meat processing facility is small relative to total community transmissions, in some cases less than 3%, across our red meat and smallgoods members.

“Further, there is a negligible amount reported in our independent retail butcher chain.”

Today, VIC Premier Daniel Andrews said that if people continue to go to work with symptoms, it could shut down industries.

“If we were to continue to see outbreaks, if we were to continue to see people quite obviously attending work when they shouldn’t be, then every option becomes on the table,” he said.

“Next steps may well have to include closing a number of these industries if we continue to see people attending work.

“We have to work together to keep anyone who’s got symptoms away from work. Otherwise businesses will have to close.”

AMIC reinforces the VIC Premier’s message for workers to stay away from their workplace if they display symptoms, get tested and follow the isolation instructions.

“This is a people transmitted virus and will be solved by people implementing and abiding by COVID Safe recommendations,” says Mr Hutchinson.

The primary focus of AMIC’s impacted members has been on the health and safety of its workforce, ensuring functional plans are implemented to minimise the risk of spreading the virus among staff. This includes temperature screening, daily sanitation, regular sanitisation, social distancing, and staggered shifts.

“The impacts of any potential closures of processing plants has a flow through effect to our wholesalers and retail network chains, which ultimately impacts our farmers and producers,” said Mr Hutchinson.

“We are an essential service feeding Victorians and Australians through independent retail and supermarket chains, and the global community, daily. We take this very seriously.

“Whilst as industry we continue to remain supportive of our front-line health workers and health department staff working with our members daily, some information has been confusing for Victorians, with changing advice to workers regarding isolation.

“We do not want to see the shut-down of our industry due to changing rules that we have limited to no control over.

“As such, we are working closely with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and those members that have been impacted to ensure minimal interruption to business operations and communicate a clear set of expectations and response procedures,” he said.

While consumer demand has been higher recently, the independent retail channel sources its product from various processing facilities across Australia and is agile to meet consumer demands. ■



# Keeping connected, skilled and competition ready

So many competitions have gone by the wayside in 2020, and those for butchers are no exception with Meatstock Butcher Wars, World Butchers Challenge and many more cancelled or deferred.

In an effort to keep connected and hone competition skills, butcher and TAFE teacher, Shannon Walker launched a lamb challenge via the online page, Butchers Alliance essentially to have a bit of fun and showcase butchering skills.

Preparing a side of lamb, butchers from around the world were invited via social media to prepare retail dishes and upload the presentation to the Butchers Alliance Facebook page for judging. No time limit, but must be your own work, not a team. Judges were drawn from around the world to judge and included Travis Stockstill from the US team, Jess Pryles of Hardcore Carnivore, Erin Conroy from Scotland, Martin Hiki from New Zealand, Flavio Saldanha in Brazil and Stuart Louttit. No sponsors, no prizes, just an expression to enter the competition.

The competition received 65 expressions to enter, with a final of 25 entries submitted from around the world including Italy, UK, Greece and New Zealand.

Through a system of who got the most 'likes' the top 10 were chosen to be judged the winner by the judges, while the entry with the most 'likes' won the People's Choice award.

The winning entry, from Ben Tindale, from the UK, said that he had been in the meat trade for more than 14 years after the restaurant he worked at closed and was offered a position at the local butchers.

"I quickly took to the role, learning the skills and knowledge required for whole animal butchery as well as building long-lasting relationships with the customers I served each week. It wasn't until the beginning of 2019 however that I took on the role of managing the shop. Since then, I have introduced and developed a range of valued added and artisan products inspired by my continuously growing passion and love for the profession."

Second place getter was Giorgos Evaggeliogiorgos from Greece, with more than 1000 votes who said on his Facebook page that "I am in the trade for many years, I have met all kinds of people, but never thought that through internet I would get to "meet" brothers and sisters with such passion for our job! Just by being able to participate in such an event, was a fantastic experience, but having the chance to excel was overwhelming!

*Congratulations to Ben Tindale for his beautiful, winning display and to each and everyone of you that made the effort to participate!*



*I would like to thank all the colleagues and friends who supported my display, honouring me with the first place on people's choice award.*

*I would also like to thank Butchers Alliance for hosting such an amazing event, special thanks to Shannon Walker that made such a great job to organise and execute the whole competition!!!*

*Last but not least, I would like to thank the great group of judges that picked my display and nominated me for 2nd place!*

*Nothing of all this would have happened, if I hadn't been a member of the Hellenic Artisan Butcher's Club, which without their inspiration, I wouldn't have participated! Until the next one... Keep safe and strong!"*

Highlighting a truly international event, first place from England, second from Greece and in third place Brett Laws here in Australia.

Brett has been a butcher for about 25 years, starting as a wash-up boy in his father's shop. Apprenticed with Bushes Meats, and a stint in Wollongong before moving onto Pryde's Meats, where he has been for the past four years.

Having grown up in a butcher environment, Brett says, it is a way of life, and wouldn't have it any other way.

"Every day in the shop is different when you are a butcher, you just know that is your life, I love going to work."

*continued on page 12*

*continued from page 11*

Brett's work is well respected in the industry, and he has gained many followers on social media for his value-add products, as well as connections with fellow butchers around the world, who support each other and give advice.

Brett had been asked to participate in the Butcher Wars competition that is held during Meatstock, but was reluctant, not feeling confident enough under the pressures of competition.

The format of online, suited Brett, giving him the opportunity to test his skills against his peers in a less stressful environment. The place in the competition has given him the confidence to participate in the Butcher Wars. Brett spent around a week and a half planning the display and preparing the props to go with the dishes. The actual presentation was completed in around an hour and a half.

The theme of the display is based on the freshness of a rainforest and contains around nine products including a stuffed lamb rack loin, lamb-chetta, chump roast, lamb mince bombs and lamb parcels stuffed with tabbouleh. The show

stopper was a 'lamb cheesecake' comprising an oat and coconut base, lamb 'filling' and a cream cheese top.

"I love experimenting and doing value-add products, and wasn't very confident about doing the competition, but this is such a good one for the meat industry to see what butchers can do. We are not just a bloke cutting and selling meat, there are many butchers in the industry that are true artisans and very good at what they do, and this competition showcases those skills."

So successful has the outcome been that Brett has since received job offers, increased business in the shop and more followers on Instagram.

Organiser, Shannon Walker said that he did this competition to show the skill and trade and to give everyone an opportunity to see what butchers can do. With more than 6,500 votes for the 25 entries and seven countries represented, it is testament to the connection that butchers can achieve through online platforms

"I encourage you to have a go, and show us what you can do," said Shannon. ■

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# Open Food Network – a marketing tool for meats

Like a sharp knife Open Food Network is a powerful tool. Used creatively, it has the potential to empower small businesses in the food chain – from farmer to retailer.

**S**o what is Open Food Network? It's a web-based platform that allows the whole food chain – but specifically farmers and consumers to communicate directly – to order produce, organize delivery, and make payments.

Farmers can list their products and consumers can choose what they like and the Open Food Network system organizes delivery and pick-up at a local hub.

Open Food Network Australia is a registered charity. Its core belief is that we need to improve the way we grow and distribute food and to achieve this, the food distribution system requires a new way of operating. Open Food Network, was established by Serenity Hill and Kirsten Larsen in 2012.

Open source platforms such as OFN, enable the creation of new supply chains. Food producers can sell online, wholesalers can manage buying groups and supply produce through networks of food hubs and shops. Communities can bring together producers to create virtual farmers' markets, and build resilient local food economies.

OFN's core function is to provide services, including software and resources that allows participants to function as a transparent and ethical "middle man" in food chains.

To achieve this, it develops, accumulates and protects open source knowledge, applications and platforms that can be used to build and operate, transparent, fair and sustainable food systems.

OFN operates on an open and transparent governance model. Decision-making is collaborative within the global network of communities, including farmers and food enterprises. Everything it does or owns, belongs to a community – not a single entity.

The platform has developed a world wide following and now operates in eight countries.

## How does it work?

Open Food Network provides a website that links producers with consumers usually through a local hub where the produce changes hands.

Producers list available products, with descriptions, quantity and price.

## What's in it for meat processors and butchers?

On first inspection Open Farm Network might look like another competitor for the retail dollar, and it probably is. At another level, livestock and meat traded through this channel needs the full spectrum of services including; livestock transport, slaughter, boning, retail preparation and storage. Existing business can provide these services on a fee-for-service basis without the risks associated with buying stock and selling meat products.



Longer term, processors, wholesalers and retailers can use the OFN to play a more active role in their supply chains and build stronger links with farmers and consumers. A retail shop or processing facility that can provide consumer ready, raw, ready to cook and pre-cooked and chilled meat products can be a "hub". OFN provides a mechanism to move meat marketing away from a commodity culture where "cheapest" is the key value to a product where; provenance including, environment, animal welfare, social responsibility and equitable pricing along the whole chain, all play a role in the value assessment.

For more information:

[www.openfoodnetwork.org.au](http://www.openfoodnetwork.org.au)  
[hello@openfoodnetwork.org.au](mailto:hello@openfoodnetwork.org.au)  
 Kirsten Larsen 0425 794 848

At the other end of the food chain consumer can look-up local hubs, see what's on offer, order what they want, and pick-up the product at the hub at a pre-arranged time.

In the middle Open Food Network allows community groups to set-up hubs or pick-up points. These regionally based hubs, using the OFN web-based system, list the products offered by local farmers, take the orders and arrange a pick-up time and place. Using Open Food Network, communities

can create a virtual farmers' market. Open Food Network hubs facilitate collaboration.

Currently there are about 50 active hubs in Australia, mainly in Victoria but stretching into NSW and Queensland. About 950 primary producers supply their local hubs.

### What's a Hub?

Strathbogies Local is an OFN hub that is located in the country town of Euroa, in North East Victoria. Euroa has a population of about 3,400, with another 1,000 people living in communities and townships within 25 km. The Strathbogies Local shop lists produce supplied by local farmers, takes orders and provides a pick-up point and time for customers to collect their orders.

Eighteen local producer supply: beef, pork, wine, beer, vegetables, bakery, mushrooms, eggs, honey, olive oil, nuts and dried fruit and preserves. The hub's webpage includes a short profile of each producer highlighting their values, objectives and production system.

The hub lists what is available from each producer at the time. Given most farm production is seasonal, the offering from fruit and vegetable growers particularly, varies with the season and can vary from week to week.

Each week, orders are taken till Wednesday evening. Suppliers including farmers and bakers are advised of their orders on Thursday and they deliver their ordered produce to the hub on Friday morning. Pick-up time for customers is 12noon till 4pm on Friday.

Strathbogies Local has experienced strong growth in sales in recent months, in part due to the closure of many farmers markets, but also possibly because Strathbogies Local provides a platform for locals to express their sense of community in these testing times. ■

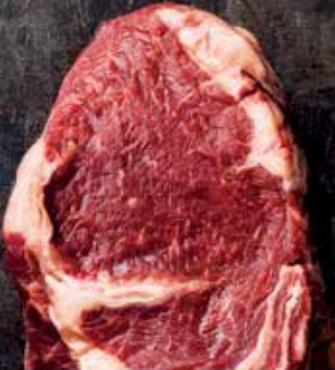
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*Season Restaurant on Noosa's famed beachfront boardwalk.*

# Food service faces long road to recovery

By Stephanie Flynn

As Queensland navigated the re-opening of its economy and borders following the COVID-19 lockdown, its tourism sector remains on 'struggle street' with a full recovery not expected until 2021 at the earliest.

With tourism being a key driver in the state's economy, valued at some \$25 billion and directly employing nearly 220,000 people last year according to Tourism and Events Queensland, the devastation caused to its food service sector has been immense with many restaurants remaining closed through to the end of June despite the easing of restrictions.

Much of Queensland's food service sector is located in regional tourist areas outside the city centre and relies

heavily on domestic and international tourists for survival, particularly from Victoria and New Zealand, to whom borders remain closed.

The economic shock was no more evident than in Noosa, a regional centre 150km north of Brisbane, which has built its economy almost entirely on tourism and where restaurants make up a high proportion of its businesses.

With a resident population of only 52,000 and only 26,000 private dwellings according to the last Census, the food service sector in the tourist town remains in an unenviable position compared to its city counterparts with large resident populations.

According to figures released by the Noosa Shire Council the economic

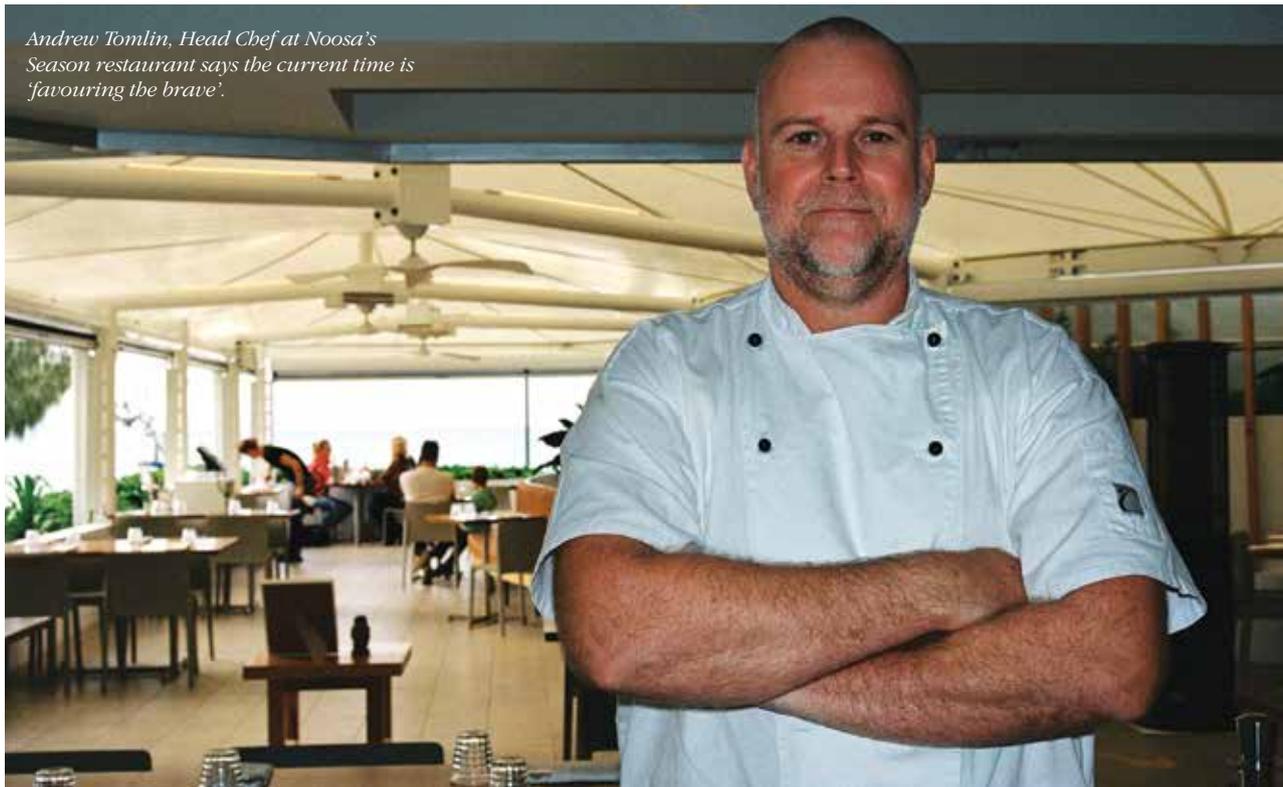
impact of COVID-19 is forecast to be immense on the regional town with GDP for the June Quarter 2020 anticipated to have fallen by -17.2 percent, a fall higher than the state average.

An indication of the depth of the flow-on effects is the loss of jobs with local jobs anticipated to have fallen -20.2 percent, including those on Job Keeper, with accommodation and food services bearing the brunt at 1,138 job losses, nearly half of all job losses in the region.

And it is a condition mirrored in regional tourist towns across the state.

Long time Noosa Chef, Andrew Tomlin, Head Chef at one of only three of Noosa's leading restaurants on the famed beachfront boardwalk spoke

*Andrew Tomlin, Head Chef at Noosa's Season restaurant says the current time is 'favouring the brave'.*



with *Australian Meat News* about the experience of finding its entire customer base had vanished overnight and for many weeks and what he anticipates lies ahead for food service businesses.

“The suddenness of the shutdown was dramatic, overnight in fact, from midday on that March Monday the street completely died, being a tourist street, and the effect on stock was hard to manage, some things we could freeze and vacuum pack but the owners and staff ate well for that first week,” Andrew said.

“We were closed for four of five weeks after that and while the owners and I and came into the restaurant we did not open for takeaways or coffees, there was not the volume of people here to make it worthwhile to open the doors,” he said.

The Sunshine Coast region, which includes Noosa, sits alongside the Gold Coast on Brisbane's southside and Far North Queensland as the top three regional tourist destinations.

According to Tourism and Events Queensland, the Sunshine Coast had

over 4.3 million overnight visitors last year with the overwhelming majority of these from the domestic market, hence the enormous pressure on the Queensland Government to reopen interstate borders which it did as planned on July 10.

The Federal Government's 'Job Keeper' programme played a major role in keeping the State's tourism-based businesses which includes the food service sector afloat, but questions remain as to how many of these will survive after the Government funding of business wages is discontinued in September and if its borders remain closed for the Winter to its lucrative Victorian and New Zealand markets.

“For Queensland businesses and for our business, much will depend on the border reopening continuously, another full shutdown would be catastrophic meaning that a lot of food service businesses in the State would not survive,” Andrew said.

“Although the Job Keeper programme was not perfect, it definitely allowed us to get back to work, keep the business functioning and trial

approaches like takeaway and menu inclusions without risking the viability of the business long term.

“We focused on a lot of the classic dishes from our restaurant over the last 20 years and developed versions that would work as takeaway and making sure what we did could translate into a la carte when things wound up again.

“We have had good local support for 'special occasions' over the years, so we focused on the challenge of encouraging locals for takeaways and ensuring this would form a continued new arm to our business as restrictions lifted.

“Today, we are open for business and the days we have good a la carte and good takeaway turnover are really good for the business, so at the moment it is about volume not high-priced, high-end which is where we were before all of this,” he said.

Andrew and his team have noticed a definite change in buying habits of customers, with one of the best sellers both inhouse and takeaway being the

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Tassie beef short ribs sales of which have doubled, a phenomenon which he admits has taken him by surprise.

According to Andrew, one of the great benefits of this last few months has been the access by a mid-priced restaurant like Season to high quality meat and seafood that would otherwise have made its way to export markets or high-end fine dining venues in the major cities.

Not surprisingly, it is a trend he hopes will continue as the country winds down its restrictions on the food service sector.

Season Restaurant has spent a great deal of effort and time developing a COVID business plan that will see them through the foreseeable future characterised by social distancing requirements, an issue top-of mind given that Noosa was the location of one of the biggest regional outbreaks of the novel virus at one of its leading restaurants.

“We do not want to put anyone at risk, so we are going above and beyond in our COVID SAFE plan,” Andrew said.

“On the floor, we have an outdoor and an indoor section so we can do 20 and 20 customers in each and rotate the tables all day from breakfast until dinner,” Andrew said.

“We have a breakfast menu in place in the mornings and then an a la carte menu that starts at lunchtime and runs all the way through with bookings taken every two hours for the tables and this rotation is working well,” he said.

The Season ‘COVID Safe’ plan extends to wait staff each of which has their own section of tables that they are responsible for and no one else goes into that area, they wear gloves to deliver food to customers and cutlery is polished and wrapped so no one touches anything.

In the kitchen Season has rostered two teams of chefs that never cross

paths and surfaces are disinfected every couple of hours, all staff have their temperature checked on arrival and on departure, and all of this is to ensure complete traceability should an outbreak occur.

With a long history as a chef in Noosa including during the Global Financial Crisis over a decade ago, Andrew is keenly aware of the financial impact of major economic shocks.

He believes the worst of the recession is still ahead and will be a major factor in the survival or not of many in the food service sector, which was struggling with profitability against rising costs before the pandemic.

And meat industry suppliers will face a change in demand from the food service sector which will be focused on price more than ever before.

“We learned a lot during the GFC including effective stock control, staff scheduling and watching every hour of staffing, effective ordering systems and, most importantly, effective design of menu inclusions, you really cannot have dishes on your menu that are not turning over a lot due to price,” Andrew said.

“The current time is ‘favouring the brave’ that is for certain and while a complete stoppage like we have just had is something else again, as we face an ongoing recession the same principles will need to be followed in order to navigate the current position and survive.

“All that said, I do see things ahead as positive for restaurants in tourist towns like ours, even with low business confidence, particularly with the borders open and Australians travelling in the country and not overseas, food service businesses will adapt and make it work well,” he said. ■



# The changing face of processing and retail

Coronavirus has stamped hard on the technology accelerator. What could be the legacies for meat processing and retailing?

Industry future-gazers are predicting that online ordering will claim more of the buying landscape. The shape of the shop will also change. Cashless transactions will become even more frequent. Social media will surprise and engage more customers. Point-of-sale software will give faster and more accurate transactional records. And, at the end-point, there will be a need for novel packaging for safe direct delivery.

## Online shopping

Online is claiming 20% of Australian grocery shopping visits – compared to a global average of 30%, and 60% in China.

An increasing number of stay-at-home shoppers are expected to select and pay for purchases using an app, and then await delivery by car, courier, pushbike or (in the further future) by drone or robot. Driven by artificial intelligence, the ordering app could send shoppers personalised sales prompts or customised nutrition information.

In Mundaring, WA, Gary Hine decided to close counter sales and only sell via online for the duration of the virus. His business, the Naked Butcher, has been operating for 13 years. “It’s not a decision we took light-heartedly,” he said. “There were a lot of sleepless nights with different scenarios going around in my head. But the most important thing is that we keep ourselves safe, our staff safe and our customers safe.

“I see it as an opportunity to adapt and to continue to keep our doors open and service the people who have looked after us for so long,” he said. “It’s a lot better than us getting sick and having to shut the doors.”

In Bathurst NSW, Mountain Meats introduced home-delivered boxed meat ordered online. Owner Paul Smith said: “We’re trying to get the infrastructure up for Facebook and get it ready; it’s come along a bit too quick, if you know what I mean, but we’re taking half our money online. It’s opened our eyes.” They launched in late March and now offer a family box, a ‘Kiddo Box’ and a ‘Doggy Box,’ – which includes a tennis ball.

Online selling has been the rescue raft for some retailers servicing hospitality clients. Vic’s Meat, a wholesale Sydney butcher supplying many of Australia’s top restaurants, found itself sitting on 300 tonnes of premium stock as the trade suddenly stopped. Owner Anthony Puharich quickly launched Vic’s Meat Direct, an online butcher service



*Deborah Sandford: “A lot of them had not been inside a butcher’s shop in their lives.”*

‘Click-and-collect’ offered a low-tech alternative for Deborah Sandford at Petersen’s Meats in Brisbane.

Her ‘car-park concierge’ system offers minimal-contact, drive-by pickup. Customers phone in their orders, paying by EFTPOS, then collect from their cars parked in front or behind the historic butcher shop in upmarket New Farm.

“We started this during the coronavirus because a lot of people didn’t want to touch anything,” Deborah said.

Initially the shop had a ‘one-in-one-out’ rule, with social-distance queues forming outside. As a boutique butchery business – it has been operating since 1901 – Petersen’s also offered home deliveries to the local area.

She said the client base has expanded during the lockdown to include time-pressed young people keen to avoid supermarkets. “A lot of them had not been inside a butcher’s shop in their lives,” Deborah said.

delivering boutique and top-end meats, and some secondary cuts, to Sydney and Melbourne homes.

Jamie Hylan of SA’s Mt Pleasant Butcher had a similar problem. He had tonnages of overstocked mettwurst after fairs and markets were cancelled. He went to social media, appealing for online orders – and business took off. He sold 800kg in one day alone. “We were so overwhelmed by how the whole of Australia got behind us to help sell our

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overstock,” he said. Now he has a new problem – the volume of orders that poured in. “The next hurdle for us to overcome is the availability of stock to manufacture these products,” he said.

Online trading extends the buyer relationship in new directions. The backing technology can track spending patterns and preferences; it can underpin buyers’ clubs and monthly subscriptions, as well as other services. For example, online customers signing up for WA’s P. Princi Food Services automatically receive bonus points, earning future discounts and deals.

Online ordering will see more data collection and sharing by using more breathtaking new technology. Last August Woolworths started trials of 2D barcoding on fresh meat and poultry, embedding information such as batch ID, supplier and use-by date.

And last November, JBS Australia, CSIRO and Sydney-based start-up Lumachain announced plans for a blockchain-based food supply tracking.

Lumachain has also developed a prototype smartphone app, using Microsoft PowerApps, which displays all the detail about the meat’s journey from paddock to plate. Ultimately

that data could be made available direct to consumers, or through interactive displays in retail outlets.

The initiative followed a \$1.5bn deal between JBS Australia and Win Chain – a supply chain e-commerce platform and Alibaba, integrating supplier, processing, warehousing, distribution, supply chain finance and brand marketing.

The shift to online sales will see the development of more related technology, point-of-sale software, tracking systems and QA technology. However, all this digital firepower will mean greater reliance on Australia’s underperforming connectivity. Businesses in black-spots, as well as those in poorly serviced regional and rural areas, could be at a disadvantage.

The introduction of new technology will also mean downtime to bed-in the new systems and for staff training.

Spin-off technologies could see more robotics in meat processing, ensuring standardised cutting with less OH&S headaches, or undertaking factory cleaning or disinfecting. Another potential legacy could see 3D printing technology creating items such as personal protective equipment and masks, which were in short supply during the early days of the virus outbreak. Simple components could be manufactured quickly without the long delay of procurement and shipping.

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## The Shop

In late March, McKinsey surveyed more than 5,000 consumers across Asia Pacific, including those in Australia, where more than 80% of respondents reported an increased preference for local brands post-outbreak. The resulting recommendation is for butcher shops to “rethink their offerings and provide healthier, more locally sourced products (including ready-to-eat and ready-to cook items) with a smaller environmental footprint.”

Butcher shops in small shopping centres will possibly enjoy a home-grown advantage, especially those with car parks or kerbside space to allow pre-ordered pick-ups.

Peter Harris, owner of Lucas Brothers Butchers in Warrnambool Victoria, established a drive-through service, allowing express shoppers to park undercover and queue in their cars. “People aren’t wanting to roam the aisles for their meat, so our drive-through has increased twofold,” he said.

Shops embedded in large shopping malls might have to adapt. These large centres are expected to morph into activity hubs, with fewer fashion and general merchandise shops, and more medical centres, offices and childcare centres. Butcher shops will have to take a proactive role in driving traffic. Suggested ways to engage with shoppers through digital activities include live-streaming training sessions and conducting digital product launches, combined with direct contact through customer relationship management systems.

Butcher shops might see more floor space devoted to preparation and cleaning/maintenance and less for customer traffic. They might install more visible health and sanitation measures. Medical-grade face masks, such as Fusetec, are coming into the system, as are Plexiglas counter screens.

In Europe, stores are removing refrigerator doors to limit common touching spots. In Belgium, supermarket giant Carrefour is trialling UV-C disinfecting booths for trollies and sanitiser airlocks on shop entrances. Elsewhere, stores are investigating complete wipe downs of self-checkout kiosks after every customer.

### Cashless transactions

Customer-facing price scanning, such as self-scanning, is a growing way of accepting payment and contactless transactions and are reportedly used in more than 90% of purchases in Australia. Tap-and-pay systems use credit cards, e-wallets and smart phones; other mobile devices are actuated by radio-frequency identification (RFID) or near-field communication (NFC) for platforms such as Google Pay or Apple Pay.

Details of payments can link forward to point-of-sale technology and backwards into a customer records management system. Some smart cards also function as stored-value cards, similar to public transport ticket technology.

Without a signature or PIN verification, it is considered that the ease of using the cards encourages more spending per shopping episode. It is already being shown to reduce rates of tax fraud globally.

### Packaging/deliveries

Last-mile logistics are among the most vulnerable element in the meat supply chain. In the US, Nielsen data found that 10% of households tried to place online orders but cancelled them due to undesirable delivery options. "Online volume was pushed to its limits," said Nicole Collida, senior vice president of brand effectiveness Nielsen.

Meat delivery is one thing – receipt by the customer is another, especially when no one answers the door.

Couriers for P. Princi Food Services phone ahead and, if there is no collection, they do not deliver; instead charging a re-delivery fee. Melbourne-based Continental Kosher Butchers instructs its drivers to take a photo of the doorstep delivery before sending the customer an SMS. Some butchers, such as Queensland's Super Butcher, deliver orders in polystyrene cartons packed with ice and advises customers to retrieve them within an hour. Brisbane's Deagon's Bulk Meats offers an automated delivery tracker activated by the order number.

Food Standards ANZ rules that using insulated bags or eskies to transport food will help maintain safe temperatures during delivery. "If food is delivered to the customer straight away, it's likely there isn't enough time for harmful bacteria to grow to dangerous levels. If you can't guarantee quick delivery, take measures to ensure the food is kept at a safe temperature until the customer receives it."

Some companies are using recyclable thermal packaging made of corrugated cardboard, which provides airflow and a conductive layer of insulated packaging, with a reflective impermeable metallised polyester laminate coating that reflects heat.

UK packaging firms are launching e-commerce ranges designed for small businesses including packs for letterbox delivery, a box for packaging iso-essentials and corrugated tray replacements for recyclable plastic crates.

In France, the trend against single-use plastics is reversing, as shoppers demand hyper-sanitary food packaging.

Canadian government researchers are assisting small, flexible companies to develop aseptic processing technologies, producing foods with up to two years of shelf stability, and drying practices to curb refrigeration use.

Globally, pioneers of robotic vehicles and drones are suggesting these technologies could offer alternatives modes of delivery. ■



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# Keeping agile in the supply chain

No industry has been immune from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and while butchers have never been busier and foodservice quieter, the wholesalers have been caught in the middle.

**T**he role of the wholesaler is to take product from the abattoir, boning room and processor and find a customer within retail or foodservice.

With a rollercoaster six months where supply has been shortened with low herd numbers, and overnight industry shutdowns, keeping inventory moving has been a challenge for the sector

Melrina Meats is one of the larger groups in the country and has been a wholesaler in carton beef, lamb, mutton and pork since 1987, with cold store distribution points in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Sydney.

Stocking products from free range, grass fed and grain fed from major brands such as Teys, JBS, Greenmount, Stockyard,

and MDH, Melrina customers include supermarkets, smallgood manufacturers, retail butchers and food service.

Much of the product is sourced from export-grade abattoirs, purely as a result of the higher level of processing and packaging that inherently provides a longer shelf life.

Melrina handles most cuts ranging from tenderloins and cube rolls through to knuckles, topside and trim, acting as a 'one stop shop' for the industry to stock anything from high end Wagyu through to pork for salamis. As with many, tenderloins have been the harder product to shift in the past six months.

When the restrictions occurred in March and April, the tenderloin market collapsed and prices varied enormously from week to week, sometimes in the order of \$30 one week, to \$10 the next. The risk of holding \$30 product in a \$10 market was high, and true for most wholesalers in the industry.

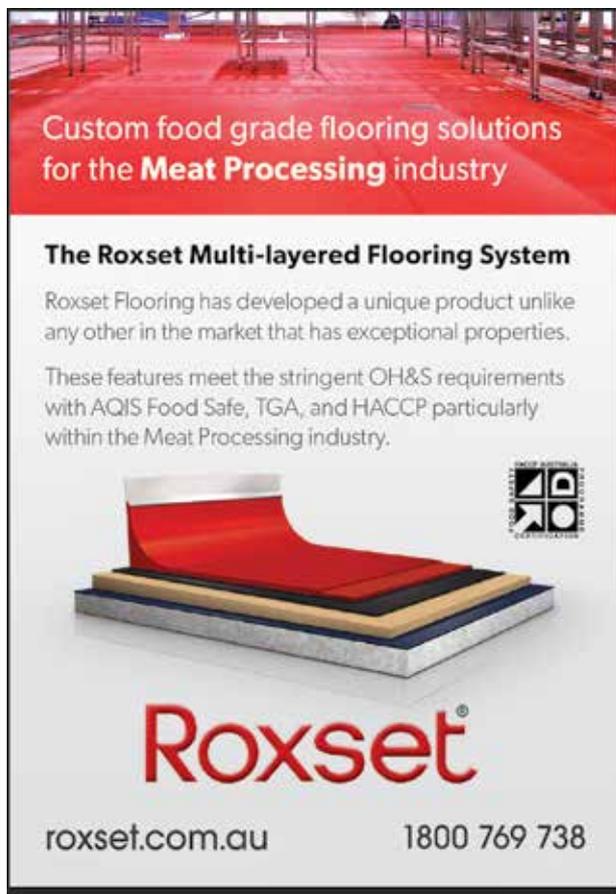
Ben says there was an inkling that the industry might change quickly in early March, but from a retail perspective, the bigger issue was meeting demand for the retail sector during the panic-buying phase. Business in one week was the equivalent to three weeks trade. With that came the decision to keep trading at the higher volumes and replenish stock should the panic buying continue or watch and wait.

"Once the panic buying stopped, and the lockdown came in on March 22nd, we went down to 40% of normal trade.

"Melbourne was more heavily affected initially than other cities as we had a higher customer base into foodservice, some of our customers dropped by 90%. Our Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide depots had a better coverage into supermarkets and butchers so they were able to adapt quicker. All markets felt significant impacts and challenges.."

"With chilled product the turnover needs to be pretty quick, frozen gives us more time. With foodservice, chilled product could be aged longer, but for the retail butcher it needs to be moved sooner to maintain the bloom that consumers look for at the butcher shop – as quickly as six weeks. Managing the losses on the high-end food service product was a challenge."

Foodservice struggled to find a home for their meat products that had already been bought, so were not buying any



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more than they needed. Stock was cleared throughout April. Through May and June as foodservice picked up once more and the effects of short supply as a result of COVID in the US into retail, volumes picked up a little, however the channels to market had changed in that retail strengthened to 80% of the overall business, rather than foodservice as previously.

Pork has remained steady with salami season commencing. Preparations for Christmas hams remain unchanged with stock of pork legs ordered and frozen ready for smoking in October and November.

Ben Barwick, managing director for Melrina Melbourne says that a closer eye was kept on stock inventory based on how long product was aged, and what needed turning over sooner for the retail market. Forward sales into supermarkets and independents have been fruitful and provided ongoing meat forecasting.

Melrina like many, needed to rapidly find homes for product destined for foodservice during the first lockdown. Learning from the experience the company is now carrying less inventory in order to not to be caught holding too much stock, as much as 40% less than prior to COVID. Now that

Melbourne is back down in lockdown, the group will be better placed to manage the next few weeks.

Relationships with customers in food service and retail has meant that Melrina is able to work through scheduling and pre-empt future needs. In the first couple of weeks of Melbourne's lockdown, the company has had some orders forward sold, but beyond that it is wait and see. Having other depots in the major cities means that stock can be shifted to meet local order demand. Transport across state borders fortunately has not posed a problem, with the status of an essential service.

The recent closures of JBS and Somerville Retail Services may have an effect, but will depend on when they re-open and how much stock they are carrying.

"Up until last week, before the Melbourne restrictions came back in place, we had been trading well through May and June. This week has put the brakes on, and we have been pretty quiet, operating at probably at about 60% of normal. No two weeks have been the same.

"The hardest part has been that you lose momentum in the sales cycle, everyone has put the brakes on and wants to see what will happen." ■




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# Working through COVID

While Victorian meatworks have had COVID-19 clusters, the labour-side implications for employers and staff across the entire meat industry are universal.

The state's largest abattoir, JBS' Brooklyn was shut in mid-July with 29 positive cases of COVID-19, as did Somerville Retail Services, with 37 cases (as at 17 July 2020). Cedar Meats which recorded 111 cases of coronavirus among its 350 staff occurred during the first wave in April. The general manager of Cedar Meats during this time said COVID-19 was a worldwide pandemic and that every possible step and consultation was taken to keep the company's staff safe.

JBS' southern chief operating officer Sam McConnell has said that the company would continue to review and implement stringent and best practice people and food safety controls, including strict access criteria, thermal temperature and imaging testing, upgraded PPE, diligent social distancing controls and company-funded flu vaccinations.

The tally of COVID-positive Australian workers is nowhere near as large as other countries nor the casualty rate anything like that of America where more than 16,200 were positive by the end of May and 86 had died. The preceding month had seen 4900 sick workers and 20 deaths. Meat workers in that country have been called 'patriotic and heroic' by the US Secretary of Agriculture.

Beyond the issues of heroism and public health comes the problem of maintaining production throughput. Backlogs are an animal welfare problem, total factory shut downs and absenteeism hampers the supply chain.

AMIC general manager processing group Mary Wu is confident the industry can cope. "During the first wave of the pandemic, there was a 30% surge in retail red meat sales, and the industry was able to meet that demand. We will continue to produce an essential product through the current challenges," she said.

## Retail feels the affects

On March 23, in the midst of the first panic-buying rush, a Warwick butcher announced it was closing until further notice after one of its team tested positive for COVID19. All staff at Rose City Premium Meats went into home isolation and the business worked with Queensland Health and the AMIC.

The effect was positive. Customers delivered care packages and when the store reopened on April 4, butchers Peter Wright and Paul Carey used Facebook to thank "every customer, passer-by and community member", adding: "Your continued support of small business, regional produce and local farmers is encouraging for the future!"

More recently, Sydney butcher Bryan Hawes closed his shop in Milperra for at least two weeks as soon as he discovered his son, who works at the business, had been diagnosed as COVID-positive. "I didn't serve one single customer as soon as I found out. NSW Health have said they'll organise professional cleaners to come in," he said.

Butcher shops have modified their operations to cope with the infection. Some have staggered their hours to limit staff-to-staff contact. Some revised their trading hours to allow more cleaning time. Some banned further pre-slicing of meat. Some asked customers to pack their own bags while others, such as Melbourne's Continental Kosher Butchers is asking shoppers not to bring their own shopping bags.

Many shops are preferring online ordering and contactless delivery. Meat at Billy's in Brisbane has chosen to avoid third-party couriers. Staff drivers do a 'knock and drop' home delivery. If there is no answer, they text with a photo of where the delivery has been left. Drivers must sanitise their vehicles each morning before deliveries and also sanitise their hands after handling a petrol pump.

## Science of infection

The possible paths to infection have included working long hours in close proximity to others, communal touch points and staff unable to cover their faces while coughing and sneezing due to production line speeds.

Wet and cold conditions appear to promote persistency. Prof Benjamin Cowie, epidemiologist and infectious disease expert at Melbourne's Doherty Institute said: "We know that the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 ... is more stable in cold conditions."

Hard surfaces such as plastic and stainless steel are known to harbour the virus for up to three days and, in aerosol form, it can remain viable and infectious for hours.

Contaminated surfaces could include tools, workstations, or break room tables as well as shared spaces such as break rooms, locker rooms, and entrances/exits. Other potential factors that have been identified include a lack of ventilation and sunlight, as well as shouting across the noise of machinery and faulty PPE use.

Matthew Journeaux, the secretary of the Queensland branch of the Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union said there are limits to the way work patterns in abattoirs can be altered.

"At the abattoir animals are put on a chain which moves along and everyone has a particular job to do along the way. It's not as simple as moving people apart," he said.

“You have work stations and many of them have specific machinery installed there, up and down platforms and things like that. There is very little automation in meat processing, each step is highly labour-intensive so this means you end up with a lot of people all in the same factory.”

AMIC recognises that the virus is most likely spread through:

- close contact with an infectious person
- contact with droplets from an infected persons cough or sneeze
- touching objects or surfaces that have cough or sneeze droplets from an infected person, and then touching the mouth/face.

It relies on ‘well-respected international agencies’ including the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and Australia’s Food Standards agency (FSANZ) that have publicly stated that there is no evidence to suggest that coronavirus is transmitted in food.

## People and work

Socio-demographic factors among the workforce include lack of instructions in languages other than English, communal living and ‘presentee-ism’ to maintain income and retain a job. A manager at one meatworks is reporting record staff attendance. “They don’t want to lose their job and they don’t want to be stuck at home with the wife and kids,” he said.

In the US some management is paying incentives to staff attending work and in Brazil, JBS has said it had put all its indigenous workers on paid leave.

ACTU secretary Sally McManus has recommended paid pandemic leave for employees, especially for casual staff who do not have access to sick leave. Her call has been supported by United Workers Union Logistics director Matt Toner.

In the US 87% of infections involved ethnic minority workers and contracted staff have been identified as a weak spot in other countries.

“Bringing large numbers of people together from across a community, having them working on long shifts with plenty of opportunities for transmission, is likely to result in heightened risk,” said Archie Clements, an epidemiology professor at Curtin University in Perth.

Other factors under scrutiny include shared transportation such as ride-share vans or shuttle vehicles, car-pools, and

public transport. Also under review are high-density living, house sharing, joint meals and community festivals and worship.

## What’s ahead?

Initial difficulties in sourcing imported plastic goods such as trays and wraps, and cleaning chemicals have been overcome and several companies have secured, or are actively seeking, Australian import replacements.

It is considered that extended use of PPE will not be difficult for meat plants with established sanitation practices.

Meat processing plants are expected to see wider use of masks, face shields and PPE, sanitisation, social distancing, personal temperature checks and touchless hand-washing stations. Intensive cleaning will extend to common-touch surfaces such as microwave or refrigerator handles or vending machine touchpads as well as push bars and door handles and handrails.

The industry will see more investment in more physical barriers such as strip curtains, plexiglass or similar materials as well as ventilation audits. Common rooms will incorporate partitions or rearranged furniture to increase worker separation or using outside tents for break and lunch areas. Shift times are expected to incorporate longer CIP/sanitising periods.

Online sales traffic is expected to retain market share but the food trade and hospitality sectors are not expected to recover quickly. Companies supplying to these clients will continue trying to redirect product to retail.

Labour-intensive value-adding activities such as flavouring, de-boning or specialty cuts are expected to be reduced, but the industry could see a faster take-up of automation and robotics.

“With economic stress there is the risk that consumers shift to cheaper animal protein, such as pork and poultry, or to less expensive beef cuts,” said Rabobank Australia’s Angus Gidley-Baird. Butchers will be pressed to get maximum yield from each carcass. Portion size will become more important in times of economic restraint. Cash-strapped customers will take up secondary cuts, using social media to learn how to cook them. Counter staff will have to train shoppers; Millennials were the predominant panic-buyers of meat in the US. ■

# Rendering our way through ‘Drought, Bushfires, Floods and Pandemic’

By Tim Juzefowicz, Rendering Account Manager, AU/NZ, Kemin Nutrinsurance

One year ago, the ARA hosted its 15th International Symposium at the Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart. It was the first time the biannual event was held in Tasmania but a strong influencing factor to make it happen was an opportunity to keep costs down for industry.

The title of the symposium was aptly titled “The bottom line” and organisers wished to do their best to keep the rendering industry informed of the latest issues and developments, give operators the opportunity to take action as necessary and assist in reducing costs.

There was some risk with the location thinking that Hobart may not be well attended in the middle of winter but the event was a success. The symposium was very well attended, attracted speakers and guests from around the world and excellent reviews received.

The introductory speech was titled ‘Issues ahead for renderers’. The speaker intended to open the next three days to the potential weaknesses, opportunities and threats the industry faced. The fact now, is that the introduction did not foresee reality as we focused on markets, quality, safety and the environment.

Late spring, the east coast was in the grip of drought, farmers destocked to survive. Then bushfires began and raged for months with cities shrouded in thick smoke. Then, heavy rains saturated the parched lands giving an opportunity for stock to be held back from slaughter. The latest instalment in an apparent final blow, March 2020, the industry saw the COVID-19 pandemic take hold in Australia.

As if these issues weren’t enough the industry faced export market access issues that added significant commercial complexity and caused significant difficulty moving product for export. The spectre of ASF also had a threatening effect in Australia as the disease stepped closer to our borders slowing the possibility to open important markets. Each scenario that played out, farmers, meat processors and renderers adapted the best they could through the flow on effect.

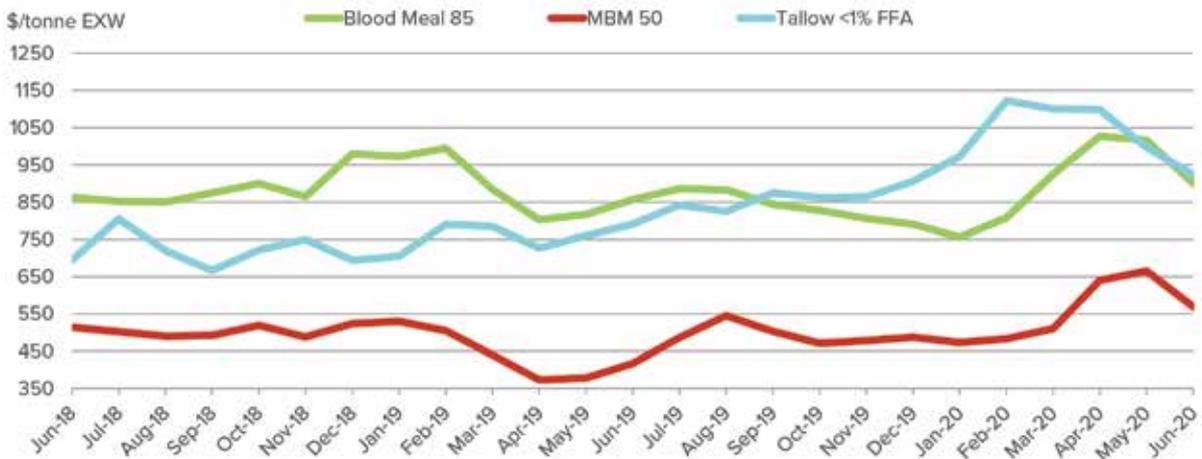
Occasionally forgotten, the reality is that the rendering industry is aligned with the meat industry. Renderers, both integrated and independent provide a service through collection then processing the animal products into meals, fats and oils.

Renderers must efficiently process raw materials and find markets for the finished products produced at competitive prices in the world market. The Australian market for rendered products is not large enough to be consumed locally and therefore approximately 50% of production is exported to overseas markets.

COVID-19 has had a serious effect on renderers as has been observed in all industries. Renderers have had to adapt by changing the way they operate for a safer workplace and be safe going home to their families.

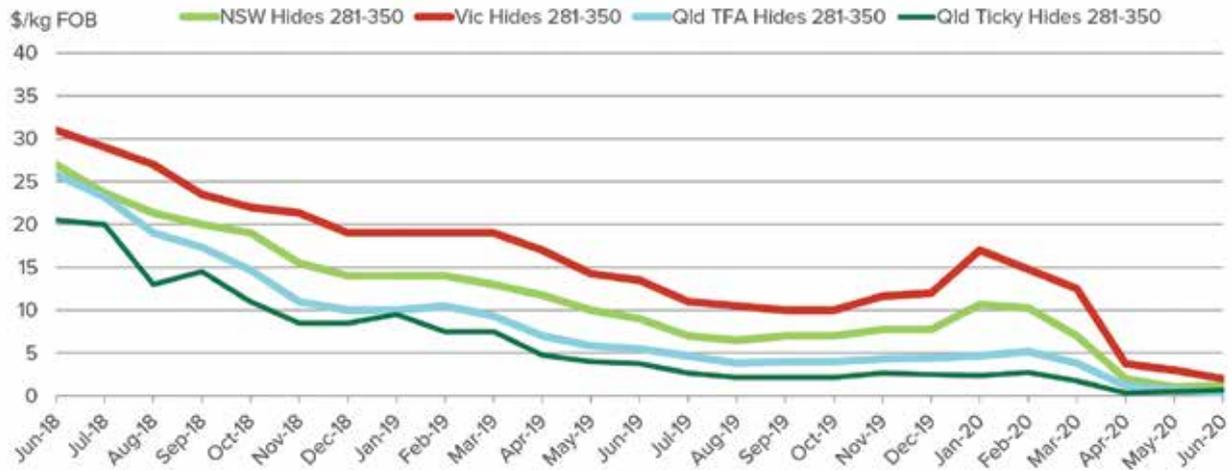
A range of actions have been taken to address minimise the risk of infection. The actions include introduction of split shifts, staggering work hours, creating backup shifts, implementing strict hygiene practices, increased cleaning regimes, maintaining social distancing, work at the office only if necessary and in turn working from home and implementing temperature checks.

## Trends in rendered co-product prices



Source MLA July 2020 analysis of co-products

Trends in hide prices (East Coast Ex Works)



Source MLA July 2020 analysis of co-products

Blood meal is trending downward on 2019 prices, while tallow prices have eased in a fluctuating year. The Hide market has contracted while Italy and China assesses the impacts of COVID-19.

Control of visitors has become a requirement and a management system adopted for raw material drivers. Visitor management systems have also been employed with prior approval and signing in procedures required. Where specialised attendance has been necessary, visitors such as service providers and auditors are recognised as essential to maintain normal operations.

When looking back at the past twelve months no one could have predicted the issues and very few could have detailed action plans. The task now for renderers is to operate as an essential service and continue to service the meat industry uninterrupted. We will deal with whatever market, environmental and quality issue that needs to be faced. ■

## New high-load, extreme temperature refrigerant pump

EDUR centrifugal pumps have been used successfully in refrigeration systems in Europe for decades, but their latest line-up of refrigerant pumps is now available in Australia through pump distributor, Hydro Innovations. The new line-up [three series of pumps] provides a maximum level of safety, reliability and efficiency, with pumps being designed for high loads and extreme temperatures.

EDUR refrigerant pumps are suitable for ecologically harmless refrigerants such as CO2 and ammonia, but also for a multitude of synthetic refrigerants and those containing hydrocarbons. The whole line-up has been designed with magnetic couplings to hermetically seal the refrigerant from the atmosphere. This allows for a spatial separation between motor and pump which avoids any heat transfer into the pumped liquid, which benefits the energy balance of the system.

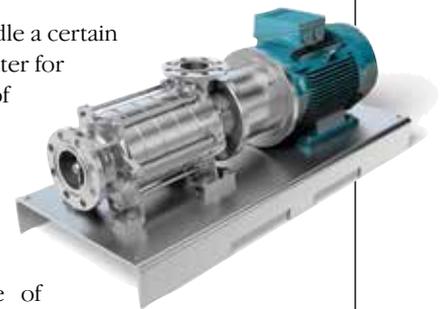
These very well designed pumps use diffuser devices in circular casings with either open impellers or closed balanced impellers to compensate for radial forces, extending coupling life. They have been designed with very low NPSH (net positive suction head – relating to pump pressure) values that enables their use on refrigerants operating close to their boiling point.

They are also able to handle a certain level of gas content [to cater for some slight evaporation of refrigerants] because of the diffuser design.

Hydro Innovations is confident that designers and asset owners will see the benefit of this line of pumps that do not require seals and do not use the pumped fluid to cool the motors. The pulsation free and low noise operation is a feature of these pumps, along with reduced maintenance cost and high operational safety. Pumps are available with flows to 600m<sup>3</sup>/hr, pressures to 40 bar and temperature ranges from -50°C to 220°C.

EDUR Pumpenfabrik from Kiel in Germany has been manufacturing quality centrifugal pumps since 1927. They are used extensively by OEM's looking to give their customers piece of mind and a product that will last for decades, not just a few years.

More information on these pumps may be obtained from [info@hydroinnovations.com.au](mailto:info@hydroinnovations.com.au) ■



# Economics of frozen or chilled

In China, pre-packed portioned beef cuts are either from local beef production or defrosted imported primal.

Chilled retail pack development is facing distribution issues, such as fragmented demand due to the smaller niches and channels and higher logistics costs due to high ordering frequency/small order amounts. Also, the limited product life restricts distribution and, in some places, the cold chain is not sufficiently developed to yet trust.

Beef frozen and thawed after sea-freight to China is only 17% of the cost of chilled air-freight meat, according to an MLA-backed trial involving NSW's Argyle Foods.

Key findings from the study showed that wastage from the frozen/thawed exports was less than 5%, compared to 25% for chilled beef and economics gained through logistics and shipping could see the pre-packaged thawed meats retailing at half the price of chilled offerings.

The preliminary study compared the two methods using a variety of cuts sold through five Walmart stores in Shenzhen, China.

After the trial, the Walmart vice-president of the fresh food section invited Argyle Food Groups, a vertically integrated processor from NSW's south-west to undertake a national roll-out of pre-portioned frozen-thawed beef. That roll-out is now underway and Argyle has started an MLA Donor Company partnership project to build on the results, along with adopting new digital traceability and supply chain design.

The trial used steaks and portion cuts for pan fry, stir fry, stew, BBQ and grill, sourced and packaged at the Northern Co-Operative Meat Company (NCMC). The product – branded The Healthy Farmer – was retail-ready, pre-portioned and identified with country-of-origin. The packages also incorporated QR coding detailing provenance.

The beef was shipped, cleared and delivered to the store frozen. On receipt it was subject to a temperature check – target temperatures being below -14°C with storage at less than or equal to -18°C. The Walmart HACCP program saw the meat control-thawed in cold storage (less than or equal to 4°C for four hours) and then displayed chilled at between 4 and 7°C for up to 21 days.

The trial included in-store displays using chefs and samples and shopper surveys. MLA staff monitoring the project reported that competitors started visiting the display stands by day two, and noted: “The first to market (advantage) may be short-lived.”

Sales over the first fortnight across the five stores saw good sales of steak cuts such as striploin and oyster blade. However, shopper feedback showed a greater demand for marinated meats, along with information on how to cook

beef. The survey showed little recognition of the Australian labelling on the package and the Chinese shoppers made no differentiation between grass and grain-fed beef.

Consumers repeatedly confessed they did not trust their own industry systems and that products packed in Australia were better. Also, packaging product by weight made purchasing decisions easier for the shopper to determine exactly how much they were spending and what was the value proposition of the purchase.

Transporting chilled red meat products to overseas markets, such as China, can be difficult because they require constant refrigeration, have a shorter shelf life and are usually only shipped in small amounts due to limited demand.

Argyle Food Group (AFG) – owned and run by the Graham family – was seeking a simple, profitable solution to supply traceable, branded chilled red meat that has good quality colour, extended shelf life and minimal shrinkage without the complications of a refrigerated supply chain.

Argyle Co-CEO Bryce Graham said: “The result replicates the Argyle strategy achieved in Hong Kong and Taiwan to be the first supplier of major retailers with affordable meat packed in long shelf life, well-presented retail packs with branding, SKU name, bar codes and use-by dates.

“Chinese retailers who might be unfamiliar with ranging and selling case-ready beef now have a supply of traceable, branded meat of good colour, extensive shelf life and minimal shrinkage, and all without having to educate staff into how to manage this new, but rapidly growing category.”

Future research will look at new product development of different cuts of red meat and pack sizes/formats and innovations, such as marinated and ready-to-cook products. Shopper survey results from the trial also suggested a need to make the Australian provenance message more visible on frozen-thawed product packaging.

MLA believes the benefits of this project would see an extension to the Chinese retail market for Australian meat processors and helps balance carcass utilisation by using secondary cuts in higher-value added products.

## And how do the figures stack up?

Frozen beef distributed by sea freight, plus clearance and local distribution costs was estimated at A\$1.15/kg, compared with A\$6.75 to air-freight, clear and distribute chilled beef. Furthermore, due to Covid-19 impacts on flight volumes and freight challenges the air freight rate increased by up to 300%.

Product life is retained during shipment. If managed properly, per week markdowns and waste has been calculated at 5% compared to 25%-plus for chilled beef. Also, reduced retail markdowns will help deliver a longer shelf life due to less raw material bacterial load. ■

# Visibility of production processes

The more consistently a meat processor uses an integrated software system for process optimisation, the more efficient the company gets.

New Zealand is one of the few countries not yet affected by African swine fever. However, for pork processors big challenges come from the other meat sectors. The domestic consumption of pork is well behind chicken with pressure also coming from beef and lamb. “Moreover, there is a building pressure from the imported pork into New Zealand, mainly from Spain, US and other low-cost countries, which are putting high pressure on the price in New Zealand. More than 60% of the consumed pork is imported meat”, says Odhran McCloskey from Freshpork, the largest processor of New Zealand produced Pork for the domestic market in New Zealand.

Only a few years ago the Freshpork management initiated a major review of its software platform. One of the primary goals was to introduce an integrated solution and eliminate existing point solutions (including manual and paper-based processes).

“Originally, we wouldn’t have had much computerisation with most processes being manual and/or paper basis. This was obviously not sustainable for our growing business, so we acquired and built some niche solutions. These proved worthwhile for a period but still necessitated a lot of “baby-sitting”, says McCloskey.

Keeping systems in sync was an intensive task, there was a lot of double entering of data and little cross-business visibility of information. There was a lot of MS/Excel spreadsheets and custom VBA with all its associated overhead and back office work just to “keep the lights on”. In addition, there was significant reconciliation effort required to run the business on a daily basis.

“Data reconciliations with all its time consuming, error-prone issues were our biggest bugbear. We also had poor visibility of stock levels across our business and stocktaking exercises always highlighted the degree of error inherent in our business.”

## One software to control it all

Where there used to be isolated solutions, today there is a complete solution with uniform data for all processes. They are based on streamlined production processes that have been fundamentally optimised with an enterprise resource planning (ERP) software system from CSB-System.

The software is implemented in almost all areas and links Abattoir, Cutting Floors, Packing, Dispatch and Distribution, Sales and Finance. “CSB was the solution that scored well across all the areas we needed to cover. Another important factor for us was the CSB people we interacted with during our assessment understood our industry and terminology.

While some other Software suppliers could “talk the talk”, we felt that CSB genuinely understood the pork business and the role that an ERP could play in that business”, explains McCloskey.

## A number of operation efficiencies

According to New Zealand’s Meat Industry Association (MIA) the meat sector is the country’s second largest manufacturing sector, providing jobs for 25.000 people at more than 60 locations nationwide.

As with the implementation of any major computer system there were a number of challenges. Chief among these was the cultural shift necessitated by using an ERP. From the IT point of view the main benefit is to have all core operation data and information in a single source system. They are now able to see the flow of their Products in real time going through the system, from the carcass to created products to the finished goods and shipments with all financial impact to these products and the supply chain. In addition, there is no reconciliation required in the background. From an inventory point of view, the ability to look up the Stock at any given time is very important, along with visibility of the production process (including relevant reports for daily operations), all from one single System.

“One of the main goals for this implementation was to have a single flow of goods in a centralized system, while covering all our sector-specific and customer requirements”. Over time, Freshpork have realized a number of operation efficiencies and today we have a level of consistency in our customer documentation, invoices, delivery dockets, etc. that we never had before.

## Get smarter and grow

Established in 1985, Freshpork is the country’s leading pork processor and wholesaler. For over three decades, the company has been 100 per cent privately owned and managed by the Glass family, and today processes approximately one third of New Zealand’s pork to markets across New Zealand. The company employs about 180 employees across 6 sites in New Zealand with processing volumes of about four thousand pigs per week.

“We are under pressure both from the industry and the market. We have to look into more than just our wholesale base and continue to look at how we can both add value and expand niche revenue streams. Therefore, we anticipate looking deeper into the cutting floor to expand and improve our view on BOM’s and Yields and the integrated Production and Coverage Planning. Recipe management is something CSB is particularly good at and again we can see ourselves making more use of this. In other words: CSB is our world for anyone sitting in front of a computer or moving products and material around,” ends Odhran McCloskey. ■

# FIND A WORD

AUGUST  
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The words in the list below are all hidden in the grid. They may be found in straight lines running horizontally, vertically or diagonally. Some of the letters are shared by more than one word. When you have found all the words in the list, there will be 34 letters remaining: these form the answer to the competition.



When complete, send your copy by mail or email. Include your name, address and phone number to go in the draw for another great prize from **BUNZL**. Results will be published in next issue of Australian Meat News. **Entries close 12 October 2020**

Last issues winners and answers, see page 8

P	H	O	N	E	A	F	R	I	E	N	D	L	L	M
M	I	K	S	E	F	R	O	S	T	S	L	A	A	A
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# Charcutería – more than meat and chemistry

At one level *Charcutería – The Soul of Spain* by Jeffrey Weiss is about the science, technology and history of charcuterie, in a Spanish context. Its parallel theme is sociology, how historically, communities worked together to preserve meats to ensure their food supply so they would not starve. Its relevance today is that the author shows how working together and understanding the provenance, preparation and sharing the food we prepare and eat can build community and business.

Despite its mass, *Charcutería* is entertaining and easy to read. The first 100 pages puts the following 350 pages of recipes into a cultural, sociological, historical and technical context. The Celts are credited with introducing pigs to Spain 2500 years ago and charcuterie has evolved there ever since, including during the 800 years of Moorish rule when the handling and eating of pigs was forbidden under Moslem religious law.

The author starts at the beginning. He graphically describes the traditional and still practiced killing of pigs, in a small-scale operation. It's about blood and guts, and minimising stress to ensure quality but he also describes the thoughts and feeling of the men involved: "... these dealers of death specifically work in the service of ending life quickly and honorably." To quote one of the workers: "That is the most important thing we do." This is followed by a description of traditional boning procedures.

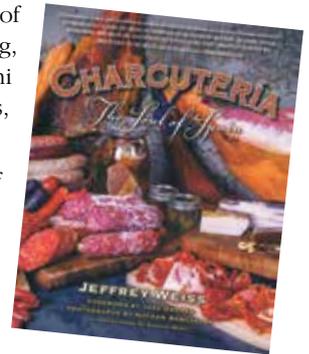
The next section explores the processes that preserve – grinding, seasoning, salting, stuffing and fermentation. As the author explains: "Everything needs water to survive. This axiomatic truth is at the very core of understanding how to safely cure, ferment, dry, and eat anything that falls under the banner of charcuterie. It is the role of the charcutier, then, to manipulate aqua pura at any given time in the curing process ... Here is where we learn to play God within our own little cured meat universe."

Chapters 4 to 11, about 350 pages provide recipes that extend and refine the basic principles described in the earlier

chapters. This includes Spanish use of marinades for preservation, pickling, confits, sausage making – fresh, semi and dry cured, stuffed meats, pates, terrines, sauces and garnishes.

*Charcutería* has a wealth of technical information, such as the relative density of commercially available salts and a detailed discussion of the role of nitrates. At the same time, the processes it describes and the individual recipes, are not only food but also a set of practices and values that applied in a modern society, can link butchers and consumers with their nutritional, cultural, social and physical environments.

*Charcutería The Soul of Spain* by Jeffrey Weiss, published by Surrey Books, Chicago. Available from Books for Cooks [www.booksforcooks.com.au](http://www.booksforcooks.com.au) (RRP\$75.00) ■





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## WIN WIN

To enter our competition to win: *Charcutería – The Soul of Spain* by Jeffrey Weiss (RRP \$75.00)

Answer the question below.

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**Question:** *What does MLA expect its income to be in 2025?*

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