

# AUSTRALIAN MeatNews

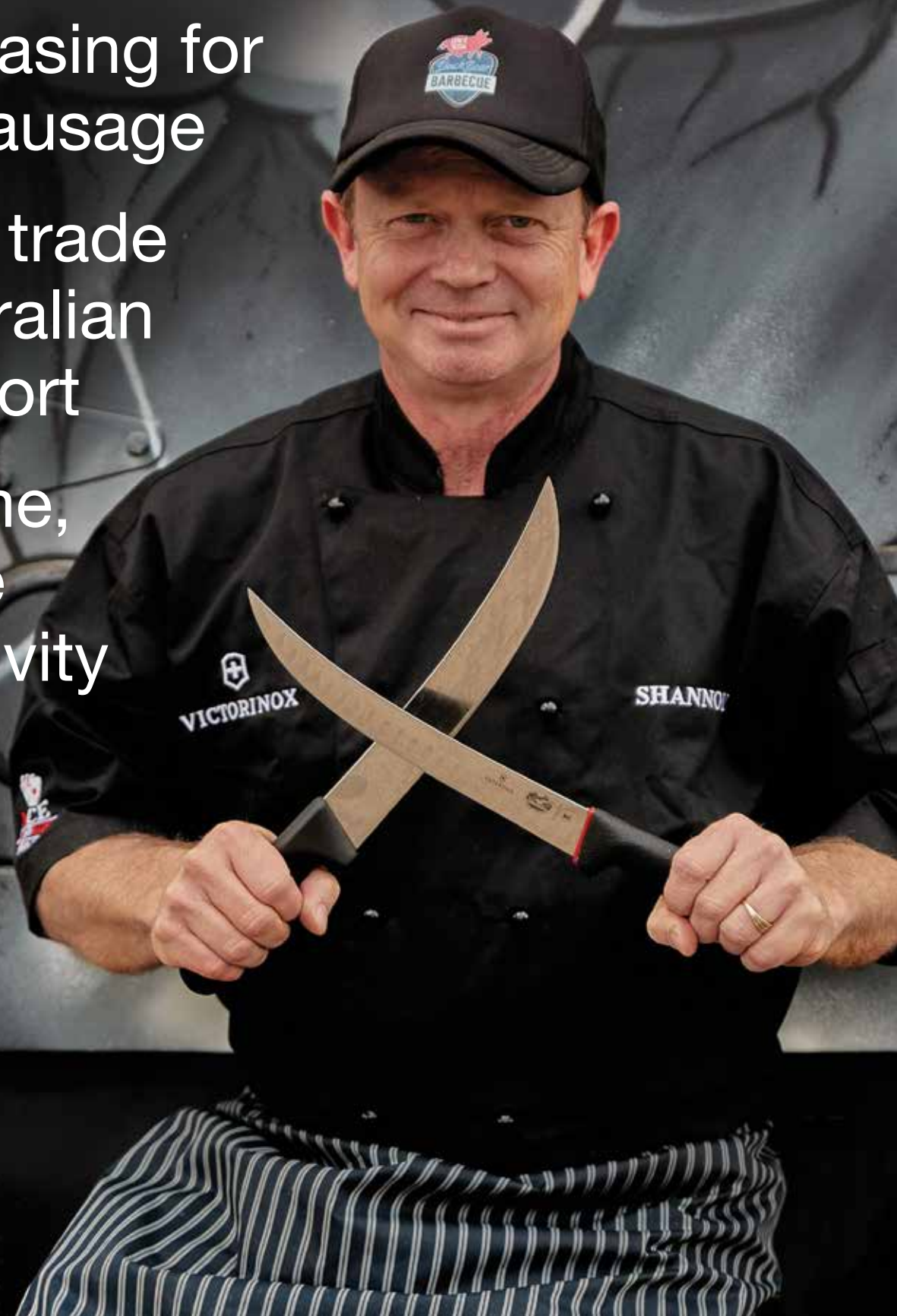
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VOLUME 19 | NUMBER 1 | MARCH 2021

Which casing for  
which sausage

State of trade  
for Australian  
and export

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increase  
productivity





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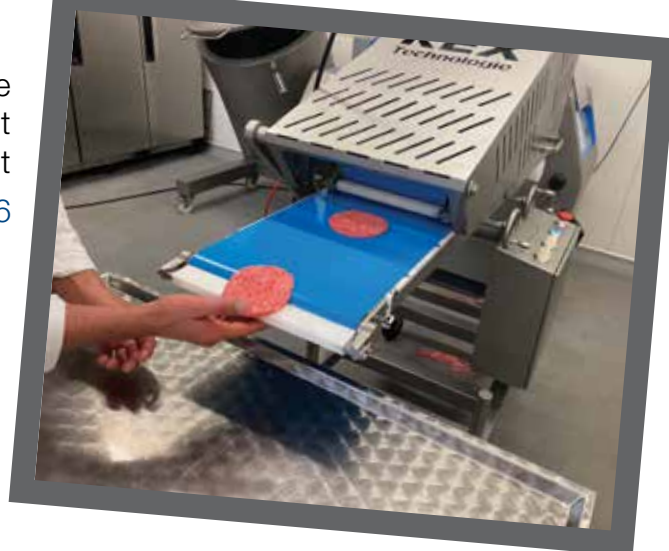


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Shannon Walker, TAFE teacher; Butcher Wars coordinator and pretty handy butcher. See page 10

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Win a copy of *The Butcher's Cook Book*. See pages 10 & 31

# Australian MeatNews

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Telephone (03) 9421 2855

Toll Free 1800 621 631

## PRODUCTION TEAM

Publisher/Editor: Athol Economou

[athol@ausmeatnews.com.au](mailto:athol@ausmeatnews.com.au)

Managing Editor: Deborah Andrich

[deborah.andrich@gmail.com](mailto:deborah.andrich@gmail.com)

Layout & design: Jocelyn Harvey

Find-a-Word: Jo Edwards

## CONTRIBUTORS

Stephanie Flynn

Deborah Andrich

Susan Webster

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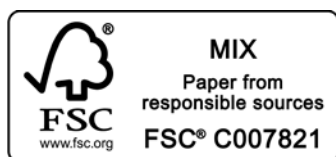
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## Supercharge your value-added offerings with pork

Australian Pork Ltd (APL) know the value of a good butcher and due to the pandemic, so now do Australian consumers. If 2020 was the year that, as a nation, we reformed connections with our local butchers, it seems in 2021 the challenge will be to retain the growth of independent butchers and keep inspiration alive in store.

For the independent butcher trade, there's a fine art to balancing products that will enthuse and excite the customer yet ensure a healthy bottom line. With prices of meat and fresh produce rising it's important, now more than ever, that stores maintain affordable offerings to keep customers coming back. The APL marketing team believe that pork is the sweet spot, as it delivers a profitable protein for butchers yet promotes creative and diverse product ranges.

One of the added benefits of shopping at an independent butcher shop is the broad range of value-added products that showcase craftsmanship and skills of their in-store talent. The 'prepped' and 'ready-to-cook' categories are rapidly growing, and therefore APL have dedicated focus to a new range of value-added pork recipes to share with Australia's independent butchers.

APL worked closely with Adelaide's Luke Leyson, also a member of our national butchery team – the Australian Steelers – to develop this range. Luke is an avid social media user with his own large following and given his network in this space, and via the international butchery competition arena, he's privy to many relevant trends and new ways of enticing customers with interesting products. These 21 recipes were developed to cater to popular food trends, high gross profit, cut variety and an affordable selling point for customers. You can find this new range at [porkbutchers.com.au](http://porkbutchers.com.au).

APL encourage butchers across the country to give this new range a go and would love to see the results. The best way to share photos, case studies and feedback is via their Facebook community – simply search for Australian Pork Butchers on Facebook to access the group. You'll also find latest announcements, tips and tricks, recipe ideas and a network to share advice, inspiration and trends with your peers. ■

## Castle Estate introduces sustainable kangaroo harvest into its paddock-to-plate legacy

Castle Estate is the only abattoir in Victoria processing kangaroo meat for human consumption, under a new license allocated by the state government.

After almost 120,000 kangaroos were culled in 2020 (for the production of pet food or inhumanely left to rot in paddocks), the Castle Estate family has made a foray into another realm of meat variety for 2021. With Food Safety as a top priority the facilities at Castle Estate process the meat fit for human consumption. Castle Estate enforces the guidelines working with professional hunters and licensed field harvesters.

All harvesters looking to supply kangaroos for human consumption, must be registered and certified under the Victorian Kangaroo Harvesting Program and the relevant Primesafe Licensing. In a bid to celebrate and humanely harvest the animal, Castle Estate is embracing the kangaroo in their meat offering which is 100% wild, organic, and grass-fed.

“We see kangaroo harvest as an opportunity to utilise the protein source like other parts of the country have done for many years,” says Steven Castle

“Reducing waste and maximising the accessibility and premium quality of meat for consumption per animal is one of our key values, and our approach to kangaroo is no exception. The life cycle and rearing of animals takes years and is a process that we believe deserves as much respect as the animals do themselves.”

The nutritional value of kangaroo meat has less than 2% fat, making it a healthier alternative to other red meat counterparts.

Kangaroo meat is also high in protein and essential B vitamins, as well as minerals such as zinc, iron and omega 3 fats and omega 6 fatty acids. Kangaroo also contains double the amount of iron in beef and triple that

of chicken and pork, making it a welcome addition to any modern Australian diet.

Compounding myriad health benefits, Kangaroo meat is also an environmentally-friendly protein, boasting low-emissions and significantly reducing the animal's negative impact on the land. This year, the local government will cull 4.8% of the kangaroo population in order to help farmers reduce the animal's destruction of local crops, with Castle Estate being able to turn waste into a sustainable source of protein.

In a media release in January, the Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas announced the 2021 quota allocation for the Kangaroo Harvesting Program – which has risen due to a notable increase in the estimated statewide kangaroo population in the last three years.

The 2020 survey estimates the current kangaroo population at almost 2 million across Victoria – up almost 40 per cent compared to 2018.

While natural in the Victorian environment, over-abundant populations compete with livestock for stock and feed, and damage crops and fences. To reduce these impacts, the Kangaroo Harvesting Program quota in 2021 is 95,680 kangaroos – an increase of 37,780 from last year.

To reduce waste and boost economic opportunities, the Labor Government will allow the extra meat to be made available for human consumption – not just for pet food as is currently the case – and look for opportunities to export the skins.

Harvesters must abide by the National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Commercial Purposes. Their vehicles and cool rooms must also be accredited through PrimeSafe.

Since October 2019, 86 harvesters and five meat processors have taken part in the pet-food-only program, with



many calling for changes that allow processing for human consumption to support jobs in country communities.

Domestic demand for the high protein, low fat meat, plus interest from overseas for the skins, could help as many as 100 regional businesses grow.

The sustainability of kangaroo populations is protected through annual quotas, in accordance with Victoria's Kangaroo Harvest Management Plan 2021-2023. The quota is based on population surveys and modelling from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and is set alongside the estimated numbers of kangaroos controlled under their Authority to Control Wildlife permit system.

Minister for Agriculture Mary-Anne Thomas, said “It's important that kangaroo numbers are sustainably managed in Victoria to reduce impacts on landholders and the community. This program provides a service to farmers and an income to trained professional shooters.”

“The changes to how products generated from the Kangaroo Harvesting Program can be used gives more options to harvesters and processors to make use of these animals and reduce waste – and create more jobs in country towns.” ■



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NAT500050188	Edible Collagen Casing NDX RTS 23/50 762m	Bag of 1	Caddy of 1	Cooked or Smoked Meats
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VHH3235BB1	Casing Hog 32/35	Bag of 1	20 Bags	Italian Sausage
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KER66081	Cure Total LTC 1.7kg	Bag of 1	Cured Meats	
KER16505	Cure MPC 16 Ham & Bacon 18kg	Bag of 1	Cured Meats	
SCNE170367WW	Netting Twine, Standard White 170mm, 36sq	Bag of 1	Dry, Cured, Cooked Meats	
SCNE180247WW	Netting Twine, Standard White 180mm, 24sq	Bag of 1	Dry, Cured, Cooked Meats	
SCNE1804811RW	Netting Twine, Premium Red White 180mm 48sq	Bag of 1	Dry, Cured, Cooked Meats	
SCNE1804811WW	Netting Twine, Premium White 180mm, 48sq	Bag of 1	Dry, Cured, Cooked Meats	
SCNE2004811RW	Netting Twine, Premium Red White 200mm, 48sq	Bag of 1	Dry, Cured, Cooked Meats	

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# Pork delivers record sales this Christmas

The Australian pork industry has started 2021 on a positive note with Australian pork a stand-out performer over the festive season. Australian Pork Limited (APL) worked to secure demand for both fresh pork and Australian hams through the uncertainty of what a COVID-19 Christmas would look like, particularly in terms of the restrictions around family gatherings.

Nielsen market data shows growth in sales of pork did exceed that of total fresh meat. Fresh pork volumes grew 16.7 per cent for the 4 weeks prior to 27th December, compared with a year ago, and in terms of value the growth was 17.5 per cent. In comparison, fresh meat grew only 7.6 per cent in volume and saw 14.3 per cent growth in value partly due to retail price increasing 6.2 per cent.

As stay-at-home Christmas demand pushed overall fresh meat sales higher, roast pork soared above the pack with a 24 per cent rise in volume and a 27 per cent rise in value. The strongest performing retailers for roast sales were

Woolworths (+31pc in \$ sales), butchers (+42pc in \$ sales) and other independent supermarkets (+60pc in \$ sales), although all retailers grew in value compared with the previous year.

Surprisingly, it was pork mince which experienced the strongest growth of all pork cuts in December, leaping a massive 50 per cent year on year, with ribs and rashers (up 30pc in volume) and pre-prepared pork (up 26pc in volume) each growing significantly.

In addition to providing amplification and inspiration around pork roasts, focus was also given to educating and encouraging consumers to purchase Australian ham. Off the back of this, we saw strong growth in bone-in ham sales with a 10.8 per cent increase in volume sold, and a \$ sales increase of 15.2 per cent compared with the previous year.

APL have their sights set on building on these strong foundations to ensure 2021 will also record many successes for the sector. ■

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# Who will wear the Sausage King crown for 2021?

The Australian Meat Industry Council's Sausage King Competition is back with regional events kicking off this month.

With over 40 regional state competitions held throughout the year, hundreds of independent butchers Australia wide compete for the chance to participate in the ultimate sausage sizzle.

The origins of the competition date back to Western Australia in 1994. It remained an exclusive contest to WA and Victoria until 1999. The Sausage King competition had then become so popular that it expanded to all the states and a national competition was introduced.

"Our Independent local Butchers are the fresh meat specialists, and the competition is about showcasing their creative ability and efforts to make a really good product, for the public to buy, cook and enjoy," said Stuart Fuller, GM Retail, AMIC.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the spotlight was cast on the meat industry and its reliance as a key driver and essential service within the agricultural industry. This saw an increase in customers turning to their independent local butcher for advice, quality, and service which has resulted in a need for more apprentice butchers. Personalised customer service has evolved into an essential practice for independent butchers as customers are searching for new and interesting recipe inspiration.

"The competition is more than just producing a great sausage, it is foremost about supporting local business, highlighting the role of the independent butchers in local communities, and showcasing their knowledge and experience," said Stuart.



"Whether it is a sole trader in a small regional town or a larger butcher shop in a shopping center, our butchers are highly skilled tradespeople who take pride in producing a quality product.

"Due to COVID, AMIC was not able to run our regular competition program last year, so this year the interest and excitement has been high."

AMIC's competition starts with regional heats within their state, then state finals. State winners then progress through to the National Sausage King titles in February 2022 in South Australia.

There are six categories to enter including Traditional Australian Beef or Pork, Poultry, Australian Lamb, Continental, and Gourmet. Two categories within a Best Burger competition and a range of Smallgoods categories are also offered.



Judges are made up of consumers, trade experts and AMIC partners.

"To be a Sausage King winner or place getter is a prestigious title and the recognition from within the industry has been extremely worthwhile for all our butchers who have participated in the past," said Stuart.

"Customers also love providing feedback to our Members about their sausages, burgers, and smallgoods. It will be great to see the range and variety on display this year."

For more details visit [www.amic.org.au](http://www.amic.org.au) or call (02) 9086 2200 ■



# From Milk to Meat

**F**ormer South Australian dairy farmer, Rachel Llewellyn has given the old milking shed a new lease of life ... as a butchery business.

Three years ago she revived her butchery training when milk prices fell and converted a 40 year old dairy on the farm of her husband Ben and his family.

She established a highly successful butchery known around Monteith as 'the pink butcher'. Rachel employs another qualified butcher, Peter Mason who came from Murray Bridge Village Butchers, as well as apprentices Chloe and Emily – who is also Rachel and Ben's daughter.

Rachel explained: "The milk processors started to chop and change the milk prices, and it became increasingly hard to survive. At the lowest point, we were being paid 11 cents per litre; that didn't even cover the cost of feed, fertilisers, workers, or even for us to pay our own way."

They made the tough decision to sell the herd and leave dairying.

"We then had to decide what to do with the old dairy," she said. "Me being me we thought 'let's see if we can create a butcher shop'."



*Rachel Llewellyn*



*Rachel Llewellyn with surprise visitor, country signer Adam Brand.*

She got approval to convert the rundown dairy. "And away we went," she said.

"There is an abundance of different varieties of meat I put through my shop. I handle beef, chicken, pork and lamb. "On average I cut, slice and process three tonnes a week.

"Days fly by, and I forget about what I'm really doing here. It is overwhelming but has given me a chance to sit back and think 'wow I'm actually doing this'," she said. "It is a dream come true, but I work hard for it too."

"Nearly three years later, I'm pretty proud of where we are. Some days I felt like throwing the towel in, but I keep going because I love what I do."

"My customers are a wide variety. I process farmers' animals and supply bakeries, pubs, clubs, supermarkets, the fruit and vegetable shops and takeaway shops. I also offer a wholesale service," she said.

"We don't have a retail cabinet like most butchers do, my customers order with me and pick up fresh quality meats processed on the day they pick up, because fresh is best."

Rachel has been a butcher for 36 years. "You won't find a lot of female

butchers around," she said. "Years ago, the old butchers really ruled the roost, no way would they have had a female working in the shop, it was a bloke's domain, but now we are on an equal par."

She delights in passing on the trade to the young women. "It is good to see them learning something that I love doing," she said. "I like watching them have that fear in their eyes that I had when I was being taught a new job, like cutting meat with a knife for the first time or using the band saw!

"To see that fear and know that I get to teach them and watch them overcome it and grow in confidence, it is really quite a proud moment."

But in their way, the apprentices give back. "My heart is overflowing with the support I have received from my family, customers and my workers, they are my well-oiled machine, I would struggle without them," she said.

"I have no future plans to expand at this stage, but if we keep getting busier we might look at expanding." ■

# The Butcher's Cook Book

A collaboration, *The Butcher's Cook Book* is the outcome of a dream by well-respected butcher, Shannon Walker, to bring the skill and passion of Australian butchers and their favourite recipes together.

The concept of the book was to invite 50 Australian butchers to contribute two recipes, with a profile of the butchers and their shops. Essentially a crowdfunded project, each butcher receives copies of the cook book to sell within their store.

Butchers are based across the country, rural and urban, who in turn reflect the diversity of culture and demographics within their own community. Recipes include decade old classics from Australia and internationally as well as recipes that reflect the current trends of low and slow, tacos and sliders.

Shannon said that butchers handle food all day and every day, with a lot of creativity, advising their customers on the best way to cook the meal, and the main reason for producing the book was to showcase that skill.

"The enthusiasm the butchers had for the idea of the book was terrific – finding 50 butchers to take part was no problem at all," said Shannon.

"It is great to see so much variety in the recipes. We knew things like silverside would come through, but there are also a lot of modern recipes in there as well, and a range of skills needed to cook the meal. We have one meatloaf recipe that was based on a 90-year old lady's recipe that has been shared for generations, as well as meals that didn't exist ten years ago."

*The Butcher's Cook Book* will be available from April 2021, and stocked in each of the butcher shops featured, retailing at \$34.95. Published by the organisers of MeatStock, limited copies will also be available from [www.meatstock.com.au](http://www.meatstock.com.au)

See page 31 for details on how to win a copy.

## Who is Shannon Walker?

Shannon Walker has many interests in the industry, but first and foremost, he is a butcher by trade. Like many in the trade, Shannon started as a wash-up boy once he had completed a pre-apprenticeship in butchery at TAFE. A stint in a shop employing 21 butchers opened his eyes to the industry.

Not afraid of hard work, those first few weeks Shannon worked 15 hour days, making sausages with the boss. At 28, Shannon ran his own shop for four years, before selling up and heading into smallgoods sales and working with local butchers, picking up more skills for gourmet value-add. A suggestion to be a TAFE teacher led him to complete a certificate in teaching, and a further qualification as a meat inspector.

The spin-off is that now Shannon is the teacher at TAFE NSW for Game Meat Harvesting and providing butcher demonstrations to final year chefs at Le Cordon Bleu cooking school and with the Intercollegiate Meat Judging.

"The demonstrations I do are designed to show students the role butchery has in our food," said Shannon.



Shannon Walker

"For the chefs, many are not familiar with what butchers do, as the majority see their meat come into the restaurant in a carton, pre-portioned. A chef should know the butcher's name, and the butcher should know the customer is a chef.

"With the ICMJ students, we are looking at people who are interested in the science of meat, so they will ask much higher level questions such as why a burst blood vessel in a pork leg occurs."

In addition, Shannon is the butcher to low and slow restaurant and competition team, Blackbear BBQ, preparing the meats for diners, and providing demonstrations on low and slow bbq meat preparation.

Increasingly, Shannon's name has become synonymous with butcher competitions including Butcher Wars held during Meatstock, the State Invitational charity event, and in the wake of COVID, online versions, all designed to showcase the skills of butchers.

Recognising early on that there are better butchers than himself, Shannon has been a key figure in the organisation of the events.



“The first Butcher Wars that was held, we had no idea what to expect, but the crowds were in the hundreds, all cheering on the butchers while they broke down a side of lamb to produce retail ready products.

“That competition has gone from strength to strength in the past five years, and now draws butchers from around the world. When COVID hit, and Meatstock was cancelled, I did an online version, more to keep everyone connected and to have a bit of fun. It is remarkable how successful that was as well.

“Working with butchers, encouraging them to do their best, and showcasing their passions and skills is what I really love.” ■

## Intercollegiate Meat Judging Association Key Dates

**A three-day Northern Conference held in Rockhampton, Qld** for tertiary student and industry professionals working across the northern beef industry and supply chain. The northern conference is supported by Teys Australia and CQUniversity and is focused on the Northern beef production system.

**An intensive Industry Education and Development week in Brisbane Qld**, for 20 students selected at the National Conference in Wagga.

**A four-week tour of the United States of America (USA) annually** involving the top five students selected at the Brisbane Industry Education and Development week. The students tour the US red meat industry and represent Australia in numerous US meat judging competitions.

**A ten-day industry tour of Japan for young industry professionals** made up of ICMJ Alumni and personnel from companies who support ICMJ.

**Meat judging competitions for secondary school students**, held annually in Scone NSW, Wingham NSW and Gympie Qld.

**An annual five-day National Conference held in Wagga Wagga NSW** for approximately 150 tertiary students and up to 35 coaches for Australian and global institutions. The conference involves industry presentations, training and interactive workshops, sponsored dinners, professional development, a career expo attracting up to 50 companies and a two day competition.

[www.icmj.com.au](http://www.icmj.com.au) ■

## MLA's lamb ad finds favour

The annual MLA Australia Day ad annoyed purists, skewered politicians and delighted punters as it urged them to ‘Share the Lamb’.

The ad appeared on time, unlike last year, and won wide public approval.

If sales track as usual, the campaign should see around one-third more lamb being sold across the nation, both in comparison to the week preceding Australia Day and throughout the entire campaign.

The ad's early impact was measured by Luma Research, which found 59% of surveyed respondents claim to have seen it.

“People feel the ad is exciting to watch and it will get noticed,” said Luma's Georgia Phillips. “That shows that it is striking and memorable. A clever story well told.”

The 2.5-minute ad aired on the *Sunrise* program on January 11 with ‘Lambassador’ Sam Kekovich and appeared on TV, Foxtel, online video, digital, social media, and outdoor displays. A shorter 30-second version was also released.

The campaign was boosted by murals touring the country on the back of billboard trucks. The images depicted state leaders closed-eyed, jointly sharing a chop and the trucks travelled border areas – highlighting the theme's general theme of tearing down state border walls.

Entitled ‘Make Lamb, not Walls’, the ad imagined a year 2031 where border walls segregate the country and a PM is MIA in Hawaii. It was filmed in NSW's Southern Highlands in November. In the

MLA domestic market manager Graeme Yardy, said: “We wanted to make something that gets people thinking, that's really relevant but is enjoyable as well. We want to leave people with a smile on their face ... it has been a difficult year but we have a lot of things to look forward to in this country.”

Some purists questioned why no lamb was available in NSW – the country's most sheep-populous state. Others pointed to a minor snafu in the lifesaver's head gear but generally, the ad got a public thumbs-up.

Michael Klaehn, educator – communications at QUT College, said: “I'm not sure why Queensland is the only one with lamb cutlets (but) it's busy, entertaining and on the money.”

Amanda Spry, Lecturer of Marketing at RMIT, said: “This ad resonates themes that we've seen from comedians and influencers on social media regarding the Prime Minister's holiday in Hawaii and state rivalries.” ■

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# The Right Casing for the Job

**T**he humble sausage has been a mainstay of butchers worldwide – a means of preserving meats and making the most of all the cuts available, including the intestine, which becomes the sausage casing. Pork-based sausages are likely to be the most common in the past, using hog casings, but lamb and beef are also available.

For families, sausages are an easy meal, enjoyed by everyone and can be served simply with bread, sauce and

onions, or as part of classic dishes such as paella.

A way of utilising trim and secondary cuts, the sausage provides an opportunity to honour traditional recipes, or to experiment with flavour combinations. Many butchers will offer upwards of eight flavours every week plus the usual basic barbecue styles. Typically, a good sausage is 25-30% fat content. Adding pork shoulder, chicken skin, pork belly, can add the necessary fat content if the ingredients do not provide enough.

Natural casings are available in hog, sheep and beef origins in a variety of lengths and diameters, to suit a variety of sausage types, and often reflect the local availability in the region. For example, the South African sausages, while based on a beef filling, more often used sheep casings, purely on what was available. European sausages typically use hog casings.

In more recent years, synthetic casings made from collagen or cellulose, have been available giving a consistency and price point advantage for larger volumes of sausage making. Fundraising barbecues would be a typical example. Synthetic casings are generally more robust, giving a sausage that is easy to produce, less likely to tear or break, and repeatable cooking results. Natural and synthetic can be used on sausage fillers with confidence.

The choice of casing is moving beyond tradition, to demand for natural ingredients and an awareness of provenance, according to sales director, Nick van der Waal, of The Casing Boutique in Sydney.

“In the past 12 months, global consumption of sausages, and demand for casings has increased by around







*Photos Courtesy Niche One Photography*

30%, largely due to more people cooking at home,” said Nick.

“Over the last decade, as consumers are becoming increasingly aware of the various ingredients contained within their food, there has been a conscious shift by suppliers to provide increased transparency on the origin and manufacturing process and I strongly believe this should extend to the casings of the sausages.”

Natural casings, however, have variation in size, strength and thickness based on the life of the animal and health.

A sheep that has lush grass and good growth will provide the best quality, compared to an animal that has grazed extensively on poorer feed. The size will depend on the width of the carcase, and consequently will be subject to availability. With recent de-

stocking in the wake of the drought, carcase weights have been smaller, resulting in smaller casings.

The final decision on which casing to be used, is dependent on cooking styles, and in some instances the ingredients.

Manufacturing and cooking styles include boiled, smoked or dried, and then cooked on the grill or warmed through in hot water. For instance, a frankfurter is smoked in production and then heated in water to serve. In this instance, the casing needs to be able to cope with smoking and boiling.

For cured and dried sausages, Nick recommends a tougher, larger casing to reduce the risk of air pockets as the product shrinks over time. Acidic ingredients, such as chilli can also affect how the casing behaves.

### Hog Casings

- Traditionally used for European sausages and salamis
- Clear colour to allow the ingredients to be seen
- More robust than sheep casings

### Sheep Casings

- Ideal for smaller sausages
- Gives a great ‘snap’ when eaten
- Translucent to show the ingredients
- Needs more care as more easily torn

### Beef Casings

- Largest of the animal casings
- Ideal for salamis and large dried sausages
- Tend to have the strongest odour

“The most important part of using a natural casing, is the soaking process just before stuffing when you take it out of the salt,” said Nick.

“After a day outside of the salt, the casing will start to go off, so it is important to have the soaking correct. Different casings will behave differently, it needs to be soft and pliable, so I would recommend that butchers plan in advance to do it right, whether it is overnight in the fridge or soaked for a couple of hours beforehand.

“Casing has protein in it, so going from a cold temperature fridge to lukewarm water will cause problems and it can tear. Make sure to transition the water temperature is not too dramatic before stuffing.”

Ultimately, said Nick, the best sausage is made with the best quality, freshest ingredients, and that natural and synthetic casings have their place. ■

## What’s the difference between a bung and a casing?

The bung is used in a similar fashion to a casing, but is derived from the end of the intestine and referred to as the ‘cap’. Typically, the bung has a higher fat lining than the middle section of the intestine that is used for casings and are also tougher. The bungs are usually used for products such as bologna and mortadella for pork, or haggis in the case of sheep.

# Too busy, no time, no staff? Try Automation!

A common lament in many butcher shops in the past year, is that they have been busy with increased business, which is great, but a lack of staff has made it difficult to keep up.

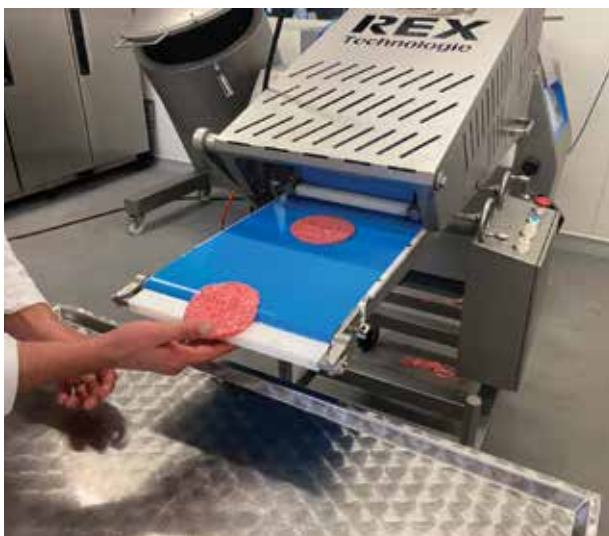
Finding staff – qualified butchers or counter service – is by no means a new phenomenon, but has been brought into sharper focus in the past 12-18 months as customers return to the butcher for their meats.

There is a solution, that provides increased efficiencies, products that are consistent and does not necessarily need a fully qualified butcher.

Automation – and not in the sense that you need production lines and conveyors, but equipment that can make the more common tasks simpler and easier to perform, with little training, which in turn frees up your qualified butcher to perform the tasks he was trained for.

Ten or fifteen years ago, it was commonplace for the butcher shop to mix the mince by hand in a tub for burgers and sausages. But with the volume of sausages now produced on a regular basis, the mince mixer is in most butcher shops. It saved time, it could mix greater volumes, and could be turned on and doing its job while staff did other tasks.

The next thing that a butcher does a lot of, would be sausages. The technology for fillers was based on a piston, literally a cylinder that was loaded up by hand and pushed through to the casing. It had the potential to create air pockets, risked tearing the casing, and was inconsistent based on who did it. And for the customer, those air pockets could burst when cooking the sausages.



Now, most butchers have taken the step with sausage fillers to a vacuum-based machine that takes out those air bubbles and provides far more consistent results. The vacuum filler can also be used with natural or synthetic casings.

“Butchers understand that the vacuum filler increases productivity – what used to be a four-hour job, can now be done in two hours,” said Andy Schurger, director at CBS Foodtech.

“It can be operated by the new apprentice, a counter person, or a senior butcher and gives the same result. Which means the qualified butchers you do have can be freed up to do the tasks where their skills are truly needed. So for businesses where they are struggling to find enough qualified butchers, the mince mixer and vacuum filler are must-haves for a butcher shop.”

Other products that can be useful as labour-saving devices include meatball and burger formers, a clipper machine for smallgoods, brine injectors and crumbing equipment for products such as schnitzels and arancini balls.

A butcher can therefore utilise a mince mixer to mix the arancini ball ingredients, put it through the vacuum filler to produce the right weight, the meatball former creates the right shape and the crumber puts it through the batter and crumbs to create a reliable and consistent product.



The brine injector can be as big or small as the butcher shop needs to inject brine into products like corned silverside, hams and bacons. With the increase in popularity of low and slow barbecue, the injectors can also be used to inject flavours into cuts such as brisket to retain moisture and add the butcher's own specialty recipe.

For larger butchers who may provide meats wholesale into hospitality, the local pie shop or aged care, dicing is also another area where using automated equipment can save time, energy and knife hands. In these examples, the cubes are at their smallest and can be time consuming.

"Working out with a butcher the returns on a dicer, is a little dependent on volume, but it does illustrate the point why automated equipment should be considered in a busy shop," said Andy.

"If the shop has four guys doing a couple of hours a day on small dicing, it is around 8 hours a day, five days a week - a total of 40 hours a week.

"Say for argument sake, you factor in wages, superannuation and other bits and pieces per staff member it comes to \$40/hour - so for a week, it costs you \$1600 per week, just to do dicing.

"A dicer can do 600kg in two hours. Add in cleaning and prep work and round it to four hours. At \$40/hour, you have done 600kg finely diced meat in four hours and it cost you \$160 for the week - 10% of what the four butchers cost.

"Most butchers will have a lease arrangement on the dicer, which is roughly \$125 a week, plus the \$160 in labour costs - round it to \$300 a week, it is still one-fifth of four butchers. You get more consistent results, the butchers aren't going numb with boredom, and they can be doing something more productive. Nor is there less repetitive knife work."

Andy said that he has heard many butchers say they can do the job, but if you had a machine that could do it, it is unlikely they would do it by hand for long.

Automation therefore, is not about long lines of robots like a car factory, but labour-saving devices that most butcher shops can consider using. Space and volume are more likely to dictate what can and can't be done, rather than the quality of the end product.

With the current government incentives for instant asset write-off, now is a good time to consider capital equipment purchases.

The pandemic has also had the added advantage of changing how butcher equipment sales are made by customers, with many demonstrations now available as videos online, and

meetings with sales reps through video calls to walk through the pro's and cons of each piece of equipment as well as training.

Now more than ever, is the time to automate your everyday butcher shop tasks to give your qualified butcher more freedom to be doing what they are trained to do. ■

## Compact Automatic Slicer - TREIF Divider StartUp

With the release of the new StartUp line, CBS Foodtech has taken up the latest slicing technology from TREIF. The Divider StartUp offers the most compact slicer in its league, with fully featured slicing options like shingle, stacking and staggered stacks all possible on the one unit. With an intuitive touch screen the operators can easily navigate to all the stored programs and make adjustments during production without any issues. The unit can be fully washed down and sanitised, offering the highest hygiene standards and disassembly all without use of specialised tools.

The unit can slice a wide range of products from cooked products like hams and bacons, to cured meats - salami and prosciutto, as well tempered fresh meats like shabu shabu. All made possible due to its patented cutting system and orbital blade. A large cutting window of 280 x 160mm and an infeed length of 600mm give this unit a wide range of application.

With its compact design and integral wheels the unit can easily be pushed in and out of production areas as required, making it a flexible allrounder for many slicing tasks.

Test it today in the CBS Foodtech R&D kitchen located in Warriewood Sydney. ■



# Camel meat's bumpy ride to retail

A leg can weigh 70kg, the shoulder is the prime cut and yes – you can eat the hump. Camel joins the ever-widening range of meats landing on the plates of Australians.

Driven by demand from immigrants from Africa and the Middle East, and fuelled by supply from inland Australia, the camel meat industry is gradually reaching city stores, but is a bumpy ride with low supply and demand.

A 2013 NT Government study valued the camel market at \$600,000 year. Some estimates claim 15,000 animals are processed annually for human consumption. The NT study said 5,000. Industry insiders say even that figure is an over-estimate.

When the meat was used on MasterChef, there was a lift in demand. Camel sirloin is currently retailing online for \$29/kg and sausages for \$13.45. Another popular market is for trim, used for home-made sausages. Camel burgers retailing through major supermarket have come and gone.

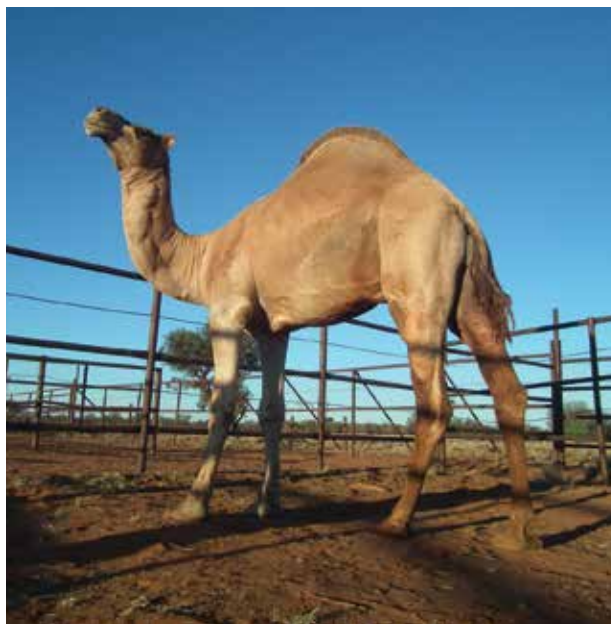
Alice Frazer of Adelaide's Something Wild said, "We see young people coming in and buying the primal cuts like porterhouse and T-bones, whereas the stewing cuts are more popular among our Middle Eastern and African customers."

The meat is rich and red and the taste is described as a cross between lamb and beef, mostly lean but with pockets of sweet, delicate fat. It is low in cholesterol and high in protein and has been approved by the Australian Heart Foundation as a healthy choice. For some cultures, the hump is the most prized cut; considered fattier and more tender than the rest of the beast – and not full of water.

Taste and tenderness depend on age, gender, condition and preparation. In some regions only young camel is eaten, mainly because there is no tradition of ageing meat. Most camel meat eaten in Australia is wild-caught, largely from South Australia and Queensland.

Recently, South Australian grain farmer Paul Blacket has diversified his successful side-business of feed-lotting bush goats by adding some camels.

Driven by requests from the butcher shops and restaurants that take his goat meat, Paul acquired 30 feral camels from near Alice Springs and brought them to the family farm near Mallala, 70km north of Adelaide.



"I thought alright, let's give this a go, let's bring down a truckload and see how they perform," he said. "They were pretty intimidating at first," Mr Blacket said. "You're talking 500 kilograms of beast standing in the yards together, looking at us like we're the weird ones."

He has been feeding them a mix of pea and barley hay before sending them to a local abattoir. The meat is sold domestically.

"They're a big animal with a lot of meat on them. If we can take advantage of that commodity rather than just culling and wasting it, it could be a good move on both ends of the supply chain," he said.

To meet the ethnic market the camel meat must be halal-processed. There are abattoirs at Wamboden, 40km north of near Alice Springs. Other abattoirs that have operated camel lines are at Caboolture in Queensland and Peterborough in South Australia. The meat is boxed and sold by wholesalers to domestic and international markets.

South Australia's Windy Hills Export Meats manager Ivan Coulter says export-driven demand is huge. "If we were to supply all the camel markets throughout the world — including the Middle East, USA, Canada, Sweden, West Africa — there wouldn't be one live camel left after one year," he said.

Townsville-based camel industry veteran Paddy McHugh agrees. "In the last five years I have received literally thousands of enquiries from numerous countries for camel meat," he said. "When I say meat, I am talking hundreds of tonnes required to fill orders. It's huge, it's International and mostly Islamic.

"Australia has only one export licensed abattoir and they have a set contract and really can't take any more orders.

"The current status is in a mess and all levels of government don't want to develop the meat industry."



He wants to see more abattoirs at Alice Springs and Kalgoorlie. “They would be close to the wild animal supply chain, access to staff, water, roads, electricity and government inspectors. They should be micro facilities, multi-species, tier 1, halal and expandable to suit demand,” he said.

A major exporter is Samex, while domestic distributors are smaller-scale, including NSW’s Alpine Game Meat and Yarra Valley Game Meats in Victoria.

John Philp from WA’s Mahogany Creek said: “It’s unavailable ... it’s not something that’s asked for at present. In time the demand will return, it’s just not there now.”

A major efficiency barrier is the halal requirement that only male animals are slaughtered. NT slaughter regulations only bar recently calved and pregnant females.

Camels are generally processed at between 3-10 years old and from 400 to 600kg liveweight. They are subject to dark-cutting meat under stress and dress better if they have been handled carefully prior to slaughter.

When the bulls are in rut, they have a concentrated body odour which taints the meat.

The possibility of using the flesh for pet meat is dented by

risks are associated with indospicine, a plant-derived toxin that accumulates in the tissue of camels and can kill dogs.

It is estimated that Australia’s wild camel population totals more than 1 million feral animals. They are deemed a pest that destroys native landscapes.

In early 2020, an official five-day cull in South Australia claimed more than 5,000 animals – sparking revulsion in some Middle East countries. A Turkish government spokesman officially reprimanded Australia and the president of the Central Council of the Turkish Veterinary Association, Ali Ero lu described the cull as ‘savage’ and ‘incompatible with humanity’.

Mustering, trapping and selling camels is undertaken by Indigenous groups in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands. But freight costs are high, as are the costs of rounding up wild animals.

“Camels may be commercially harvested over relatively large areas for meat, but it is difficult to harvest all camels and not all camels are of commercial quality,” said NT researcher Glenn Edwards.

APY general manager Richard King calls the camel meat industry a ‘false economy’. “The economic returns are just not there – it’s not a viable industry at all,” he said.

Nevertheless, Australia is exporting to Egypt, Libya, Saudi Arabia, USA, Canada, Europe, East Africa and Asia. For a while the Peterborough abattoir was supplying the Moroccan army.

There has been consideration of a live animal export business. In 2014 an MLA cost benefit analysis concluded the industry offered high risks and modest returns. It found that average prices are around US\$400/head while Australia’s cost of supply would be between US\$1,000 and US\$1,500/head.

However, Paddy McHugh is sceptical. “I get five inquiries per week for anything from 3,000 live camels to 30 tonnes of meat and over the past five years no more than 400 camels have left the country.

“Live export for meat purposes will never happen out of Australia, deck heights are too low, camels are difficult to load and don’t travel on ships too well plus supply out of the African region is cheaper and easier to obtain.

“Nothing much will change until government gets on board and backs the industry. There is a very strong movement in certain departments to treat them solely as a feral animal and slaughter them to rot on the ground, which is very sad indeed.” ■

## Camel cooking tips

Alpine Game Meats Ewan McEwen offers these camel-cooking tips:

- Don’t overcook it. Camel is low in fat and is best served medium-rare.
- Use a hot pan
- Bring the meat to room temperature before cooking it. Oil the meat, not the pan,
- When grilling, barbecuing or pan-frying steaks, first brush each side of the meat with a little oil, before searing the steaks for 4-6 minutes on each side. Then rest for 5 minutes covered on a warm plate or in a low oven.
- When roasting larger cuts, first sear all sides of the meat to seal in the juices. A lot of roasting recipes for camel has camel done in an oven with water or as a pot roast to keep it moist. After cooking, let your camel rest, covered, for 5-10 minutes to allow the juices to evenly disperse.



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# Complications in export trading scene to continue

By Stephanie Flynn

**T**he export market landscape has changed dramatically over the last year but, despite the global chaos, Australia is now in a more balanced and protected export position than it was a year ago when China dominated our beef exports.

It is a complicated export scene globally with the EU/UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement coming into force in January, a change of Administration in the upheaval ravaged United States and political tensions running high between Australia and China.

As COVID-19 vaccines continue being rolled-out around the world, economic stimulus is wound back globally and limited supplies continue this year in Australia, there will be set-backs and challenges for the meat industry.

But there is great hope and opportunity for the nation's protein exporters both within our major markets and, as we look to the future, in our local region as developing South East Asian nations become the powerhouses for economic growth.

In an interview with *Australian Meat News* Rabobank's Senior Animal Protein Analyst, Angus Gidley-Baird, explains the intricacies in the global trading environment, where we are now and the opportunities which abound for the nation's meat exporters as 2021 progresses.

## United Kingdom and European Union

Billed by the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, Mr Boris Johnson, as a 'jumbo' Free Trade deal, the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement came into force provisionally on 1 January 2021, four years after the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU) in a Referendum in 2016.

According to an announcement by the President of the European Commission, Ms Ursula von der Leyen, the Agreement provides for zero tariffs and zero quotas on all goods that comply with the appropriate rules of origin between the UK and the 27-member EU states.

Both the UK Parliament and the European Parliament are expected to consent to the Agreement in the first quarter of this year after which time the deal will be signed.

But the intricacies of the deal for countries like Australia wanting to access export opportunities in the now two separate trading markets are hidden in the detail as Mr Gidley Baird explains.

"At the present time, my understanding is that the quota that

existed for the EU-28 will now be apportioned between the 27 countries remaining in the EU and the UK.

"It is based on an apportioning of volumes that had been imported by the UK and by Europe over the last three years.

"For Australia it means that for beef, we have a country specific quota for high quality beef which is 7,150 tonnes which was the quota into Europe so, based on the average of the last three years, 65 percent of that volume will be allocated to the UK and 35 percent to Europe.

"But we also supply into a global quota as well and that quota, based on volumes over the last three years, has a much higher volume going into Europe and it is this aspect that leads me to anticipate that there will be minimal change for our beef exports to these markets at the moment.

"The Australian Government is in the process of negotiating Free Trade Agreements with both the UK and the EU the terms of which, if favourable, could see increased access for our exporters in the future," Mr Gidley-Baird said.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade commenced negotiations on the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement in 2018 and the Australia-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement last year, with both currently classified as being in the early stages of negotiations.

According to Mr Gidley-Baird, our competitiveness compared to the United States (US) and South American countries is a factor that may challenge exports to the European market given the current high livestock prices and the value of the Australian dollar against other currencies which means processors will face a big hit on margins over the 2021 year.

But he sees Europe as a very developed market in terms of consumption and not offering the same kind of growth that is available in South East Asian markets and China.

Rabobank data shows that that only 8,525 tonnes of our beef was exported to the EU last year, representing only one percent of our total export volumes.

Despite much publicised claims that Australia had narrowed its trade focus to one major market, the reality is that according to Rabobank Japan accounted for 26 percent of our beef exports last year, while the United States took 20 percent, China 19 percent and the Republic of South Korea 15 percent.

Mr Gidley-Baird is of the view that these figures show a good spread of big markets and there are different segments

*continued on page 22*

*continued from page 21*

within each of these markets. The US likes lean grinding beef, Japan and South Korea like more grain-fed product and China is a developing market with much growth potential ahead.

One of the major threats to Australia's meat exports, however, is the winding back of COVID-19 stimulus packages globally which will mean less disposable income for consumers and less demand in the high-end food service sector which has been decimated in the wake of the closure of economies and tourism as a means of controlling the spread of COVID-19.

## China

Mr Gidley-Baird said that Australia reached its safe guard measure, based on volume, under the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement midway through last year and, as a result, reverted to 'most favoured nation' status eroding our Tariff advantage which, along with lower supplies and higher prices, caused the slowing beef trade with China.

Six Australian beef and two sheep meat processors have had their export licenses suspended for a range of factors including issues around labelling, chemical residue in some products and in Victoria due to COVID-19 outbreaks among plant workers, a move China took with processors globally as outbreaks occurred.

Nevertheless, Mr Gidley-Baird said that trade tensions are the most likely factor in the delay in the reassessment by China of Australian processors given that other processors globally are being reappraised.

Rabobank expects that trade tensions between China and the US as well as between China and Australia will continue to hit the meat industry hard in 2021 but Mr Gidley-Baird says that there are still massive opportunities ahead for Australian exporters.

"What has been interesting and will continue to be so is the mix of product going into China. We used to send a lot of forequarter cuts into that market, but they are now picking up on ground beef with increased westernisation as well as the very premium Wagyu and highly marbled beef," Mr Gidley-Baird said.

"While our overall beef exports to China dropped last year, our chilled exports actually increased nine per cent in volume terms.

"COVID-19 and African Swine Fever (ASF) have changed beef consumption in China and we have seen as a result increased consumption of beef, most notably at home, which was not something that was there before with our estimates having been that at least 60 percent of beef was consumed out of home.

"This provides a real opportunity for beef suppliers because if the Chinese consumer continues to eat beef at home, which Rabobank analysts there anticipate, it is a massive

market for chilled beef going into the retail space," he said.

Mr Gidley-Baird highlighted some key factors that will impact the Chinese market for Australian exporters in the year ahead.

US beef exports to China started to pick-up in the second half of last year, while still small compared to Argentina, Brazil and Australia, if this continues it will mean that they will become a bigger player in the Chinese market, meaning we will face increasing competitive pressure than previously encountered.

China is now overcoming ASF with its pig herd and production increasing, driven by larger commercial operators with biosecurity procedures.

"This will mean that China will take its foot off the accelerator in terms of their need for imported protein," Mr Gidley Baird said.

"Consumers will trend back toward pork as the prices come down, but we do not believe it will revert back to 2018 levels but, in our view, there has now been enough impetus to push those consumers into other protein spaces with the major beneficiaries being beef and chicken," he said.

## United States

Rabobank data suggests that half of Australian beef exports to the United States has been going into the food service sector but this market segment, particularly the dine-in restaurants, has been decimated due to COVID-19 and is anticipated to continue to be so in 2021.

Nevertheless, Mr Gidley-Baird anticipates beef exports to hold-up well during the year ahead.

"Although we have had high exposure to the downturn in the US, we have also been very fortunate to have had the capacity to pivot our exports," Mr Gidley-Baird said.

"If you think of the US market for Australia as a manufacturing beef or ground beef market going into quick service restaurants, it actually means that we are less exposed to that drop in dine-in restaurant sales.

"Furthermore, contracting economic conditions also supports quick service restaurant sales. Consumers still want to have a beef meal, but they have been going out and buying a burger because it is at a lower price point.

"In fact, we have actually seen, through the course of 2020, quick service restaurants perform quite well," he said.

There is evidence to support this contention. In releasing its financial results to investors for the third quarter of last year, McDonalds said that sales continued to improve globally through 2020 with positive comparable sales of 4.6 percent in the US driven by what it terms the three D's – Digital, Delivery and Drive-through – which compares to 4.8 percent for the same period in 2019.



Comparable sales for the fourth quarter 2020 in the US rose further to 5.5%.

There is, however, a caution according to Mr Gidley-Baird, the challenge for Australia in 2021 is that we have had rain here which means farmers are not wanting to sell old cattle now and this will limit the volumes of product that will be available to send into that market and what we can supply will be expensive.

## Asean

As we head into 2021 and beyond the growth potential of the ten ASEAN nations and their importance to Australian protein exporters cannot be overestimated.

Global online market data company, Statista, estimated that in 2019 the total GDP of all ASEAN nations amounted to the equivalent of US\$9.34 trillion, a growth trend that has been evident since 2010, and continued to maintain its GDP levels in 2020 despite the global economic situation.

Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam have exhibited the highest growth rates.

Although at the present time the combined market is for lower value product, Mr Gidley-Baird said they are an increasingly important market for Australia's protein industries.

"Our data suggest that South East Asian nations, grouping them together, account for 10 percent of our export volume so this means it is our fifth largest market in terms of volume," Mr Gidley-Baird said.

"We are well placed to take advantage of the developing region, we are geographically close, we are almost in the same time zones and travel distances are minimal, in my view we would be crazy not to develop those relationships further.

"A lot of these South East Asian nations, although they will not follow the same growth trajectory as China, are coming off low bases for per capita consumption and wealth per capita, which all means there is good potential for growth in the years ahead, particularly compared to developed markets.

"Vietnam is a strong country, and we believe will recover faster than some of the other countries because they have good domestic wealth generation ability whereas Indonesia, for example, relies more on trade and tourism.

"It is in our best interests to nurture these relationships now as it will be a region that will become very competitive, we know our US counterparts consider it to be a big opportunity and Brazil has access already in Indonesia and is trying to get access into other ASEAN nations as well," he said. ■

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# New regional trade agreement announced

By Stephanie Flynn

After eight years in negotiation, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) was signed in November last year by Australia and 14 other Indo-Pacific nations heralding a Free Trade Agreement that will allow tariff-free trading within a region that represents 30 percent of the world's population.

According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the 15 participating countries make-up 29 percent of world GDP and includes nine of Australia's top 15 trading partners accounting for 67 percent of the nation's exports.

Participating countries include the ten ASEAN nations – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – as well as China, Japan, New Zealand and the republic of Korea.

India, although involved in negotiations, did not become a party to the Agreement but has an opportunity to do so at a later stage.

Australia already has individual Free-trade Agreements (FTAs) with eight

of the participating countries as well as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) covering a further three which means that exporters will need to identify the benefits under each Agreement before nominating the one under which to trade.

The outcomes of the RCEP for trade in goods include an immediate duty-free access to participating countries for 89 percent of current Australian exports rising to 94 percent of current exports when fully implemented.

Exporters will continue to have access to existing FTAs including where they are deemed to be more favourable.

According to Australian Senator Simon Birmingham, Minister for Trade, the RCEP is the world's largest free-trade agreement and will improve export opportunities for Australian farmers and businesses.

"This deal will further integrate Australian exporters into a booming part of the globe, with RCEP countries making up nearly 30 percent of world GDP and the world's population," Minister Birmingham said.

"This agreement covers the fastest growing region in the world and, as RCEP economies continue to develop and their middle classes grow, it will open up new doors for Australian farmers, businesses and investors.

"Greater openness within our region, as well as the greater integration of value chains and more common rules of origin which this deal delivers, will make it easier for Australian businesses and investors to operate throughout our region helping Australia to continue to grow our exports," he said.

The RCEP will provide a single set of rules and procedures for accessing preferential tariffs across the region which means that Australian exporters, trading with multiple countries party to the agreement, will only need to comply with one set of rules and procedures.

RCEP will reduce FTA Rules of Origin compliance burdens and will also provide businesses with greater choice in how they meet origin documentation requirements.

An agreed set of regional rules of origin negotiated under the RCEP will allow inputs from the most efficient and cost-effective regional source while supporting access to preferential tariff treatments.

Certificate of Origin arrangements familiar to Australian businesses will be maintained and options for the use of self-declaration expanded, with scope for proof of origin to be accepted in electronic format.

The RCEP also offers improved mechanisms for tackling non-tariff barriers in customs procedures, quarantine and technical standards. ■





# Australia's protein exporters will face toughest year in history

By Stephanie Flynn

In welcoming the announcement of the new Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP), Mr Patrick Hutchinson, Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) said that while the Agreement was an achievement, the protein industry needed diversification of markets for value, not only volume and non-tariff barriers to trade needed particular attention.

According to Mr Hutchinson, 2020 saw the Australian meat industry perform very well on high value protein exports, including to China, despite political tensions and a misconception that the nation has focused too heavily on one market.

But, he believes, the industry will face the toughest year in its history in 2021 as it is hit by a confluence of factors creating the 'perfect storm'.

Mr Hutchinson spoke with *Australian Meat News* about the export landscape and the current 'state of the nation' regarding the industry's challenges.

"The RCEP will be advantageous for a number of other industries, but for the protein industries there will be limited additional benefits at an export level because we already have a range of Free Trade Agreements in place under which we are already trading with all the participating countries," Mr Hutchinson said.

"Certainly, had India agreed to participate it would have been advantageous for Australia's sheep meat and goat meat sectors, but India's need to protect its domestic farmers prevented it from entering the RCEP, but it is promising that the door has been left open for the future.

"Nevertheless, from an overall country relationship perspective, it is a positive thing but how it will help with relations with China is the big question," he said.

Mr Hutchinson emphasised that China continued to play a key role in underpinning the value of Australia's beef exports



*AMIC's Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Hutchinson*

throughout 2020, despite reports to the contrary, by placing a value on the products like bone that can be ground for fertiliser as well as the high-end meat cuts like Wagyu tenderloins.

It is the breakdown of exports that offers the Australian industry much to be noted for the year ahead.

According to AMIC's data, mainland China took close to 200,000 tonnes of beef in the 2020 calendar year and while that was a 34 percent decline on the 2019 calendar year, it remains the second highest export volume on record to China.

While beef exports to China were down 15 percent, year on year in total, chilled beef only declined two percent on 2019 export levels, but frozen product suffered a 40 percent drop.

Lamb exports to China were only down 10 percent while mutton exports were decreased 30 percent, but it is still the second highest year on record.

"We need to take a deep breath and look at all these factors, we achieved the second highest year on record in terms of exports to mainland China even when we had four major beef processors out of the market since May last year and two major sheep meat processors out of the market since September," Mr Hutchinson said.

"It is the current political tensions between Australia and China, not demand, that are preventing those processors having the suspension on their licenses lifted which means countries like the United States are taking up that space, so the key message is that as an industry we need the

*continued on page 26*

*continued from page 25*

Government to focus on trade normalisation between our two nations,” he said.

Interestingly, the decline in frozen commodity exports was mirrored in other major markets such as the United States, where a 20 percent decrease was recorded and, also, Indonesia where there was a decline of 17 percent compared to 2019.

Similarly, chilled product continued to hold up not only to China, but also to Japan which has now taken back its position as Australia’s largest beef export market.

Australia’s stronghold on high-end markets for retail is among the factors credited with supporting chilled protein exports.

But it is not only a decrease in demand for frozen protein commodities that the industry has had to face, but there is also a confluence of factors that have and will continue to challenge our nation’s protein export sector over the coming year.

“We have a lack of supply on the back of the current phase of herd rebuilding after a major drought, we have the political

impacts with China, we have, globally, entire nations impacted by COVID which affects both supply chains and demand and we have a very high value on the Australian dollar,” Mr Hutchinson said.

“Domestically, we also have a major impact on capacity of the processing sector due to a shortage of workers normally underpinned by international workers through different Visa classes, so if you consider that any one of these factors in isolation can have a major impact on the industry, in combination, it is unprecedented, and the industry is having to start taking drastic action in response to survive.

“We are aware of at least two processors which normally process commodity lines that are having to rethink what they do because of the dramatic reduction in demand, however, quality lines have only reduced slightly.

“One of the strategies being pursued by the sector is retooling to tackle more quality lines so it could be about value not volume, particularly given that in 2019 we were the third highest exporter in volume on beef, but we were the highest in value,” he said.

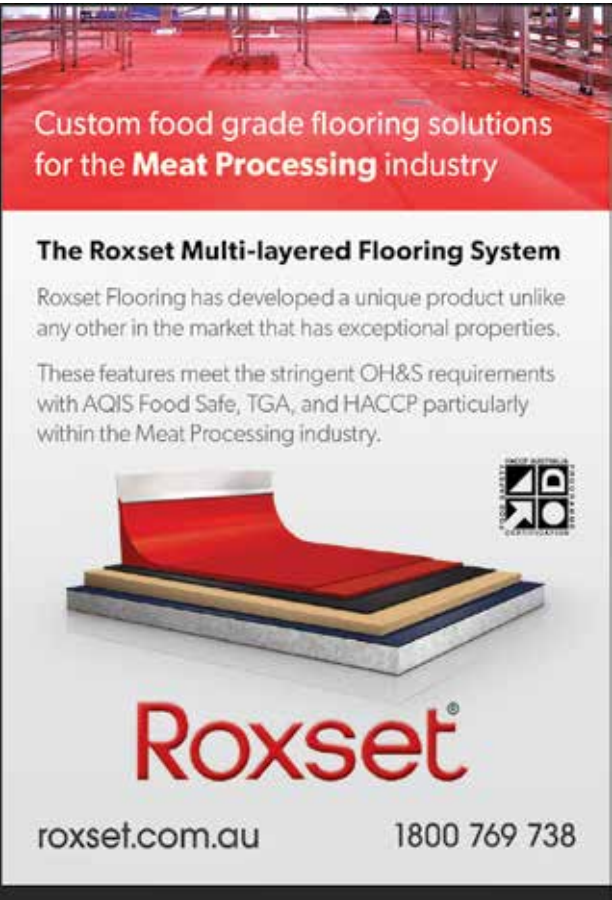
Mr Hutchinson reiterated AMIC’s role in managing policy requirements around the issues of trading conditions globally through Government liaison and it is a role he says the organisation is actively engaged.

Continued discussions are also taking place around non-tariff barriers to trade which include matters such as scientific technical differences in major markets, packaging, labelling and testing requirements both here and in market and shelf-life.

“A good proportion of these non-tariff barriers can be viewed as ‘protectionist’ and are often implemented to meet requirements of consumers and consumers’ views within our export markets,” Mr Hutchinson said.

“In some circumstances these issues can be managed in dialogue between Governments, in other cases it is about other countries setting tolerances that are different to ours. These issues are regulator to regulator based, and a number are scientific.

“Non-tariff barriers of this nature cost our industry four billion dollars in lost opportunities. In trade, Free Trade Agreements are not the only ‘piece of the puzzle’, it includes other issues such as management of these barriers and we really need to see progression on these to unlock the immense potential for our protein exports,” he said. ■



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As if 2020 did not bring us enough stress, pressure, and heartbreak, Hydro Innovations received a call from a Food Processor one night, at the most hectic time – his surface aerator had broken down!!

As you can well imagine, this food processor was in dire need of a reliable and efficient replacement system and FAST.

The food processor had heard of bank mounted Aerators, and was keen to hear more about how effective they could be and how much simpler the maintenance would be, so he would not have to experience this disastrous situation again. He also wanted to know if the bank mounted aerator could be retrofitted to replace his existing surface aerator easily?

We at Hydro were able to explain to him the benefits of the Venturi Aerator, a bank mounted aerator, and pin point the exact model to fill his requirements. The benefit of the Ventura Aerator over a surface aerator, is that the equipment is mounted on the bank of the lagoon. This makes maintenance and servicing simple and easy, which in turn means the equipment is more likely to be regularly serviced and have a longer life span than aerators which are difficult to access. The Venturi Aerator does not need any special equipment or certifications for servicing and maintenance.

Not only was this food processor happy with the pump and price, he was thrilled that Hydro could get the system to him and his problem solved in less than four weeks, including transporting from East Coast to WA.

Hydro Innovations keep a wide range of products in stock, which was also instrumental in solving this problem effectively and quickly, even during the 2020 pandemic.

Flow rate for this pump is 10l/s @2840rpm ■



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# Price Taker, Price Giver, who is in the box seat?

In many industries, each member of the supply chain would know what the purchase price will be, and aim for a specific sell price, thereby giving the business profit and loss estimates months in advance and the ability to plan.

Agriculture, on the whole is subjected to a wide range of cost variables, many of which are not easily controlled – such as the weather.

Drought, floods and fire make for poor growing conditions. Crops may fail and the farmer and or the feedlot needs to seek alternatives. The price of meat production can therefore vary from year to year.

Add in a pandemic, limited workforce and international trade pressures, and the industry is in what Patrick Hutchinson, CEO of AMIC calls, ‘a perfect storm’.

For the past few years, many areas of Australia were in severe climatic conditions, with many sending cattle earlier than

normal to the sale yards. The breeding cattle were kept, but only if conditions were within acceptable limits for cows and calves. As a consequence, the levels of stock on farm in 2020 were at the lowest levels for years.

With the return of rain, many farmers are now looking to hang onto their stock with the view to rebuilding the herds.

Domestic demand in the interim has continued to increase, despite the pandemic, due in part to more stay-at-home meals, or restaurants offering take away or delivery services – especially at the budget-end of the hospitality industry.

For butchers, that converts to wholesale prices that continue to put pressure on a shop, and not always in a predictable fashion.

For farmers and processors, the Eastern Young Cattle Indicator (EYCI) provides an indication of cattle (and sheep)

## Trial review reveals price skew

A recent South Australian study has shown that although beef processors benefit from high-quality carcasses, they do little to reward producers for higher-yielding carcasses.

The study found greater processor benefit from carcasses with greater lean meat yield and eating quality, while current grids rewarded producers for optimum weight and fat.

Researchers at the University of Adelaide’s School of Animal and Veterinary Sciences re-analysed an old bone-out trial of 153 crossbred carcasses and found measurement of yield accounted for up to 63% of the variation in retail value beyond that accounted for by MSA grading, when price was calculated based on yield and eating quality.

They calculated the value of the carcasses after being boned-out to record saleable meat yield. They then compared how six pricing mechanisms determined variation in meat yield and predicted eating quality.

The scientists used six methods to calculate carcass price value, expressed as \$/kg. All methods were adjusted to the same average dollar carcass value to standardise the comparisons.

Lead researcher Professor Wayne Pitchford explained: “We assumed that the overall payment did not change, but instead compared the effects of greater premiums and discounts.”

The prices were based on a commercial grid; grid-plus-eating quality premium; yield of saleable meat only (constant price for all saleable meat); yield-with-eating quality premium; then the yield prices with optimum weight and fatness penalties, based on grid optimums.

The study found that measurements of meat quality (marble score) or saleable meat (eye muscle area) yield accounted for no variation in the grid price.

“However, measurement of yield accounted for substantial variation in prices calculated from yield and eating quality,” Prof Pitchford said.

The scientists, from the University’s Davies Livestock Research Centre at its Roseworthy campus, suggest that an actual carcass yield measurement would help guide processing decisions to maximise carcass value. “It would also help direct optimal cutting plans,” Prof Pitchford said.

“Also, the introduction of yield measurement would feed market signals back to beef producers which carcasses have higher meat yield given that eating quality is already graded by MSA.

“The implications of this study suggest that, assuming that yield and eating quality are important to processors, improved measurement of meat yield is required if carcass prices are to reflect carcass quality or the potential value captured.”





prices on a price per kilo basis. Mostly commodity beef, it still gives insight into the trends – including stocking levels.

Most butchers will hold their prices steady and attempt to ride out the storm, but recently that has become increasingly difficult. Breaking down bodies in-house certainly helps to reduce product costs, but brings the added problem of moving all the cuts.

One butcher *AMN* spoke to said that prices from wholesalers is a day-to-day proposition. When cuts are in short supply, the price can increase dramatically making it more challenging to compete with supermarkets who are able to VARY prices across the full product range of foods, drinks and groceries to compensate.

Another commented that as hospitality recovered, particularly for overseas markets, premium cuts were increasingly difficult to source, as more and more is exported to attract the higher sell prices.

Taking one step back along the supply chain, wholesalers are feeling the rapidly changing market environment as well.

What if there was a ready method of assessing carcass prices at the time of slaughter so that butchers could plan pricing for the forthcoming month?

Currently pricing can be based on a purely commercial basis with basic points of assessment (dentition, fat, liveweight), yield AND eating quality, or a contractual assessment agreed upon between the producer and the processor (or perhaps the feedlot). Ultimately, this means that deriving a price for the butcher is not a simple exercise. And in recent years, the indicative value or price trends for a beef carcass has not been readily available in the way that EYCI is available for cattle.

A comment from a prominent Melbourne wholesaler was that pricing is dependent on who has the upper hand. If the processor needs to offload meat, the wholesaler (and butcher) has an opportunity to strike a better deal. Conversely, if cuts are scarce and demand is high, the processor can potentially call the shots.

The reduced stock numbers, and the losses currently experience by processors (around \$300 per head in February), processors are faced with selling product into the domestic market due to the international trade barriers, which means the wholesaler is paying that higher price and risking holding onto stock for too long, and the market price changing in the meantime.

With a limited level of meat consumption in Australia, the market may reach saturation point which puts pressure on the cut price. This wave of high price, low volumes, followed by increased volumes which inevitability drives the cut price down tends to be cyclical. The market in Australia is the most attractive at the moment compared to overseas, for many processors it is the best option, which is not a common occurrence. Premium beef cuts and Wagyu is under supplied in the domestic market, and continues to hold firm on cut price, according to the wholesaler. He also added that rump is particularly difficult to shift, while striploins are moving. Rump is often exported, but is currently being retained in Australia, creating a glut.

Some analysts suggest that the high prices at the saleyard can't be sustained and that the price may come down around May.

In the meantime, while there is a continued push for more price transparency at cut/price grid level, butchers will need to do their best to keep ahead and hope the analysts are right about the pricing.

Tips from the trade:

- Bone out wherever you can – including chickens
- Look for opportunities to have quick sales to promote and move product
- Don't buy what you can't sell – know what your customers want
- Utilise social media to build shop loyalty – its basically free
- Avoid wastage by using it in value-add products
- Shop around with the wholesalers to get the best deal – and keep them honest! ■

# FIND A WORD

MARCH  
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Enter the competition to win one **Khabin** 10inch Cimetar Steak Knife & 12inch Steel. And one of five **Khabin** 6inch Granton-edge Boning Knives.

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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 15 April 2021**

Last issues winners and answers, see page 31



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## BOOK COMPETITION WINNER

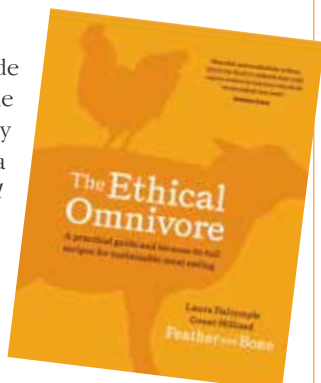
Congratulations to Jade Dean, who is part of the team at Ladbrooks Butchery in Roma. Jade has won a copy of: *The Ethical Omnivore*, by Laura Dalrymple and Grant Hilliard.

Jade submitted a correct entry to the question:

*How many Sausage Sizzles are run by community groups in Australia per year? And what percentage of CEO roles in the meat industry are held by women?*

Answers 40,000 Sausage Sizzles and 5% of meat industry CEOs are women. And Jade was lucky enough to be selected by the random number generator in our computer.

Jade Dean and her mother Marion Kadel work part-time at Ladbrooks. They describe their function as the "admin ladies". Congratulations Jade.



## WIN WIN

To enter our competition to win: *The Butcher's Cook Book* (RRP \$34.95)

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Book Competition

By post: PO Box 415  
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Email: [athol@ausmeatnews.com.au](mailto:athol@ausmeatnews.com.au)

Question: *what type of casing is traditionally used for a European sausage.*

**Entries Close 15 April 2021**



## Winners November 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

**Ken Simpson**, My Butcher, Gympie Qld

### Victory Narrow Curved Boning Knife

**Ben Freeman**, Barraba Beef, Barraba NSW

**Jesse Obst**, Baleen Filters, Torrensville SA

**Andy Marks**, Cactus Bore, Swan Reach SA

**Mark Port**, Marbled Meats, Bentleigh Vic

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