

MBL, Australia's last surviving butchers' Co-operative, was hamstrung by an out-dated business model and a single out-dated rendering plant until a new-look Board cleared the way for Warren McLean to modernise the century-old business. With April 18 marking Warren's 10th year at the helm, we look at MBL's essential evolution into a modern business working at a high standard.



Warren McLean (left) and Bruce Carter pictured in 2013 checking plans for MBL's big move to Athol Park.

10 CRUCIAL YEARS FOR YOUR MBL

When Warren McLean took charge at MBL in 2008, the merchandise division was at Kilburn in a building that was years past its use-by date and we made pig and chook feed in a single proteins conversion plant at Wingfield.

Today the merchandise division occupies a modern, spacious warehouse and office complex at Athol Park, and we operate modern and efficient protein conversion plants on two sites, at Wingfield and Keith, producing quality assured pet food ingredients & tallow and oils for export all over the world.

The changes, essential for the Co-op's survival, have been massive and relatively fast paced. MBL's turnover has more than doubled

from about \$30 million in 2008 to at least \$70 million this year, securing our future.

"Although we had an out-dated plant and an out-dated business model, we had a very solid foundation built by Bruce Carter and his team over his 17 years in charge," says Warren, MBL's first CEO after initially being appointed as General Manager.

"When Bruce took over in 1991, the Co-op had some serious operational challenges, which were addressed to prolong the life of the business, but MBL was never quite in a position to take the next steps.

Continued page 4

Pork's value rising

Pork has experienced a 5.7% value increase in the past 12 months, according to new national research.

Nielson Research says the increase coincided with Australian Pork running its 6-2-2 marketing campaign to educate consumers on how to cook pork perfectly.

Throughout the measured time period, 50% of pork sold was on promotion, up from the 42.5% purchased on promotion in the previous 12 months.

The new research confirmed what butchers know - chicken increasingly dominates total meat sales ahead of pork, beef and lamb.

However, Nielsen says while lamb is fourth in the pecking order, consumers continue to respond well to lamb promotion, led by the Australia Day campaign.

Making fritz iconic



Big seller... Barossa Fine Foods' fritz photographed at Golden Grove Butchers, Surrey Downs.

An appellation process may be applied to the making of fritz as part of an official move to have it officially recognised as a South Australian food icon.

AMIC is looking for fritz to be added to the National Trust's State Heritage Icon List which includes products such as Balfours Frog Cakes, Menz Fruchocs, Farmers Union Iced Coffee and Coopers' Pale Ale.

As part of the process to attain icon status, industry-agreed appellation standards may be introduced to guarantee the authenticity of fritz.

These new manufacturing standards, designed to ensure quality, would need to be met for the product to be called fritz.

AMIC's Paul Sandercock floated the concept at the Active Forum Exchange in March and is seeking the view of fritz manufacturers.

"We'd need to gain consensus about any new standards. It may be seen as a good idea or it may not," says Paul, who sees merit in aspects of the appellation process for sparkling wine made in Champagne, France.

New standards would likely cover percentages of the different types of meat used and the orange colour of the bung casing to guarantee the overall quality and appearance.

"This does not mean that all fritz should be made the same way. Makers would retain flexibility to

allow for their particular fritz to taste different," Paul says.

"For instance, they'd be allowed to use their own amount of pepper or other spices, like nutmeg, to give their fritz a slight difference."

The move to officially make fritz iconic stems from poor results in the fritz section of AMIC's state-wide smallgoods competition, held annually in conjunction with Sausage King.

The competition is points based but for several years in the recent past, no entrants accumulated enough points to win a gold medal, meaning either the fritz simply wasn't good enough (or the judges were too tough).

"This was not a good look for a State that prides itself on fritz, and we looked at ideas to raise the standard," Paul says.

The idea was born to set an appellation process as part of a push to make fritz iconic, which in itself would be valuable in a promotional sense.

The practice of kind butchers offering a slice of fritz to children is a South Australian tradition, fondly cherished by generation after generation.

It's a tradition that many independent butchers keenly keep alive - a simple gesture which reflects personal service and attention to detail.

Next issue of MBL News: how fritz makers are responding to the AMIC plan.

MBL NEWS

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AMIC's Paul Sandercock retires – pages 8-9



SKARA'S SOARING

Business is booming for Skara Smallgoods, with production tripling over the past 18 months due to supermarkets wanting to identify with South Australian products.

"It's just gone huge," says founder Anthony Skara who, with wife Deanna, began from scratch by selling his Croatian-influenced smallgoods at farmers markets.

"Every supermarket in SA, from the independents to the big chains, has backed us. They want to see more local products on their shelves, so the timing for us has been right.

"The huge increase in business has seen our staff number increase."

From producing seven products 10 years ago, the business now supplies 20 retail and 20 wholesale lines under two brands, Skara and Adelaide Hills Fine Foods.

"Some growth has been from increasing our product lines but we've tried to be careful not to over extend our range," Anthony says.

"Our Adelaide Hills brand, which is mainly for bulk deli and food service customers, has had the biggest growth."

The rise in production followed Anthony's decision to close his two retail outlets – a

shop at the Skara factory at Totness, between Hahndorf and Mt Barker, and a second shop at Croydon.

The factory shop area created more space for production but Anthony essentially quit retail so he could fully concentrate on meeting increasing wholesale demand.

"You need to separate your retail and wholesale markets; you really need to be one or the other," he says.

"We looked at our business inside out before making the decision (to close the

shops). We had to make the hard decision for the business to move forward."

He says since the closure of the factory shop, production has risen strongly.

Anthony's golden run was iced in late 2017 when Skara entered the SA Food Industry Awards for the first time and won two categories for businesses with 15 staff or less. Skara was a finalist in another category.

Skara won the awards for business excellence and sustainability, and was a finalist in the New Product section for its 250g pack of Adelaide Hills Fine Foods bacon.

And at the 2017 Sydney Fine Foods Awards, Skara was awarded medals for 12 of 13 products entered.

"The two of us started from scratch 10 years ago. We had no marketing budget and we started selling at farmers markets," he says.

"Deanna remains the backbone of the business, looking after the financial side. I'm more a product and people person; I now spend less time in production but always oversee what is going on.

"We have valued staff. You need a good team from the front office to production to sales. Without a successful team, you can't have a successful business."



Winners are grinners... Anthony and Deanna Skara at the SA Food Awards.

10 HUGE YEARS

From page 1

"In the last few years of Bruce's tenure, cash was built up from the success of Wingfield, providing an excellent foundation to launch change.

"A big shift has been the rise of our protein division, driven by poultry. The merchandise division was traditionally way ahead in terms of turnover but the reverse is now the case.

"Protein's turnover is now around \$48 million compared with merchandise's \$23 million and protein opportunities abound, mainly in exporting ingredients for pet food manufacture.

"However, our merchandise operations remain extremely important to our viability and we continually strive to be relevant to our traditional butcher Members."

Warren, with broad meat industry experience, joined MBL in 2004 as Chief Financial Officer and Company Secretary. He replaced Bruce Carter as General Manager on April 18, 2008, retaining the role of Company Secretary.

Long-serving Director Mike Rankin became Chairman in 2008 and Bruce Carter joined the Board. Soon after, Warren was given the green light to modernise MBL.



In 2013, Warren and Bruce check final plans for MBL's new base at Athol Park. A move was vital as the old Kilburn base was years past its use-by date.

"The first thing we needed to do was build a team capable of taking the Co-op forward," Warren says.

Darryl McPhee was appointed Financial Controller with many years' experience in the meat industry.

Gary Deutrom, after a 20-year apprenticeship at Wingfield, was appointed as Operations Manager of the proteins division upon the retirement of Barry Forby.

And Bexley Carman was appointed Operations Manager of Merchandise and Machinery upon the retirement of John Phillips.

"The next step was obvious - we had to get serious about quality and improving our work culture!" Warren says.

"We searched for three years to find the right person, before Michaela Rock was appointed as Quality Assurance and Work Health & Safety Manager.

"We have since appointed Puga Gopal as Human Resource Supervisor to back up Michaela.

"The purchasing department was strengthened under David Curtis, a long serving staffer, and the warehouse management was strengthened with the appointment of Adam Neville as Warehouse Manager.



Warren at Wingfield's new Bio-filter in 2009. The new technology solved a severe odour problem which would stymied MBL's expansion plans, putting the Co-op at risk.

"The sales structure was strengthened by promoting Dale Rowe as Merchandise Sales Manager and Chris Mountford as Machinery Sales Manager.

"We now had a team capable of taking us in the right direction."

Warren says over his 10 years, 50% of his time has been spent driving the business and the other 50% reacting to changing business circumstances to protect the business or take opportunities.

"In that time, the Board's support and the ability to 'get it' has been crucial in obtaining the approval for the many projects and changes," he says.

"The capital investment alone placed a great challenge on the directors."

Here's a summary of develop-

ments over the 10 years:

BIO-FILTER: An early priority for Warren was finding a solution to the Wingfield plant's odour problem which, with neighbours encroaching, had the potential to curtail rendering operations.

"I took some directors to look at a sewage plant in New Zealand and four sites in NSW that had odour containment issues and had solved them, and we decided a Bio-filter was the best way to go," Warren says.

"We engaged a specialist Sydney firm, The Odour Unit, to assess our plant and design a solution. We looked at what had been achieved on the east coast, getting to know the science.

"We incorporated all the



best features from interstate models and now the Bio-filter at Wingfield is regarded as one of the most effective in the land."

By proactively solving the odour issue, MBL won praise from the Environment Protection Authority and the local council, paving the way to more than double the capacity of Wingfield.

WINGFIELD: Since 2012, MBL has spent \$16.5 million at Wingfield where three separate plants provide a diverse range of by-products to meet changing demands.

A new Low Temperature plant was built beside the original high temperature plant in 2011, to produce poultry meal, after Coles refused to sell chickens which had been raised on feed with any avian content. This allowed the high temperature plant to produce avian free meal for our poultry feed customers.

Last year, a third plant costing \$8 million and dedicated to processing poultry also was commissioned.

"The original Low Temperature plant was a major step for MBL, allowing us to get close to the expanding poultry industry," Warren says.

"Ingham has since doubled its volume of raw material supplied, requiring us to build the second low temperature plant."

KEITH: MBL purchased the Keith plant in 2011, gradually turning what was a "fragile" plant into a vital asset which produces a



Recognising and appreciating MBL's rich history and the Co-op business model is important as we advance says Warren, pictured here in the Boardroom with a photograph of MBL's austere, moustachioed Board of Directors from 1911.

diverse range of products for export.

Keith receives much of its raw material from western Victorian processors including lamb and mutton from Frewstal in Stawell and Ararat Exports at Ararat, duck from Luv-a-Duck at Nhill, lamb from Midfield in Warrnambool plus kangaroo from Macro Meats in Adelaide.

Most poultry raw material for Keith comes from Adelaide's poultry factories in the northern suburbs.

The Keith plant now produces lamb meal (ovine), goat meal (caprine), duck meal, kangaroo meal, venison meal, feather meal and blood meal.

ATHOL PARK: MBL began operating at Athol Park in February 2013, after outgrowing premises at Kilburn, giving the Co-op room to expand.

Four warehouses and other modern facilities enabled greater stock holding, improved buying power and a wider product range. A streamlined and faster supply and delivery system for merchandise and machinery began.

And we were able to establish a quality control system that is best practice along with greatly improved working conditions and a more proactive culture.

The move also allowed for an expanded retail area, a larger machinery showroom and space for offices.

Warren says, "Athol Park gave us the space to handle multiple containers and the ability to sell more at lower prices, beginning with our bulk buying of cheaper black foam trays.

"Now, an area for significant growth is gas-flushed products. Drakes and others look to these products for improved shelf life."

As MBL forges ahead thanks to opportunities in the protein division, Warren pays due respect to MBL's rich history and

the Co-op business model.

While merchandise sales continue to slip to butcher shops, mainly as a result of the impact of supermarkets, MBL remains firmly committed to our traditional Members.

"We're acutely aware that the \$25 customer across the counter of butcher shops is extremely important. These customers drive our merchandise division and without it, the business would be in serious trouble," Warren says.

"Merchandise sales are underpinned by the protein division, and we lose money on the pickup of raw material from traditional butcher shops.

"The Co-op was started in 1905 to address the needs of butchers – to combat unreasonably high ice prices and to process hides and skins.

"Today we still strive to remain relevant to the needs of butchers and suppliers by offering a big range of products at competitive prices.

"Our gross margins are the lowest in the national Ikon Pack buying group. As the only Co-op in the group, our prices are up to 10% lower which translates into buying power for our Members."



Warren inspects the \$8 million poultry rendering plant at Wingfield in 2017, built in response to soaring chicken sales.



Now Wilson's cooking!

Cooked roasts, gourmet pies and pork rolls give extra dimensions to popular new shop

With pan and oven ready meals now entrenched, Wilson Lowe says the logical next step for butchers is to cook roasts to order – with a few roast potatoes tossed in.

“The next step in butchering is to cook for customers and we should do it for free as part of our service,” says Wilson, 58, one of South Australia’s first Master Butchers.

Wilson is practising what he preaches at his new seven-day shop at Mt Barker where his cooked roasts are proving a huge hit with increasing numbers of time-poor people.

He says, “People, at first, are really surprised that we offer cooking, saying things like, ‘You’d cook it for me? For free? Are you serious?’ They love the idea.”

Customers are choosing a roast in the shop and collect it cooked later, and city workers are phoning their orders for pick up on the way home.

“I like to throw in some roast potatoes as well,” Wilson says.

He has also expanded traditional offerings by starting a range of takeaway food headed

by store-made pies and hot roast rolls, with pulled pork most popular.

Carveries are common in northern England, with Wilson getting advice from a butcher mate in Yorkshire, and hot takeaways are popular in German butcheries.

Wilson’s customers have responded well to

the initiatives by supporting the business across the board. Meat sales are strong and, to Wilson’s surprise, prices are not an issue in Mt Barker.

“I did a lot of research on Mt Barker as one of Australia’s fastest growing areas with a lot of young families. I thought shoppers would be price driven but it’s not the case,” he says.

“They’re not really after specials; they want good quality meat at fair prices along with personal service.

“There’s a lot of well-to-do people here – you can tell by the cars in the carpark. We get a lot of retired farmers coming into the shop.

“However, it’s essentially an area for young families with both partners working. They want help to get the evening meal on the table and are happy to pay for it.

“We’ve quickly connected to a strong South African community who really appreciate quality meat. We sell boerewors and we have a machine that shaves biltong.”

Wilson owns the new shop which



Butcher Zac Young on taste testing duty.

operates under the Bruce's Meat umbrella. Wilson has called his shop Bruce's Meat, Poultry Options & Roast'd to reflect his cooked roasts.

Trevor Hill is impressed by Wilson's innovations at Mt Barker and says he may introduce them to other Bruce's Meat stores.

Wilson has carved a distinguished career spanning more than 40 years, including owning and managing shops across Adelaide. He has had senior roles at Bruce's Meat for the past 12 years.

He opened his new shop two weeks before Christmas and did a roaring trade, taking 60 orders in his first week. He didn't advertise yet had Christmas turnover of \$20,000.

He attributes the instant response to the strong reputation of Bruce's Meat.

"I haven't had my own shop for nearly 20 years, since I had one at Frewville which I ran for 16 years. I still love being a butcher," he says.

Wilson's nearest and dearest are heavily involved in the new shop. His partner Tania, with an arts background, designed a striking wall of four huge photos of Mt Barker main street scenes from 1870 to 1930.

A business partner is Wilson's son Daniel who helps serve on weekends, and Wilson's daughter Megan looks after the takeaway section, making the pies and meat rolls.

Wilson is joined by two young butchers, Zac Young and Troy Lang. Wilson is a noted mentor of young butchers, having trained dozens over the years.

When designing his shop, at the new Mt Barker Village shopping centre, Wilson says it was imperative to have cooked foods served at a counter separated from the uncooked meat display.

"If we (butchers) cross over to the cooked counter, we automatically wash our hands," he says.

Megan says the most popular rolls are pulled pork – in barbecue, Thai or Moroccan – with coleslaw. Lamb rolls also sell well. The rolls cost \$7.

Lamb with Mint pies are a hit. Other varieties in a changing menu include Chunky Chicken Moroccan, Steak & Red Wine, and



Pie-maker Megan Lowe at work.



Steak & Bacon. The pies are \$6 each or two for \$10. Megan also makes jumbo sausage rolls.

The takeaway section helps Wilson better manage stock rotation. If he has too much lamb, for example, he can channel some into takeaway products.

There are two slogans which Wilson uses to best sum up the shop – We Cut to Your Specs, and Quality You Can Afford.

"People are appreciating how we cut meat the way they want it and sell it in any amount they want – all at a fair price," he says.

While traditional products like steak, lamb chops and beef sausages are popular, Wilson has been a little surprised at the strong demand for more "adventurous" products.

His sausage range is dominated by the likes of Chicken, Pumpkin & Feta, Beef Jalapeno, Chicken Cheese Burger, and Lamb Moroccan, plus South African boerewors.

There are also some crossovers within takeaway, such as pepper steak filling for pies proving popular in rolls.

But Wilson says, "My big thing is cooking roasts – for free. The idea has been in my head for years and now it's really taking off.

"People worry if they will cook roasts properly; if they will be tender. We take any stress out of people cooking roasts. We get most requests for pork, which people seem to have trouble cooking.

"I recently cooked and carved roasts for a man having a 60th birthday party and he was so appreciative, he was in tears."



Megan with another batch of gourmet pies ready for the oven.

PAUL'S LEGACY



RAISING BUTCHERS' STATUS

After 23 years working to improve the lot of butchers across South Australia, one thing ruffles Paul Sandercock's feathers – when a butcher laments that he's "just a butcher."

Paul still hears this sentiment, in various guises, surprisingly regularly. He hates it because of all the negative connotations that it conjures up.

"When I started at AMIC, I was told butchers weren't particularly proud of being butchers. I didn't get it; I wanted to know why. I still don't get it, 23 years later," he says.

"I really hate it whenever a butcher says, 'But I'm just a butcher.' It's so negative, it puts a dampener on everything and it needs to be eliminated from the conversation."

Paul retires from AMIC at the end of April with a deep, satisfying legacy of improving the status, credibility and competitiveness of butchers, right through from apprentices to Master Butchers.

He has done this through improving and instigating AMIC competitions such as Sausage King, coupled with training initiatives to raise knowledge levels to properly reflect butchers as skilled and respected tradesmen.

"It's about lifting pride and recognising what people are achieving," he says.

Paul combined theory with practice in the mystery box competition for apprentices, while instigating Master Butcher nationally to recognise our best butchers for their amazing skill.

"If the pathway in butchery is to come in as an apprentice, at the other end is to work up to becoming a Master Butcher by

filling in the gaps," he says.

"I'm particularly proud of introducing Master Butcher because it's achieving something really important – pride in the industry."

To encourage butchers to celebrate being butchers, Paul created a gala annual night for socialising >



Paul is rightly proud to have instigated the national Master Butcher program. Here in 2017, he presents the MB jacket to Goodwood's Dave Armstrong.

➤ and networking through the Big Night Out which evolved into the Awards for Excellence dinner.

A chef by trade, Paul never expected to work at AMIC for over 20 years. "My time here is certainly longer than I'd expected – I always had five-year blocks (of employment) all the way through," he says.

"Once I demonstrated my ability and built trust, AMIC gave me the freedom to run the SA brand like it was my own business; I was allowed to develop different programs.

"All my programs have been adopted; at no stage has anyone said, 'Don't do that.' I'm pleased I have contributed.

"I'm proud at the way the industry has progressed; how people think differently about themselves and their businesses, and how they no longer see young people as just cheap labour."

Paul says, "The industry has become more professional as business compliance demands increase and consumer expectations keep changing.

"Butchers once had only to prepare and sell meat – now they need to cook it as well for ready meals and give advice on



'The industry has become more professional as business compliance demands increase' – Paul Sandercock

how to cook it.

"Operators have continued to face challenge after challenge, leading to changes in many areas.

Leading the way was a string of new food safety regulations after the Garibaldi case, with some smallgoods makers initially resisting the changes.

"When change is forced on people, there tends to be a level of resistance by some. It's not a defence to say, 'Over the years, I haven't killed anyone'. Systems simply need to be in place to make sure it doesn't happen," Paul says.

"Australian standards have evolved over time to become the reference point for making

sure the right thing is done.

"The standards may have been forced on people but there are long term benefits for individuals and the industry."

Paul says business compliance and regulation will continue to evolve, almost to the point of distraction and annoyance, but there are long term benefits.

"Sometimes we may be over compliant, over stepping the mark, but it's about keeping meat safety off the front page."

Paul says he needs a break after 23 years with AMIC, but has the energy to do a lot more down the track.

"I'll spend a week in the Flinders. I've never been there, and I like the idea of getting right away from everything after 52 years of continuous employment," he says.

Paul also plans to lower his golf handicap of 24. He plays at The Vines, Reynella, often with Glenelg South butcher Dennis Wilks, every Saturday and will look at playing on Wednesdays as well.

AMIC's new SA rep will be Oliver Stankovski, who will be based in Melbourne. He will also cover Victoria, Tasmania and parts of NSW.

Industry leaders are lavish in their praise for Paul's contributions.

MBL CEO Warren McLean says, "Paul has given fantastic service to butchers over an extend period of time and by his efforts has added a lot of credibility and competitiveness to butchers' businesses.

"He has contributed to butchers holding their own against the supermarket duopoly. His work directly supporting butchers on a daily basis has been extremely valuable.

"His work on the Sausage King and associated competitions has contributed to butchers increasing sales by continuously improving their offerings, not to mention some fantastic awards night dinners to honour the winners!

"MBL would like to acknowledge Paul's contribution to the industry. We wish him well in the next phase of life."

Trevor Hill, Chairman of AMIC's Retail Council for eight years, says, "Paul has always

Thanks, say leaders

been a calming influence for the industry.

"AMIC members contact Paul when something's has gone wrong or is going wrong and they tend to be emotional, needing help to work through assorted issues and grievances.

"Paul has accumulated such a deep knowledge of the industry that he's readily able to give good advice.

"He deals with the facts and works through issues in a calm way. He's always a gentleman to both sides in any argument."

Franz Knoll, Chairman of AMIC's national Smallgoods Council, says Paul has made significant contributions to the industry locally and nationally as an instigator of many original concepts.

"One of his initiatives was the Group

Apprentice Scheme that had up to 60 apprentices employed with host employers around the State," Franz says.

"The scheme ended when senior management changed direction and it is sorely missed now as we have a shortage of suitable apprentice candidates.

"The Master Butcher initiative to recognise excellence in the industry was driven by Paul. This will be built on each year as next generations fulfil the requirements.

"Paul has evolved the smallgoods competition judging and presentation to combine with the State leg of Sausage King, and he is presently co-ordinating our next initiative, the recognition of Fritz as an icon of SA.

"Through all his initiatives and interactions, Paul became an important part of the fabric of the meat industry."



Dennis Ashby's major show trophy has joined his bold Hello sign as a customer conversation piece at his Fullarton shop.

A SHOWSTOPPER AT 73!

Dennis Ashby steals the show at his first attempt

It's never too late to add new strings to your bow, says Dennis Ashby, who at 73, has entered his first competition and cleaned up.

A butcher for 57 years, Dennis runs Arkaba Fresh butchery at Fullarton and still loves working, having no immediate plans to retire his trusty knives.

He now has an extra spring in his step after surprising even himself by winning the major trophy for Champion Gourmet Exhibit at an Adelaide Hills country show.

Entering competitions has never interested Dennis, but he "had a go" for the first time late last year and excelled at the competitive Uraidla and Summertown Country Show.

He won five categories, came second in another three and to cap a remarkable show debut, he won the Champion Gourmet Exhibit trophy for the entire show.

The haul surprised even Dennis, who until now had been oblivious to the satisfaction of competition success.

"I got first places for my chicken sausages, beef sausages, chicken and spinach sausages, pork chops and whole smoked chicken," he says.

But the "big one" was winning the Champion Gourmet Exhibit trophy, which Dennis proudly displays in his shop, sparking conversations with intrigued customers.

"It's a good talking point and it gives customers more confidence in our products," he says.

"I won it for a barbecue pack for four people, with steak, chops, burgers and sausages, all made with MBL ingredients.

"I've never entered shows but I always look at the displays at the Royal Show and I heard there was a meat display at Uraidla, so I gave it a go.

"About 10 or so other butchers entered. I thought I might win something but I was stunned to do so well."

There may well be no stopping Dennis now that he has a taste for competition success.

"I started as a butcher in 1960 and I still love coming to work every day. I love it," says Dennis, who did his five-year apprenticeship in Perth and moved to South Australia in 1974.

"I'll keep working while my health lasts. I have regular health checks and I'm 100% now – all's well."

Dennis has had three shops in SA – at Marion, McLaren Vale and now Fullarton where he has been since 2007. He proudly says he has always been a 100% supporter of MBL. 

➤ He may be long in the tooth but he's mentally as fresh as a daisy.

"We still break our own beef and make our products in the traditional way," he says.

But while he's adamant some old school ways remain best practice, he quickly picks up trends and makes new products for today's busy lifestyles.

The retail meat scene has changed dramatically during Dennis's working life, moving to cater for a core of customers who are time poor and need all the help they can get to put the evening meal on the table.

A key to his longevity has been his willingness to move with the times, adopting changing trends with the help of MBL reps.

The result is new products and flavours which were unheard of when Dennis did his training all those years ago in Perth. He's now a big fan of vacuum packing.

He has a good range of vacuum packed products, including ones with "new" flavours such as marinated Thai chicken breasts and cajun thighs.

He says most vacuum packing is done by clean-up boys after school.

"There was some customer resistance to vacuum packing at the start but they accepted it, some faster than others. It was accepted within six months," Dennis says.

An eye-catching product is something Dennis calls Dragon Tails, which are end pieces of beef ribeye fillets. He says they fly out the door.

"I wanted to sell the end bits but Fillet Tails sounded a bit plain so I made up the name Dragon Tails and they are still very popular two years later, now at \$13/kg," he says.

"People buy them mostly for the barbecue although they can be used for anything, including stroganoff.

"In a number of ways, it's a different world to when I started. There's little customer loyalty now and people won't wait, wanting everything straight away.

"Years ago, people placed orders to pick up in the mornings; now, they only order for Christmas and they shop at any time, so it's impossible to tell when it will be busy.

"People say meat is expensive today but it's never been cheaper in relation to wages. Still, they say disposable income is shrinking and things are tight.

"We try to have some banter but you've got to be so careful with what you say these days."

Goat, anyone?

MLA is leading a push to have more goat meat sold in Australia, predicting domestic sales of \$13 million annually.

Australia is the world's leading goat meat exporter. In 2016, some 30,680 tonnes of goat meat was exported, representing 88% of production.

A new feasibility study, commissioned by MLA, has now identified opportunities to lift domestic goat consumption. MLA is now seeking funding partners to act on the findings.

The study identified young families, adventurous cooks and millennials with new-age food values as potential goat eaters, if presented with convenient recipes, including slow cooking.

MLA's Goat Industry Project Manager, Julie Petty, says goat is not widely consumed domestically, except by diners at restaurants and among some ethnic consumers.

"In the last 20 years, several secondary proteins have risen to prominence beyond the restaurant scene to be sold in shops," she says.

"There is potential to lift the profile of goat

to the same level as other secondary proteins such as kangaroo, duck, turkey, venison, salmon and tuna.

"While the goat meat export market is lucrative for producers, a healthy level of domestic demand would provide a degree of insurance against any export downturn.

"More importantly, domestic demand would also enhance the industry's reputation, encouraging more producers and supply chain players to participate in production."

The study identified Luv-a-Duck, based at Nhill in western Victoria and a supplier of raw material to MBL's Keith plant, as an example of how secondary proteins can be promoted.

"Luv-a-Duck has transformed duck from being a hard to replicate, 'special' item eaten mostly in restaurants to something far more accessible to the home cook," it says.

"They bred a duck with a good amount of meat, developed semi prepared, easy to follow recipe kits, and paired this with support via cooking classes and recipe guidance."



Clean-up advanced at Keith

Extensive work has been carried out to repair damage caused by January's fierce bushfire which threatened the MBL rendering plant near Keith.

Heroic efforts by MBL staff and the CFS saved the plant, with no production time lost. However, some surrounding MBL property was destroyed or damaged.

CEO Warren McLean says fence replacement and repairs to the office, which had a lucky escape, are well advanced.

"The overall clean-up is going well with burnt trees removed, trees and undergrowth near buildings removed and extensive lawn planting carried out to give a wide fire break," Warren says.

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Creative butchers from two small shops in the South-East have trumped the "big boys" on the national stage, winning two prestigious competitions.

Mt Gambier's Mick Lamond and Naracoorte's Shaun Watson triumphed with their sausages and burgers at AMIC's national awards at Healesville, Victoria.

Mick, of Collins Court Butcher, won Sausage King's Traditional Pork section, while Shaun, of Tender Cuts, won the Best Butchers Gourmet Burger title for his Thai Chicken with Shredded Coconut burger.

"Being a smaller shop, it's very satisfying to successfully compete against the big boys," says Mick.

Shaun says, "It's always challenging to put your product out there to be the best in Australia and to have any success, let alone first place, is very satisfying.

"We've won a nice big trophy that's sitting in our window as well as bragging rights. We are pretty happy."

Shaun becomes Australia's first butcher to win national Sausage King and burger titles, following his Traditional Australian sausage victory in 2015.

South Australians shone in five other sections of AMIC's 2018 national awards:

Kiara Marrone, of Goodwood Quality Meats, finished third in the Apprentice of the Year competition.

Jason Mathie, of Mathie's Meat Shoppe at Clare, was runner up in Sausage King's Gourmet section with his Beef & Blue Cheese sausage.

Ian Shaw, of Ellis Butchers at McLaren Vale, took third in Poultry for his Turkey, Duck and Fennel sausage.

Franz Knoll, wearing his Standom Smallgoods hat, came

third in Traditional Australian.

Trevor Hill, of Bruce's Meat, was third in the Best Butchers Beef Burger competition with his Salt & Pepper Brisket Burger.

For Mick Lamond, winning the Traditional Pork crown was a case of third time "lucky."

tion, so it's great to win the big prize," he says.

Mick has been making his traditional thick pork sausage with no herbs or spices for six years, using MBL Old English Pork meal.

"We started making 10kg of

"We get lots of nice comments from customers about Sausage King. Not everyone is attracted to pork sausages but more people now want to try them after our awards success.

"The MBL Old English Pork meal has just worked for us, proving a really good product over time. We have an excellent relationship with MBL."

Mick has supported MBL all his working life, which began with Jim Maney at Mt Gambier's Margaret Street Meat.

He has built a long rapport with MBL sales rep Martin Arbon, who says, "MBL gets 100% support from Mick."

Mick purchased Collins Court Butcher, in a small shopping centre on busy Jubilee Hwy, in 2006 and has impressively grown the business, developing a wholesale side to supply clubs and hotels in the South-East.

He has advanced plans to expand into the shop next door.

Shaun Watson, who bought Tender Cuts in 1996, has won awards aplenty for his creative food and has his own lamb brand, Watsons Lamb, from local farms.

He says developing "new flavour" products such as his winning Thai Chicken with Shredded Coconut burger, with a little spice, keeps his job interesting and customers are appreciative.

"I was at first worried the coconut on the outside would burn, but instead it just turns a nice golden brown," he says.



Mick Lamond with his winning sausages. Photo: Stock Journal

"We won the Traditional Pork competition for SA in the past two years and last year we were second in the national competi-

tion, so it's great to win the big prize," he says. "We started making 10kg of these pork sausages a week; we're now doing 80kg weekly and we hope to do over 100kg," he says.