

VISIONARY PACT

BUTCHERS, FARMERS ALIGN AS CATTLE PRICES ROCKET

Online carcass auctions are central to a visionary pact between a group of retail butchers and farmers, under a plan being floated by two prominent South Australian butchers.

Richard Gunner and Trevor Hill have mooted the bold plan in response to record-high cattle prices which have risen by 40% and are expected to continue spiralling.

They propose that forward-thinking butchers form a buying group to buy prime beef directly from farmers who are presently peeved at being price squeezed by the supermarkets.

The beef would be MSA graded in the abattoir and details posted online for 12-hour overnight auctions, with next day delivery from the abattoir to butchers.

The initial base plan calls for at least 30 graded carcasses to be sold at each auction.

Similar online auctions are the norm in other countries, including Japan.

Richard and Trevor are seeking expressions of interest from butchers, and will liaise with farmers and meatworks.

The plan effectively aims to wrest back some control of the supply chain, and should mainly interest Adelaide butchers as most country butchers already buy directly from local farmers.

It would put city butchers on par with country butchers who say price becomes secondary for customers craving prime meat from local farms.

There would be multiple benefits for participating butchers and farmers, say Richard and Trevor.

Butchers would have direct access to prime beef, bidding at auction for the grade they want and paying a fair price.

They would also have the marketing advantage of being able to tell increasingly inquisitive consumers the full "story" of the beef and the "food hero" farmer who produced it.

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'It's important for butchers
to tell the story of the meat'

- Richard Gunner



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New \$20,000 tax deductions for MBL machinery

There's never been a better time to buy new machinery and other equipment from MBL.

Butchers, bakers and fishmongers are among small business operators who can now claim immediate tax deductions for every business related purchase of up to \$20,000.

Any number of purchases for under \$20,000 each can now be made, and each can be instantly written off.

The Federal Government's new tax break, up from \$1,000, came into immediate effect on Budget night, May 12.

The tax break will continue for two years, with the threshold for immediate depreciation returning to \$1,000 on July 1, 2017.

"Now is obviously a great time for butchers and others to seriously consider updating their equipment," says MBL Machinery Manager, Chris Mountford.

On top of the tax break, MBL offers interest-free payment terms to approved Members.

MBL's buying power delivers competitive prices to Members who also receive the Co-op's annual rebate.

The new tax break applies to businesses with an aggregated turnover of less than \$2 million a year.

Assets costing over \$20,000 can be depreciated in a single pool - 15% in the year of purchase and 30% in subsequent years.

MBL Members and customers should consult their accountants for specific advice.

MBL has a full range of Australian and imported machines, plus smaller equipment. Some machines are displayed at the MBL showroom at Athol Park.

Meanwhile, MBL's machinery department has been refreshed, with Chris Mountford being joined by experienced butcher Shane Reynolds.

Chris, MBL's former warehouse manager, became machinery department manager late last year and has brought his trademark enthusiasm to the role.

With Chris planning to begin visits to Members and customers, Shane has come on board.



New team... Shane Reynolds (left) and Chris Mountford.

"I want to go out and build relationships, and someone of Shane's experience is ideal to have on board. He has excellent customer skills," says Chris, 45.

"At MBL, I've been a driver, sales rep and then warehouse manager, so I have a reasonable knowledge of Members and customers.

"But until now, I hadn't focused on the machinery side, so I'm bringing myself up to speed by making visits rather than solely relying on the phone."

Shane, 51, first began working in a butcher's shop at age 15. More recently, he ran Valley Chopping Block at Happy Valley with his brother, Daryl, for a decade.

Wanting a change, he joined MBL in February to lend his experience in the machinery department and to also help with shop sales.

MBL's Operations, Business

Development Manager Bexley Carman says Shane has "fitted in seamlessly" at MBL.

"Shane has picked up the ball really quickly and he's a very competent 2IC to Chris," Bexley says.

"As well working in machinery, he'll also spend some time filling in at the front counter and with phone orders."



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RED-HOT machinery bargains pages 6-7

Butchers' skills tapped for farmers markets

Preparing and packing meat for farmers markets is proving a godsend for a growing number of country butchers, including Shaun Harrison.

"The markets are huge and have made a big difference to my business," says Shaun, 35, of Meadows, in the Adelaide Hills.

"They provide the equivalent of two full days' work a week for my apprentice and me.

"It's about using our skills for guaranteed income. Knowing that I have X-amount of dollars coming in certainly takes some stress off.

"I was building up the business when the farmers approached me six years ago, and accepting their work has been a real bonus.

"The amount of work has tripled in those six years."

Other country butchers have similar stories to tell, and work from outside is tipped to keep rising as more farmers look to sell their meat online.

Farmers markets have mushroomed since the first was held at Willunga in 2002, attracting big numbers of people who want to meet growers and hear the story of their food.

Shaun prepares meat for a sheep farmer from Yankalilla and for a beef farmer from near Strathalbyn.

"Each week, 15 lambs are delivered to us from Normanville meatworks and four, sometimes five, beef bodies come from Strathalbyn meatworks," he says.

"We cut a lot of it into 500g, two-person packs and cryovac it. Everything we need comes from MBL, including machinery.

"We pack it into boxes which the farmers collect. They later label the packs."

Meat prepared by Shaun and his apprentice Nathan Griggs, 18, is sold at markets at Willunga, Adelaide Showgrounds, Victor Harbor and Prospect.

"These areas are not in my district so my shop is not effected," Shaun says.

Another butcher benefiting from markets is Strathalbyn's Craig Maidment, who initially saw them as a threat.

"When Strathalbyn's market started, I



Shaun Harrison.. looking every inch the quintessential country butcher.

thought, 'Oh no, I want nothing to do with this.' I saw no benefit," says Craig, 58.

"But then someone walked in and asked if I wanted to cut meat for him, and I ended up thinking, why not. It was something extra.

"Now, processing for markets amounts to two days' work a week for all of us here – and there are eight of us."

Craig says demand is rising for butchers who can cut to farmers' specifications.

"If you don't get into bed with them, you'll

fall by the wayside," he says.

AMIC's SA Retail Council chairman Trevor Hill says doing work for farmers' markets is a bonus for some city butchers as well as those in the country.

"We've been approached (at Bruce's Meat) and it didn't fit into our set-up at the time, but I think it's fantastic for butchers to capitalise on their skills," he says.

"It's a great alliance that allows butchers to top up their wages, and there's no financial investment as they don't own the meat."

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This would offer a major point of difference against supermarkets, enhancing butchers' reputations as meat experts offering personal, trusted advice.

Richard says buying by carcass is "open and clear", as opposed to the guesswork of buying live cattle in the ring.

"It creates transparency that's not there at the moment," he says.

"The butcher gets exactly what he wants. The farmer gets rewarded for producing it and gets good information on what to grow.

"It's important for the butchers involved to tell the story of the meat and the farmer because consumers want to hear about it in increasing detail.

"The butcher definitely benefits by being able to tell the story, adding to the connection with customers.

"It's about word of mouth – people are more loyal to butchers than to any other retailer I know."

Trevor says, "By bidding for beef after it has been graded, the farmer is rewarded for the top end.

"Beef of a lower grade can be hung for longer and is for shops where price is important.

"After butchers buy what they want, what's left over would be put online for public bidding, with the meat processed by a registered butcher."

Of the big picture, Richard says a butchers' group would overcome logistical problems for individual butchers.

"As an example, the smallest number of head that can be trucked to Bordertown meatworks is 15, but a butcher may want only three head processed," he says.

"This favours the big boys, giving them a logistics advantage that individuals could match if they were in a group."

Richard says, "There'd be positives all round, but at this stage it's just an idea and there's a lot to work out.

"It all depends on how many people on both sides take it up, and people on both sides would have to stick it out.

"We'd need some critical mass on both

sides – it doesn't have to be huge, perhaps 20 butchers, and we'd need a co-operating meatworks or two.

"We'd look at beef first because it's easiest and people see more value in beef."

Trevor says, "Butchers can talk to Richard or me to register their interest.

"We also need to talk with farmers, develop website technology and hold some trials."

The plan was formulated after Richard heard Trevor talk on ABC Rural radio about how butchers and farmers should unite to challenge the supermarkets.

AMIC's SA Retail Council chairman, Trevor was interviewed by the ABC in Mt Gambier where he was demonstrating butchery skills to a group of farmers in an MLA promotion.

The owner of Adelaide's three Bruce's Meat shops said an alliance between butchers and farmers could control the supply chain and attract consumers away from supermarkets.

"If farmers come back, we can get some alliances in branding and things like that, that are exclusive to the independent retail butcher," Trevor told the ABC.

"That's where we're going to get mutual support and we're both going to have a nice secure future. I think we can stand strong.

"I envisage 'pockets of brands' promoting produce on a regional level, with a large



Trevor Hill... sees benefits all round.

network of independent butchers and farmers working together.

"Those brands will need to collaborate together on production. They'll be independent brands but with one production facility or method for consistency."

Trevor's words on radio struck a chord with Richard, owner of four Feast! Fine Foods stores and award winning supplier to 200 restaurants.

He phoned Trevor to say, "I know how we can work with farmers!" An "invigorating" meeting followed at Richard's factory at Mt Barker.

Richard says, "There's nothing new



Richard Gunner (red shirt) says butchers and farmers should work together.

> about carcass auctions – they are held overseas. I saw one for the multi grades of wagyu in Tokyo and it was mind boggling.

"I'm told Vestey's held them in Adelaide 70 or 80 years ago. The auctions were physical then, of course – you had to attend. Online auctions are so much easier."

Trevor says, "Farmers are presently jaded by the supply chain, opening the way for an alliance with butchers.

"When the supermarkets started going to the farmgate, they took the whole herd. Farmers got a fair price and they thought it was wonderful," he says.

"They loved the convenience of selling directly to supermarkets but they aren't as enthusiastic now that the market has turned and buyers are far more aggressive over prices, often telling farmers to take it or leave it.

"Some farmers are holding back some cattle and getting butchers to process them for markets, getting bigger returns."

On the day MBL News visited Richard, he had just returned from Mt Compass saleyards with news that beef prices had risen a further 10%.

"I've just been telling people here that we'll have to put up our prices again. On days like today, I wish I was only farmer," he says.

"There has never been more price movement than this year. Farmers have gone from getting less than it costs to produce to doing nicely.

"Until now, beef has been expensive everywhere in the world except in Australia.

"The price needs to be somewhere in the middle, without the highs and lows, for the benefit of the overall meat industry.

"With less beef being sold, farmers are looking at a shrinking beef industry.

"It will be absolutely interesting to see what happens as retail prices rise – some people may decide not to eat meat."

Beef processors and wholesalers have been partly absorbing rising cattle prices which are resulting from extreme overseas demand and a smaller national herd.

They fear a backlash at retail level and MLA conservatively tips Australian beef consumption will fall by 5.9% this year.

There is speculation Australia may follow the US trend where high beef prices have led to chicken and now pork outselling beef.



Factory shop's success

Richard Gunner is pleased with the success of his latest retail venture, a shop which opens only one day a week for strictly bulk sales.

The shop is attached to his processing plant, tucked away in an industrial area of Mt Barker, but locals are happy to go out of their way for wholesale prices on Saturdays from 8am to 3pm.

Naming the factory shop Farm Direct Meat was a no-brainer for Richard, who figured consumers would be attracted to the notion of fresh bulk meat.

"It's going very well, with excellent patron-



age. We have three butchers serving out front and they are kept pretty busy," says Richard.

"We offer wholesale prices direct to the public which is something different for the area.

"It's bulk, so if you want T-bones you have to buy the whole piece.

"You can show the butcher how thick you want the T-bones – thick for you, thinner for your wife – and he'll mark it all before taking it over for cutting.

"We vacuum seal whatever way people want, ready for the home freezer for their convenience.

"We don't sell 'diced beef' but we will dice up in front of the customer any whole primal they want to the exact size chunks they want to cook with."

Richard says the factory shop has not effected sales at his established retail shop in Mt Barker, The Chop Shop.

The factory shop was built two years ago as part of Richard Gunner Fine Meats' new factory which supplies five of his stores and 200 restaurants.

But Richard bided his time before opening the shop's doors last August, deciding to base its operations on a factory shop in Brisbane.



Chefs Choice Knife Sharpener CC120

Product code 840828

\$160 plus GST

The new Chefs Choice electric diamond hone knife sharpener brings back the edge of your knives simply and quickly. Why not offer knife sharpening to your customers? It takes two minutes to produce a fantastic edge on any knife, and at this special price, it won't take long to pay for itself.



Henkelman Falcon 80 with Gas

Product code 692988

\$10,500 plus GST

Henkelman Falcon 80 with Gas has it all - a 560mm seal bar, large chamber and the ability to gas flush your product. Our special price of \$10,500 plus GST represents a saving of \$3,665! So if you require a larger vacuum machine, this may interest you. And using MBL's interest-free terms to approved members, this would cost you \$962.50 a month or \$240.63 a week.



Thompson 840-M1 Mixer Mincer

Product code 810310

\$10,200 plus GST

Thompson 840- M1 Mixer Mincer is made with the smaller butcher shop in mind. It has a 40kg capacity bowl, and with a 5ml plate fitted, it is able to produce 1,500kg per hour. Stop mixing your sausage meats by hand and invest in the 840 mixer mincer at \$11,220 including GST on MBL'S interest-free terms agreement. That's only \$935 a month, \$233.75 a week, or \$33.40 a day over 12 months to approved members.



5 ONLY

INS 100 Bench Top Scale

Product code 771774

\$385 plus GST

INS 100 Bench Top Scale is certified for legal trade should you need to update your scale. It can be operated by both battery and AC power, and weighing capacity is 15kg measured in .5g increments. It also has an add function, allowing prices of multiple products to be added for the same customer.

MBL offers interest-free terms to approved Members

SAVE NOW



Rhenninghaus Start L300 Slicer

Product code 712886

\$1,000 plus GST

Rhenninghaus Start L300 Slicer is belt driven with anodised aluminium casting, a high quality hardened chromium steel alloy 300ml blade and a built-in blade sharpener. The price of \$1,000 plus GST is a special for MBL members.



Thompson 900E M-1 Mixer Mincer

Product code 810436

\$13,260 plus GST



5 ONLY

INS 100 Tower Scale

Product code 771840

\$410 plus GST

INS 100 Tower Scale is certified for legal trade and can be operated by both battery and AC power. Its weighing capacity is 15kg measured in .5g increments. The tower is designed to allow a high level of visibility for both you and your customers.



Blue Dolly for 7, 10 and 15 Nally Tubs

Product code 840041

\$75 plus GST

Heavy duty moulded dollies, hygienic and easy to clean to suite no 7, 10 and 15 Nally tubs. They are easy to move and easy to clean, and each dolly comes with a free bonus scraper on top of the discounted dolly price.

For details

Call Chris Mountford or Shane Reynolds at MBL on (08) 8417 6002 ONLY WHILE STOCK LASTS!

Shorty hangs up his knives after 54 years

Alice Springs butcher Brian "Shorty" Bail has retired after 54 years in the meat game, including running his own shop for over three decades.

"There's been a passion about it but it was time to go and I have no regrets," says Shorty, 68, who had Shorty's Quality Meats for 34 years.

The business has been taken over and upgraded by another MBL Member, Milner Meats, giving it two shops in Alice Springs.

Shorty says, "I started out at 14 working in the local abattoir. I worked 60 hours a week and only got paid two quid but I loved every minute of it.

"In those days, all the cattle came up on the train from the area of Mount Sarah, 600km south of Alice.

"They were all droving cattle, so they were all about 450kg dressed - big, fat, beautiful cattle.

"My old boss at the abattoir maintained that the best meat he ever tasted was old bullock – team bullocks that had been retired and sent out to re-fatten."

Shorty describes starting his



Brian "Shorty" Bail locks up his Alice Springs shop one last time.

own shop 34 years ago as "daunting."

"Having to borrow money was a bit of a worry. We just went along and built a reputation for good quality and service," he says.

"Years ago, we didn't have a choice apart from the local abattoir. They would only give us the seconds and we had to pay top dollar.

"Sometimes we had to be surgeons, making something

out of the cattle that we got.

"Now, carcasses come from Strathalbyn or Yankalilla, delivered twice a week, and the cartons can come from all over Australia."

Shorty began thinking of retirement last year when one of his butchers, Darryl Dives, died of cancer.

"He was a big, strong, happy, gentle giant. Customers loved him. He didn't smoke but got throat cancer and died in seven months," he says.

"His death got me thinking about things; you have to move with the times and it was time for me to go."

Shorty supported MBL for many years, building a 30-year friendship with rep Geoff Nunn who retired last year. Shorty travelled to Adelaide for Geoff's farewell.

He says he is pleased his business has been taken over by the local Milner Meats, which operates its own quality shop.

"It's a new ball game; my traditional shop is getting a big makeover which was needed but I didn't want to do it because my time was up," he says.

"It's getting a real turnaround and it will be a wonderful shop."

MBL'S SUSIE O'BRIEN COVERS THE NT - P11

Bacon jam from waste

Adelaide chef Phil Whitmarsh has begun making bacon jam under the Newbury & Watson label.

Sweet, salty and smoky, Phil's Bacon Jam has diverse applications, from sandwiches to casseroles, and comes in 300g jars which sell for \$8.95.

Phil, formerly of nose-to-tail Daniel O'Connell restaurant, became the third in-house chef at Richard Gunner's Fine Meats earlier this year.

Richard says, "We sell so much bacon now,

we needed something to do with the bacon tail ends.

"Phil has basically taken waste bits and added honey and a few spices to make bacon jam."

Preservative free, the jam's listed ingredients are bacon, onions, honey, brown sugar, malt vinegar, garlic, cajun spice and cayenne pepper.

It is sold at Feast! Fine Foods and at other stores which stock Newbury & Watson products.



MBL has a new premix for butchers wanting to make meatloaf, a traditional winter favourite.

The new meatloaf with vegetable premix, which Newly Weds Foods developed, contains dehydrated vegetables for an authentic homemade flavour.

By adding fresh ingredients such as chilli, garlic or onion, you can give your product a unique final finish.

The premix is also applicable for the

New meatloaf premix

production of other minced meat products such as patties.

Newly Weds has the following meatloaf recipe for butchers. It calls for using 3.3kg beef, 3.3kg pork, 400g bacon/ham, 2kg ice water and 1kg meatloaf premix.

Process: Mince beef, pork and bacon/ham

through 5mm plate; mix water with premix, mix slurry with minced meat. Extra water can be added for desired consistency.

Place in aluminium trays and sell fresh, or bake at 170C for 45 minutes.

MBL meatloaf with vegetable premix product codes:

5kg - 350413 25kg - 352146

Jim's marinade lesson

Victorian butcher Jim White fondly recalls returning from trade school to tell his boss, "There's a new thing out – it's called marinade."

Young Jim was enthusiastic in relaying the potential benefits of this "great new thing" but says, "My old boss really wasn't impressed – he just laughed at me.

"Back then, we did pepper steak and garlic steak – that was the full extent of our 'gourmet' range. How things have changed!

"Today, you have to value add everything and be versatile – we now sell fruit and vege, and do salads in summer."

Jim, 48, a loyal supporter of MBL, has just celebrated 20 successful years of his award winning Jim's Butchery, at Nhill in western Victoria.

He marked the milestone by inviting more than 50 people who have worked in the shop, or have given valued support, to a dinner at the local pub on May 23.

A succession plan is in place, with Jim's son Daniel, 17, working for him two days a week as a school-based apprentice.

While Jim tells the marinade story to show how butchery has changed, he is quick to admit that old thinking can die hard.

"Daniel suggested a year ago that he set up a Facebook page for the shop. Like my old boss

'My boss wasn't impressed - he just laughed at me'



Like father, like son... Jim White with his apprentice son Daniel.

and the marinade, I wasn't interested," he says.

"My attitude was that if you've time for Facebook, you have too much time on your hands.

"But I went along with Daniel, and Facebook has proven a big success. To my surprise, we now

have 475 Facebook followers.

"Daniel puts on videos of the boys breaking up beef or lamb and a lot of people watch. He put on a cooking video and 2,500 people watched it – how incredible!"

Daniel began working at the

shop at age 12 as a clean-up boy and began his school-based apprenticeship there last year.

But two years ago, Jim didn't think Daniel was interested in becoming a butcher and put the shop up for sale.

"I didn't think he wanted to take it on but he came up one day and said, 'This is what I want.' Everything suddenly changed and I kept the shop," Jim says.

Daniel says he simply likes working as a butcher.

"It's interesting and it can be pretty entertaining at times," he says.

"I do most things, like breaking beef and lamb through to making sausages and salads."

Jim says, "There have been 13 butchers working here and Daniel is the eighth apprentice. Most came back for the (20th anniversary) party."

Two of them, Simon Duffy and Ben Pollock, are no longer butchers but live locally - Simon works on a farm and Ben works for the local council.

"But they both come into the shop to give me hand if I'm short," Jim says.

"Alan Fritsch, who worked here for six years before working as a butcher in England, came over from Sydney for the party. He's now a fireman."

"We all had a good time catching up."

With demand rising for making chicken schnitzels for pubs, Strathalbyn butcher Craig Maidment looked at ways to use "pesky" tenderloins.

"Tenderloins are a pain when you're making schnitzel – they just hang there, getting in the way," says Craig, a strong supporter of MBL for many years.

"Pubs, of course, want uniform size and portion control, and we had a lot tenderloins left over so we looked at ways to use them."

"They're too good to mince or to dice for curry, and we ended up deciding to crumb them and fry them as chicken chippys, or nuggets."

"We bought a two-pan deep fryer, like those used by delis, and got batter mix and crumbs from MBL – and we were away. We called them Chicken Chippys."

Twelve years on, Chicken Chippys have become a Friday tradition at Maidment's Meat Service, snapped up at \$19kg.

"We make 20kg of chippys every Friday morning – that's a lot of tenderloins! We always sell out," Craig says.

"Sometimes, if we don't have enough tenderloins, we get extra breasts, keeping the best part for sale in the shop and using the rest for chippys."

"They're something for 'party time' at the end of the week – to munch on with drinks, or to have watching the Friday night footy on TV. We cook them; people just heat them."

"Most of what we make is ordered by Thursday and there are a number of standing orders. We sell the rest in the shop but they're sold out by lunchtime."

"There's no big secret in making them – it's not like KFC with secret herbs and spices."

"We get everything from MBL; we don't add anything; it's really easy, straight out of the bag."

"All we do is trim the tenderloins of all fat, use fine white crumb and batter mix, coat in a mix of sweet chilli and hot & spicy crumb, and then it's into the fryer."

"We used to make three types of chippys –

TRY THIS!

Butchers share winning recipes



MBL product codes: *Chicken Chippys*

Fine White Crumb 191575

High Yield Batter Mix 349381

Sweet Chilli Crumb 190934

Hot & Spicy Crumb 190942

plain, hot & spicy and sweet chilli - but we now do just one – it's basically sweet chilli crumb with some hot & spicy added for zing."

The deep fryer which Craig bought for Chicken Chippys is now also used for other

value added products.

"We do things like frying meatballs and minced pork in batter" he says.

"But we've so far stopped short of frying ice cream..."

Running over two weeks, the ad was aired 732 times on commercial TV, with an estimated reach of 6.6 million viewers. It was viewed more than 1 million times online.

Sales of lamb for the week

before Australia Day were up by 35.3%, compared to an average week, and were up by 20.3% for the campaign fortnight.

These were exceptional sales results, says MLA's Andrew Howie.

Marvellous, Richie

MLA's last Australia Day lamb campaign was one of the most successful ever, thanks to the late Richie Benaud.

The "Richie's BBQ" ad was one of the final TV appearances of the cricket legend who died on April 10, aged 84.

As sun-loving Susie O'Brien shivers through another drab Adelaide winter, her thoughts regularly turn to Darwin where the June average temperature is 30C.

Susie makes regular telephone contact with MBL's 20 Members throughout the Northern Territory, taking orders and organising deliveries.

"You get to know people to an extent when you phone them regularly and I'd love to go up there to put faces to the voices," Susie says.

"I keep getting asked when I'm coming up. I've never been up there. It would be a real experience, especially at this time of year when it's so warm..."

"There'd be a lot to see, including the two crocodile farms which MBL supplies."

MBL has long supplied retail butchers from Alice Springs through Tenant Creek and Katherine up to Darwin, plus processors including Holco.

The NT is also home to some of MBL's more unusual Members, including two crocodile farms, a barramundi hatchery and a camel abattoir.

MBL Key Accounts Manager Dale Rowe visits twice a year. He flies into Darwin before driving south to Katherine, then visits Members in Darwin before flying to Alice Springs, then flying home to Adelaide.

Susie telephones most NT Members every week to take their orders.

"I start calling on Tuesday and Wednesday so that the orders are prepared on Thursday to go by courier on Friday," she says.

Susie joined MBL five years ago after working in the meat area for 10 years at Coles, Foodland, Gawler River and Standom.

Aside from her role helping NT Members, she takes general phone orders, serves in the MBL shop and processes email orders, including those from larger customers such as Ingham and Macro.

"Some customers don't have reps visit and they phone me once a week to place their orders," Susie says.

"As well, I work through a list of regular calls to make."

Susie says MBL's introduction of compact iPads last year has streamlined the system of taking orders.

The new system not only cuts the time of ordering for customers but can lead to more accurate orders.

Order pages can be specifically designed

"Meat the Team"

Profiles on MBL staff members



Susie O'Brien... her trusty iPad cuts the time of ordering for customers.

for each customer and the layout of his premises.

"This allows butchers to walk through the shop as we talk on the phone, placing orders in sequence," Susie says.

"The last five orders can be called up on screen. This can save time in estimating the new order.

"I can see if something from previous orders has not been included in the new order, and I can also quickly find if an item is in stock and if it's on special."

Away from work, Susie is an A-grade netball coach with Freeling in the Barossa, Light and Gawler league.

She grew up in Freeling and played netball with her three sisters for six or seven years, winning several premierships.

She then coached the A-grade team, returning to the role this year after 11 years away.

"It's a big commitment driving from Adelaide for training twice a week plus Saturday games but I'm really enjoying it," she says.

"I've got a great bunch of girls – I love the enthusiasm on their faces when you pull out something new."

Susie also enjoys catching up with and

supporting her children – Deana, 29, and Jesse, 24.

Jesse has his mum's sporting genes, now back playing football for North Adelaide in the SANFL after several seasons with Brisbane Lions in the AFL.

Q & A

Do you have a special interest or hobby? Outside family and work, coaching netball is my main interest.

What would you do with a spare \$50,000? I'd travel to somewhere where there's sun, surf and sand.

If you were a car, what would you be? A black Porsche 911 Carrera – just like the one (MBL Machinery Manager) Chris Mountford drives.

What food can't you live without? While I'm certainly not a vegetarian, I love vegetables.

If you could meet anyone, living or dead, who would it be? Bob Marley, the late reggae singer and musician. I'd love to play the bongos with him.

What's the best thing about working at MBL? I enjoy the wide range of people I have contact with. There's also a good, fun environment here.

Slape eyes ready meals

SA's largest sausage manufacturer, Slape & Sons, is entering the ready meals market after purchasing an established Adelaide frozen food company.

Slape & Sons, celebrating its 50th anniversary, has purchased Moore Foods which manufactures cooked frozen foods - such as schnitzels, cordon bleu, burgers and tuna patties - for a variety of food service customers.

These lines will continue and be expanded, but Slape & Sons essentially purchased Moore Foods, based at Ridgehaven, to provide capacity to enter the expanding ready meals market.

The new business has been called More Slape Foods and will be run separately from Slape & Sons' core sausage-making facility at Newton.

"We bought the Moore Foods premises and will keep it going so we can separate the two businesses and have two identities," says Slape & Sons' joint Managing Director, Paul Slape.

"To a degree, we're stepping out of our comfort zone but we've branched out because we see massive growth in ready meals.

"We've been thinking about ready meals for two years but we lacked the space at Newton and didn't have the cooking facilities."

Staff have been busy refreshing the Ridgehaven facility, with work expected to be completed by mid June.

Christopher Johnson has been transferred from Newton to manage the new business which will initially have five staff but will expand once ready meal production begins.

Paul has known Brian Moore, who founded Moore Foods, for more than 30 years.



Paul Slape at the Ridgehaven factory which is undergoing refreshment.



"He made steaklettes, hamburgers and chevapchichis for Slape & Sons," Paul says.

"Brian wants to retire but I didn't know he was selling until I saw a flyer for an auction for equipment. The building was to be auctioned separately.

"I came here looking for steel benches and

trolleys but the conversation quickly changed because I knew I wanted to buy the whole business.

"The deal was finalised only the day before the advertised auction, so it really came together at the 11th hour.

"It wasn't a hard decision. I knew Brian made good frozen products and I saw potential for growth, bolted onto established interstate markets for our sausages."

Brian stayed on a month after the sale to train Christopher and other staff in making existing products.

Paul says, "We plan to expand from one production line to two. We have some recipes at Slape & Sons that we can bring here with modifications for new frozen lines."

"But we're particularly keen about moving into the ready meals area which is only going to keep growing."

"Branching out is an exciting development in our company's history, happening in our 50th year."

The business was formed by butcher Robbie Slape. It is now run by his sons Paul and Philip, with the third generation now coming through.

"Dad could never have envisaged how the company has progressed," Paul says.

Woolies at the ready

Woolworths has announced plans for what it calls "Australia's first dedicated facility" for ready meals.

It has partnered food manufacturer Beak & Johnston to establish a factory in Sydney's west to make ready to cook and ready to heat meals.

"Under a 12-year contract, this facility will make a growing range of meals for Wool-

worts," a spokesman says.

The ready meals factory is part of a new division called Woolworths FoodCo, which is charged with developing new products.

The new division's brief is also to improve Woolworths' fresh meat supply and processing facilities, and develop "strategic sourcing relationships with primary industry partners."