

# AUTOMATION BECKONS

## MBL's latest labour-saving machinery combats growing shortage of skilled butchers – and now's the time to buy!

With skilled butchers difficult to recruit, MBL has been stocking up on an impressive range of the latest labour-saving machinery to help medium-to-large butcher shops remain viable into the future.

Our Athol Park showroom and adjoining warehouses are holding high levels of stock, ready for delivery, ahead of an expected rush on machinery before the end of the financial year.

The looming finish of the Federal Government's record Covid-inspired tax break requires new machinery to be in use, or installed ready for use, by June 30, so butchers wanting to upgrade should contact MBL now.

The generous offer dwarfs all previous machinery tax breaks by allowing businesses to claim immediate tax deductions for any number of machinery items at any cost.

With MBL's competitive prices and rebate to members also factored in, Sales Manager Ryan Mercier says there's never been a better time for butchers to upgrade to labour-saving equipment, particularly if they are struggling to source staff.

"There's a shortage of butchers and we have a strong focus on machines to create efficiency and assist retail shops remain sustainable," Ryan says.

"If you can't hire a butcher, look at buying a machine. For instance, an unskilled worker can use an automated chop cutter to do in a few hours what used to take a butcher all day to do manually.

"Modern labour-saving machinery allows efficient businesses to be competitive and sustainable into the future. Payback for machinery is very short, usually from one to three years."

Ryan crunched the numbers on three machines to calculate when a business should investigate purchasing and the weekly cost of repayments. He found that if a business:

- Makes 500kg of sausages weekly, it's time to consider a Rex RVF 327 Vacuum Filler (from \$467 weekly over three years).
- Processes over 200kg of diced meat weekly, it's time for a Treif Dicer (about \$224 weekly).
- Produces over 80kg of burgers, meatballs and chevaps, it's time for a Planus Burger Former (from \$139.60 weekly).

Ryan says MBL constantly gets great feedback from butchers who have taken the plunge and purchased new machinery. They often wished they'd upgraded sooner.

*Continued page 4*

## New machinery powers smallgoods push – see story pages 6-7



Let's get this one opened and out there... Ryan Mercier begins unpacking another new machine in an MBL warehouse to add to our record amount of machinery ready for immediate delivery.



# 10 YEARS AT ATHOL PARK

The opening of a spacious base at Athol Park 10 years ago paved the way for continuing growth and diversification by MBL's merchandise division.

While we're focused on the present and building an exciting future, our 10th anniversary at Athol Park is a time to pause and acknowledge the historical context.

Only our third base in our 118 years, the acquisition and development of Athol Park has been crucial for MBL remaining strong and stable as SA's oldest co-operative.

Our huge product range, competitive prices and annual rebate combine to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of members' businesses.

MBL Food Service would simply not be the market leader it is today without Athol Park providing the spacious base for four warehouses plus extra room for product development, blending, retail and administration.

Athol Park's space and modern facilities are a world away from our previous base of 42 years at Kilburn which we outgrew 20 years ago.

We were cramped and shackled at Kilburn, unable to expand our operations and missing out on opportunities.

After a fruitless search to secure a suitable property, MBL decided to build new premises on our land fronting Grand Junction Rd next to the Wingfield plant.

Plans were well advanced when the Athol Park property became available. With three street frontages, the site covered 13,890 square metres with buildings totalling 6,856 square metres. It ticked all the space and access boxes.

By purchasing at Athol Park rather than building afresh at Wingfield, MBL saved \$3.5 million - and we were able to retain our Wingfield land.

*(Retaining this land, where our original rendering plant still*



*How we announced the move to Athol Park.*

*stood, has subsequently proved important to MBL.*

*The old building was leased for many years to paving and stone products maker Hewnstone and was recently demolished for the imminent construction of a warehouse for our proteins division.*

*Spare land around the new warehouse will be leased to a neighbouring transport company to park trailers. This will generate \$200,000 a year for MBL).*

Settlement of Athol Park was in July 2012 and work began immediately to adapt the premises to meet MBL's needs.

MBL's last day of business at Kilburn was February 1, 2013.

We closed for the next two working days for the big move to Athol Park, opening on February 6.

After a "bedding down" period, the official opening was on April 16, 2013, by veteran MBL Director Mike Rankin.

MBL flung open the doors to members and guests for the official evening opening, providing refreshments and live music. Visitors, on small group tours hosted by staff, were struck by the vastness of the complex.

We are about to start work on a new blending facility, the latest example of Athol Park giving us the flexibility to cater for new opportunities and grow the co-operative.

## MBL NEWS

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**'Athol Park has been crucial for MBL remaining strong and stable as SA's oldest co-operative'**



# AMIC centralises awards, rejigs smallgoods

AMIC has reverted to its regional industry awards being centralised in Adelaide as part of a national shake-up.

Country butchers will need to send their entries to Adelaide rather than have judging in regional cities.

And instead of SA competitions, in four zones, being spread over several months, all judging will be held over three days as part of Adelaide's Beer & Barbecue Festival at Wayville on July 14, 15 and 16.

The State finals will be on July 29, probably at Adelaide Zoo once more, wrapping up SA's competitions within the month of July.

The condensed timetable will allow the 2023 national finals to be held in 2023 rather than spilling over to February 2024.

Regional judging around Australia has been

scrapped as part of a national push to contain increasing costs and to free-up time for AMIC's State managers to manage other business.

In another major change, only two smallgoods categories will be part of SA competitions with the rest, including Ham and Bacon, added to AMIC's national Australian Charcuterie Excellence Awards.

The Ready To Eat Products category will be retained in State competitions nationally, while in a nod to SA tradition, our unique Fritz category remains.

The State awards will be for six Sausage

King categories, two burger categories, Ready to Eat Products, Fritz and the Apprentice of the Year competition.

The apprentice competition will be held at TAFE SA Regency Park in May.

For the past two years, SA's country butchers have appreciated having the competitions back in the regions after previously having to send their entries to Adelaide for judging.

Country butchers strongly supported award presentation nights after regional judging in cities including Renmark, Port Lincoln, Port Pirie and Whyalla.

Victories by Balhannah Butchery and Barossa Fine Foods highlighted South Australia's strong showing at AMIC's national awards finals in Adelaide in February.

Balhannah Butchery won the Ham On The Bone competition for its red gum double-smoked ham, while BFF's Cambridge chipolatas won Sausage King's Traditional Pork category.

"We always knew we produced good ham and this is a great reward," says Balhannah's shop manager Kris Kuwette, who oversees three butchers and three apprentices.

Shop owner Brad Turner says, "It's awesome for our butchers



BFF's Dieter Knoll.

## National victories for Balhannah, BFF

to get this recognition. We have a great team producing quality products.

"A key to our ham is sourcing quality pork from two farmers near Murray Bridge through Hills Homestead Meats."

*(In March, Brad opened a second Adelaide Hills shop at the new Aston Hills shopping centre, Mt Barker. The combined business will be profiled in the next MBL News).*

BFF's Operations Manager and fourth generation smallgoods maker Dieter Knoll was delighted to continue his family's outstanding record of awards success in Sausage King.

Dieter was trained by his father Franz, Australia's most awarded smallgoods maker who won more than 1,000 medals and trophies in State and national competitions.

The 2023 national awards night, sponsored by Ikon Pack,



Kris Ruwette (left) and Brad Turner of Balhannah Butchery.

was a huge success at Adelaide Town Hall. Assorted events over three days were well attended.

Four SA businesses celebrated second placings – Coopers Butchers of Burra in Sausage King's Lamb category, Rollbusch Quality Meats of Waikerie in SK Continental, Swallow Drive Meat Supply of Mt Gambier in

SK Gourmet, and Tendawrap Butchers of Hallett Cove in the Bacon Rasher category.

Rollbusch Quality Meats also collected third placing in Boneless Leg Ham.

Edward Potter, of Churchill's Butchery at Glenelg, put up a bold showing in the Apprentice of the Year competition.



Plenty to inspect... MBL has increased the floor stock of machinery displayed at our Athol Park showroom to a record level.

From page 1

## AUTOMATION BECKONS

"They find new machinery – from auto slicers to vacuum packers with gas flushing attachments to prolong shelf life – adds value and helps them progress to the next level," he says.

"Today's machines are essentially plug and play. They can be programmed for maximum efficiency, work to high standards and they don't take sickies or go on holiday.

"The industry is moving towards bigger machines, seeing them as essential for efficient productivity.

"In the past, butchers often had to reach out interstate to buy high-end machines but they are now available at MBL.

"We can discuss finance options for purchase – we'll work to find a way to help approve applications.

"We have technicians who can take care of installation and factory-backed servicing and maintenance as part of our policy of taking care of members."



Ryan Mercier with a Rex Vacuum Filler.

Costello's Smallgoods and Hahndorf Gourmet exemplify the significant ongoing benefits of creating efficiencies by investing in the latest machinery from MBL.

Doug Costello purchased a Rex RVF 327 vacuum filler after struggling to find staff

and describes it as "fantastic" for producing 750kg of kransky in just two hours. He also uses it for assorted other products, led by bung fritz.

"It only cost the equivalent of one year's pay for a worker and we'll get years of production from it, not having to worry about absenteeism," Doug says.

At Hahndorf Gourmet, a Foodlogistik SlicR is making light work of portion cutting, saving time and labour as well as delivering perfect portioning.

"This machine has helped us out tremendously at a time when we find it hard to find workers," says owner Malcolm Hughes, who runs the expanding business with sons Liam, James and John.

James says, "It saves a lot of time. We use it mainly for bacon and it cuts 400 slices a minute. What used to take us three days to cut manually is now cut in a day by machine."

Hahndorf Gourmet is looking to MBL's expertise to automate its full slicing and packing operations as the business expands into new markets.

Ryan urges members wanting to take advantage of the tax break to contact MBL as soon as possible not only while stocks last but to make sure the machinery is installed by the June 30 deadline.

"With time running out to take advantage of the current tax incentive, we expect to be extra busy in coming weeks and we're well prepared for the rush," he says.





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# ‘JUST BRILLIANT’

## State-of-the-art machinery from MBL powers Nigel’s smallgoods expansion

Resigned to high beef and lamb prices eating into his traditional profit margins, Waikerie butcher Nigel Rollbusch has moved to secure long-term viability by greatly increasing his smallgoods production.

“With meat prices high and margins low, ramping up to become a smallgoods supplier is a way forward,” says Nigel, the winner of multiple AMIC awards, including a national Sausage King title.

Nigel has purchased a second Riverland butcher shop, at Barmera, as a base for smallgoods manufacture, updating and expanding a large production area and calling on MBL’s expertise to help equip it with modern, labour-saving machinery.

He currently supplies two Riverland supermarkets, as well as several pubs and clubs, but is eyeing markets further afield, aiming to increase smallgoods to 50% of his business.

His two latest machinery purchases from MBL – a Rex RVF 327 Vacuum Filler and a Viking 1020 Auto Swing Lid Vacuum Packer with gas flushing attachment – represent an investment of over \$100,000.

“They are just brilliant, greatly saving labour and reducing production times to make expansion possible,” Nigel says.

MBL Sales Manager Ryan Mercier says, “These two machines represent a significant investment by Nigel who’s doing great things in the Riverland.

“He looked to long-term efficiencies to meet demand as he expands the smallgoods side of his business.”

Nigel says, “Ryan has been a big help in getting set up. MBL’s service, including after-sales service, has always been great. We’re happy supporters of the co-operative.

“If you get good help and have good people behind you like MBL, you can go places.

“We’re enjoying immediate benefits from



*Nigel Rollbusch... plans to increase the 300kg of bacon he presently produces weekly.*



*Alex Rollbusch and his father Nigel with their trophies at AMIC’s national awards night in Adelaide in February.*

the two new machines but we’re a little way off using them to their full potential – they will be great as we grow.

“The vacuum filler produces in a day what it used to take us three days to do, there’s no human error and it frees time to do other things.

“We dial in exact amounts of ingredients

to give exact profit margins and it gives the exact cook time.

“About 70% of its use now is for smallgoods like fritz, mettwurst, kransky, kabanos, and viennas, and we use it for all our sausages.”

Rex vacuum fillers can do 100 links a minute to churn out, for example, 750kg of kransky in just two hours.

Nigel is equally impressed by the Viking 1020 Auto Swing Lid Vacuum Packer which sits in its own new room in an expanded rear area. “It’s fantastic, saving a lot of labour,” he says.

“There are two chambers – one does the vacuum packing while one person loads the other chamber ready to go, so one person is continually kept busy.

“We use the gas flushing attachment mainly for bacon, sealing it in bags for longer shelf life. We presently produce about 300kg of sliced bacon weekly but this will increase.”

Nigel, 51, shares a passion for smallgoods making with his son and protege Alex, 24, who has a talent for



➤ developing recipes and oversees day-to-day production.

"Alex is all over these new machines, having them programmed to a tee. He is the future of the business," Nigel says.

After working as a Riverland stock agent, Nigel returned to retail butchery in 2016, opening Rollbusch Quality Meats at Waikerie and taking on Alex as an apprentice.

The business, offering premium local meat at fair prices, thrived and Nigel began collecting AMIC awards for sausages and smallgoods, led by ham and bacon.

A highlight came in 2019 when he won a national Sausage King crown in the Continental section for his bratwurst sausage, made from local pork and beef. His bratwurst production rocketed to 120kg a week on the back of publicity.

In the 2023 national awards in February, his bratwurst sausage came second in Continental and his smoked ham was third in the Boneless Leg Ham competition, adding to the imposing collection of trophies displayed in the shop.

With the price of beef and lamb escalating and his profit margin shrinking, Nigel looked to boost smallgoods production.

"Along with overheads being so high, there's not a lot of cream left to keep the cat fat," he says.

An opportunity arose when Barmera's butcher shop, 40 minutes' drive from Waikerie, closed in 2020. Nigel was initially interested in buying the closed shop's equipment but decided to also buy the premises as a base for smallgoods production.

"The production area, in an old house at the rear of the shop, was a good size and



*Alex puts the game-changing Rex RVF 327 Vacuum Filler through its paces.*

was only six years old. It had \$20,000 worth of plumbing done and had a drained floor, and there was \$30,000 worth of solar equipment," Nigel says.

"We were running out of space at Waikerie, having already expanded into the shop next door, and we had no room to expand further.

"Barmera had potential and I could see a good future there for Alex and Michael Reichstein, another good butcher I trained. Both have passion and talent for smallgoods.

"We've expanded out back with two new rooms to create a free-flowing manufacturing area and installed a new coolroom. We bought some second-hand machinery to supplement what was already here."

The main second-hand item was a smoke oven from Maidment's Meat Service, Strathalbyn. "This gave us four smoke ovens so we're able to do 50 hams in a day. When I opened at Waikerie, we could only do eight a day," Nigel says.

"We decided right from the start to take our time in getting set up, going slowly but surely. We didn't want to bite off more than we could chew and wanted to get everything right before chasing big contracts.

"As we updated and expanded, we worked



*Michael Reichstein with the fruits of his labour at the Barmera smallgoods hub.*

*Continued page 8*



# Wattsy finds his niche

Living with autism, young Jacob “Wattsy” Watts struggled to say just a few words when he started work experience at a popular Adelaide butcher shop.

He began at Windsor Meats, Malvern, at the end of Year 12 under a work experience program for young people with a disability and he slowly came out of his shell, encouraged by the butchers.

Initially spending one day a week in the shop, Wattsy enjoyed simple tasks like crumbing schnitzels and helping with sausages. A social worker visited once a fortnight to monitor his progress.

Showing a clear passion for butchery, his working hours increased as his abilities and confidence increased.

Impressed, the shop’s then owner Lou Zammit saw his potential and took him on as an apprentice. Wattsy went on to “graduate” with flying colours, as Lou knew he would.

Now, 10 years after first starting, Wattsy is entrenched as a popular figure at Windsor Meats, grateful for having been given the opportunity to find his niche.

Over 120 customers readily recorded their support when current owner Sam Burt posted a short item about Wattsy’s history on the shop’s Facebook page.

Sam says, “The change in Wattsy over the years, from a young man who would barely say more than Hello, has been absolutely huge.

“He is super confident with customers and has become a good, all-round butcher. While most comfortable with repetitive routines, we can put him in any role.”

Wattsy, now 29, says, “I felt incredibly lucky for being given the chance to learn a trade and work with great people like Lou and Sam.



*Windsor Meats owner Sam Burt.*

“At the start, I was allowed to work here for one day a week for three months and I enjoyed it. Lou insisted on paying me even though he didn’t have to.

“Being autistic, I liked routines and simple systems that I could work to. I still do but I’m much more confident in what I do and I now like to chat with customers. I always aim for them to leave with a smile.

“Christmas is my favourite time. I like to suggest what customers can eat and how it’s prepared. It’s nice when they return to say they did what I suggested and it was fabulous.

“I look at a hanging piece of meat and see it as something ready to be ‘sculptured’ – to be turned into presentable, appealing cuts that are great to eat.”

Wattsy, with his wife Caroline, likes to invite friends over to enjoy Windsor Meats’ fare, including burgers.

“I love cooking burgers for friends – seeing them enjoy something I make at work and then put together at home,” he says.

with John Hill and Tyrone Looker from PIRSA’s Meat Hygiene Unit to make sure we complied with regulations. They were great – I can’t speak highly enough of them.

“Cees Wesselingh, of Stephan Knoll’s Independent Institute, topped up Alex and Michael’s smallgoods knowledge. Cees is a very knowledgeable man and the boys really benefitted.

“More recently, we’ve been boosted by Andrew Leech joining us. I worked with Andrew years ago and he’s an old-fashioned butcher who guides our younger staff.

“Andrew’s arrival at Waikerie has freed me to float between Waikerie and Barmera to help Alex with the smallgoods and better concentrate on the overall business.”

Production has grown in the two years since operations began at Barmera but will significantly increase with the addition of the two new machines from MBL.

Nigel’s two main wholesale customers are currently Koch’s Foodland supermarkets at Renmark and Loxton, supplying products including bacon and ham for the delis as well as a range of pre-packed smallgoods.

“We’ve only got into pre-packing relatively recently and, when we’re happy our system is fully right, we’ll look at securing other contracts,” he says.

“As well as supermarket contracts, we see potential in supplying our smallgoods to small butcher shops.

“We’ll be a bit dearer than others but people increasingly want quality products and they are prepared to pay for them.

“We’re seeing more young people come into our shops because of the quality. If you’ve got good bacon, they come from miles away.”



Looking back over 30 years at his Willunga butchery, Richard Brown quips, “I’ve created a monster!”

He’s referring to the demanding workload accompanying the incredible growth of Willunga Quality Meats, a small shop which regularly attracted “only 30 to 40” customers a week when Richard took charge in 1992.

“Now, we regularly have 800 to 900 – sometimes up to 1,000 – customers a week, so we’ve come a long way,” says Richard, who specialises in premium local beef and lamb in a renowned foodie hotspot.

“There was my wife Debbie and an apprentice here with me at the start; now we have a really good crew of five butchers.”

Saturday mornings are particularly busy, fuelled by visitors to the ever-popular Willunga Farmers Market – SA’s first such market when launched in 2002 and still rated one of the best.

From day one, the spill-over of hundreds of market visitors has been a boon to Richard and other main-street traders.

Richard, who opens until 1pm on Saturdays, says, “The town is buzzing and we’re run off our feet. We average 150 customers, sometimes up to 220, in this little shop on market days.

“Locals know it’s best not to come in on Saturdays because we can’t chat with them or give them the full personalised service that they are used to.”

Richard attempted to ease pressure at the shop by also selling his products from a refrigerated van at the market.

“I’m at the market with two casuals while five butchers run the shop – and we’re busier than ever,” he says.

“We go through three bodies of beef and 15 to 20 lambs a week, and we make our own ham, bacon and other smallgoods.

“We made over 400 hams for last Christmas – I’ve created a monster!”

Customer support was demonstrated when news of Richard’s 30 years in the shop was posted on Facebook, drawing 210 Likes and 54 Comments within days.

Richard describes as “huge” the customer interest in buying local and knowing the “story” behind the meat in a region which prides itself on its food and wine.

His key to sustained success over three decades has been offering premium Fleurieu Peninsula beef and lamb, including some from his own land.

# Premium local meat the key to Richard’s 30-year success at foodie hotspot



Willunga’s Richard Brown.... “quality is remembered long after price is forgotten.”

“We grow all our own lambs organically and source local cattle from the range. Quality is remembered long after price is forgotten,” he says.

Richard, 67, who did his apprenticeship as a butcher and slaughterman at Woodside, has no plans for retirement. “I’ll be sticking with it,” he says.

“I have a good crew of hard-working butchers – they look after me and I look after them. They capably look after the shop whenever I’m not here.”

As an example, on the day when MBL News

interviewed Richard, he had been out delivering 100 of his lambs by trailer to a local property for fattening.

“They are trimming the grass for a local horse lady. She doesn’t use fertilisers on her property, fitting with our policy of growing the lambs organically,” he says.

Richard also looks after the selection of cattle and lambs, delivering them to a small abattoir at Kangarilla.

“Delivery is on Wednesdays, killing is on Thursdays and we bring the meat back to the shop in a refrigerated trailer on Fridays,” he says.

Over the years, Richard has been a staunch supporter of MBL. He says, “I look after people who look after me. MBL has always looked after me so I’m loyal.

“All butchers should fully support MBL because of the service, prices and rebates. They are crazy if they don’t.”





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# Jane's changing of the guard

Despite the pressures of constant work and long hours, Jane Price declares: "A butcher shop is one of the happiest places where you can work!"

Jane, 66, largely bases her observation on the good-natured banter that still flows between butchers and customers despite creeping political correctness.

She knows all about banter after spending her life in and around the butcher shops of her grandfather, father and husband. She has witnessed massive changes along the way but banter survives.

"I'm the third generation so butchering's in my blood," Jane says ahead of a changing of the guard at Berri's Plaza Quality Meats which she and her late husband Tom opened in 1986.

At Berri and in previous shops over many years, she was Tom's "rock" – serving, making ready products like schaslicks and schnitzels, and doing the books as well as raising four daughters.

Tom passed in 2020 and Jane has kept the shop running with help from daughter Robyn and butcher Shane Robertson who has worked there for 26 years.

"While I worked in the shop for years, Tom managed the stock and the staff. I was a little concerned about taking over – I wasn't confident that I'd be capable," Jane says.

"But it was something that needed doing so I did it and I was surprised by how much I knew. It went well thanks to my staff, especially Shane who has been wonderful.

"He's a very good butcher; nothing's too much trouble for him."

But after three years at the helm, Jane is now ready to retire and has put the business up for sale.

The grandmother of seven wants more time to spend with family and for lawn bowls. She's an accomplished bowler in pennant competitions.



Jane Price and daughter Robyn at Plaza Quality Meats, Berri.



Shane Robertson... 26 years at Berri.

Robyn, 43, says, "This will be our Easter. It's very sad and it wasn't a nice decision to sell but Mum's more than done her bit and is ready to retire."

After working as a truck driver at a mine in Queensland, Robyn returned to help Jane run the shop and considered taking it over before realising she was not up to it.

"I've been learning something every day but I'm not a butcher and I don't know enough

to take over the shop," Robyn says.

"It has really been fun to work here. It can be hilarious, with butchers flirting and some of the older ladies flirting back. It's banter you couldn't get away with anywhere else."

Jane says she'll miss butcher shop camaraderie. After all, she has been around shops for long as she can remember.

Her grandfather was a butcher as was her father who had a shop in Waikerie which was taken over by her brother Brian "Butch" Burnett who went on to establish Butch's Smallgoods.

Husband Tom bought his first shop at age 19 at West Richmond and had other Adelaide shops at Stepney and Kilburn before moving to the Riverland.

"The Kilburn shop was across the road from MBL. The MBL blokes would come over to test preservatives, flavours, meals and cures," Tom told MBL News in 2012.

Jane says, "My family has been MBL members going right back. MBL has been very good to us."





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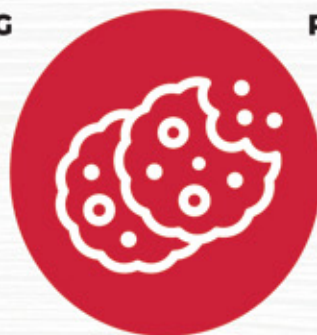
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