

GOING GREEN

MBL gives butchers a leg-up in the transition to eco-friendly packaging

MBL is at the forefront of packaging's green evolution, working to be the food industry's authoritative and trusted supplier of eco-friendly products.

It's only a matter of time before traditional single-use foam and plastic packaging is banned, so MBL is making good use of what is effectively a transitional period to become the industry leader.

We have been proactively investigating green options from around the world and have begun the gradual rollout of several home compostable products.

Ikon Pack Green Eco-Cane trays, made from

sugarcane pulp, and vacuum bags, made from plant-based cellulose, both break down in home green organics bins and have been well received by butchers for being practical and functional.

"MBL is on the front foot because green packaging will become mandatory faster than most people think. We're giving Members a leg-up," says MBL General Manager Sales & Marketing, Bexley Carman.

SA is setting the national pace for green legislation, with single-use plastic straws, cutlery and stirrers banned from March 1 this year, and polystyrene trays and containers to be banned from March 1 next

year. Further measures are sure to follow.

In 2018, the Federal and State governments agreed that all Australian packaging should be reusable, recyclable or compostable by 2025.

"As well as new regulations being on the horizon, shoppers have rising expectations of how their food is packaged and the effect on the environment," Bexley says.

"The major supermarkets have green plans in place and smaller food retailers are following suit in varying degrees.

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Watch MBL News for continuing updates of our green rollout



MBL has created a new role of Key Accounts Manager Packaging, appointing packaging expert Andy McMahon to focus on sustainable options and liaise with our Members on the green rollout.

Andy is pictured with a box of Ikon Pack Green Eco-Cane home compostable trays which are proving functional for Members and being warmly welcomed by shoppers. The full story's on page 4.

Race day a winner

A meat industry networking event at Murray Bridge races, hosted by AMIC and MBL, may become an annual event.

About 220 people attended the highly-successful inaugural event on Saturday, January 16, and now both AMIC and MBL see merit in holding it annually.

"It was a fantastic day which everyone, from butchers and wholesalers to processors and producers, enjoyed," says AMIC's Chris Kelly.

"There was good mixing, including a case of someone meeting his supplier of 20 years for the first time.

"Judging by the positive feedback, I hope it becomes an annual event."

MBL's Bexley Carman agrees, saying: "It was an excellent day and we'd definitely look at being involved again.

"We subsidised the event to keep the cost down to \$60 a ticket as a bonus for our Members."

MBL NEWS

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CHRISTMAS CHEER

Most retail butchers enjoyed their best Christmas for several years, with some reporting festive sales rises of 30% to continue the strong growth of 2020.

In MBL News's annual straw poll of Christmas trade, Bruce's Meat reported a 30% sales boom across its four Adelaide stores, as did Rollbusch Quality Meats at Waikerie.

Smaller rises were more common overall, as reflected by MBL's merchandise sales for December being 13% up over December 2019.

But despite the fluctuations, retail butchers collectively enjoyed their strongest Christmas after generally modest or flat sales for at least three years.

MBL's strong sales for December capped a robust 2020 which featured continuous monthly figures of around 20% higher than in 2019, says General Manager Sales & Marketing, Bexley Carman.

"We've heard really good noises of butchers having a very good Christmas, with most holding onto customers they gained during the COVID-19 sales rises," Bexley says.

"Our focus at MBL is to continue working hard to help butchers to keep their new customers."

AMIC's SA rep Chris Kelly says butchers enjoyed upbeat sales during the festive season, continuing the trend of strong sales during 2020.

"Butchers were generally happy with Christmas trade, with most well up on the previous Christmas after a slow start caused by the sudden three-day COVID-19 lockdown in mid-November," Chris says.

"The lockdown put the brake on things and Christmas orders suddenly stopped. Then the lockdown ended and the orders started coming again with a rush.

"Christmas continued a really good year for retail butchers and it will remain a case of them needing to consolidate."

Trevor Hill says Bruce's Meat sales were up by about 30% for both Christmas and the month of December across the four stores at Mitcham, Pasadena, Stepney and St Agnes.

"There were fluctuations of 2-3% between the stores but overall we were up by about 30%," Trevor says.

"Schools finished a week earlier and with more parents at home, shopping started earlier and seemed more organised so while we were busy, it wasn't as manic as previous Christmases.

"There were no big workplace Christmas dinners this year and there was more socialising - and cooking - at home.

"All the butchers I've spoken with have said it was a good Christmas."

In the Riverland, butcher Nigel Rollbusch says sales were up by 30% at his Waikerie store, while his new shop at Barmera exceeded his expectations.

"Christmas was really good, I'm very happy. With COVID, it was a very busy 2020 and our sales kept consistently high," Nigel says.

Festive sales were up by 15% at Mellor's Gourmet Meats, Modbury Heights. "I definitely can't complain - Christmas rounded off a good year," says Darren Mellor.

At Seaford Gourmet Meats, David DiCicco says, "We had a very good Christmas which started slow with the COVID lockdown but finished with a rush of orders to complete a very good year."

In Clare, Sausage King Jason Mathie says his Christmas sales were up by at least 10% and the rush continued through to the New Year.

"We were really busy up to Christmas and it continued through to the New Year because a lot of people were travelling within SA," Jason says.

"Clare was booming with travellers. A coffee shop across the road had record sales and we were lucky we had ordered extra meat."



50 BIG YEARS Jimmy Lambos, who has enjoyed more Christmases than he cares to remember, started the New Year by celebrating his 50 years as a butcher. At 67, he has no plans to retire because he says he still gets excited every morning when opening the door of Mr Meats at West Hindmarsh.

See his story on pages 8 and 9.

Drakes has underscored its impressive growth, particularly over the past seven years, by accumulating one million shares in the Co-operative.

MBL CEO Jamie Higgins says, "This not only reflects Drakes' growth as a business but underscores the growing and important partnership between Drakes and MBL."

MBL's diverse supply to Drakes includes many specially-sourced items of high technical specification for the Beverley meat processing facility.

In 1974, Roger Drake purchased his first supermarket, a three-laned store named Jack & Jill's at Mitcham. He employed four staff.

Drakes is now Australia's largest independent grocery retailer with more than 50 stores across SA and Queensland, annual turnover of over \$1 billion and over 5,500 staff.

Drakes Operations Manager Phil Shayler has long enjoyed a strong relationship with MBL, recalling when the Co-op's former Sales Manager John Phillips first called on Roger Drake.

"When we at Drakes first started dealing with MBL about 20 years ago, we were still in our relative infancy as a business," Phil says.

"Although nobody knew how big we'd grow, MBL took an interest in us and helped us with packaging and ingredients,

MBL and Drakes: growing together



At a dinner to mark Drakes' one-million MBL shares milestone are (from left) MBL Chairman George Ujvary, Drakes founder Roger Drake and MBL CEO Jamie Higgins.



Drakes distribution centre opened at Edinburgh North in 2019.

becoming like a partner.

"We've always found MBL progressive, coming up with

innovations to help our business.

"MBL has sourced and trialled

many new products for us, finding the right products at the right price."

MBL General Manager Sales & Marketing, Bexley Carman, says the Co-op goes to great lengths to meet Members' specific requests for products.

Bexley says in the case of Drakes, MBL was set the task in 2014 of sourcing some high-specification products for Drakes' meat and bakery departments.

"Some of these items took us over 12 months to produce moulds and have signed off against Drakes' high standards before putting them into production," Bexley says.

"We believe the savings to Drakes was at a minimum of 5%, as well as improving quality outcomes for many products.

"It's gratifying that Drakes considers us to be a partner as this is very much how we want our customers to regard us.

"We're pleased to be playing a role in Drakes' growth."

Phil says he has had many approaches from rival merchandise suppliers over the years but Drakes had stuck solid with proven and dependable MBL.

"We don't go off on tangents. There has been no need for us to look elsewhere as we see MBL as a partner in packaging and ingredients," Phil says.

"MBL's support has never wavered. MBL knows how we think and we know how MBL thinks.

"We can't see our strong relationship diminishing into the future as the two businesses grow."



Plenty of smile about... MBL and Drakes leaders gathered for a photo at the celebration dinner.

Meet MBL's expert 'face' of new green packaging

Former butcher turned packaging expert Andy McMahon has received a warm reception as a "face" of MBL's move into eco-friendly packaging.

MBL, showing commitment to exploring and implementing emerging "green" packaging options, created the new role of Key Accounts Manager Packaging.

Andy, who was working for another packaging supplier, stood out as the best candidate and began his new job at MBL last August.

He has been busy researching "green" trends and their practical application to the MBL Membership, focusing on being proactive rather than reactive.

MBL General Manager Sales & Marketing Bexley Carman says, "Andy's job is to educate and create awareness because we expect the cost of sustainable packaging will come down as the scale of manufacture increases.

"With higher volume, we can properly talk with manufacturers about lowering the price.

"Andy has had a good response from the membership and we have had some good volumes starting to come through."

Bexley says Andy's role gives MBL the necessary focus to "educate" butchers and other customers about the virtues of eco-friendly products.

"Andy's role is about education, helping set people on a clear path in what is a relatively-new area," Bexley says.



Home Compostable



Andy McMahon... offering expert packaging advice to butchers and other MBL customers.

"In Andy, MBL has a fresh resource to focus on the changes that are happening with an eye to what's coming.

"He's finding out about trends and what products are available to keep everyone, including our reps, up-to-date. He's also out and about, visiting the membership.

"We're planting the seed that when reusable, recyclable and compostable packing becomes mandatory, people will think of MBL for the solution."

Andy spent most of his butchering career working in Adelaide's southern suburbs, owning The Steak Shoppe at Christies Beach for 11 years, before entering the packaging field.

"I'm passionate about sustainability and the environment – when I'm not working, I'm surfing," he says.

"But there's idealism and there's realism.



My role at MBL is lowering the step for people to switch to sustainable packaging.

"More sustainable products are becoming available but prices are higher because the products are new. Prices will come down with scale.

"With people being increasingly concerned about the environment, butchers could attract new customers by marketing their green credentials."

For packaging advice, Andy McMahon can be reached on 0437 434 744 or at amcmahon@mblsa.com.au

'My role at MBL is lowering the step for people to switch to sustainable packaging' – Andy McMahon

From page 1

"The ins and outs of the changes could be daunting to busy butchers and our other customers, but they can turn to MBL for authoritative advice, knowing our products will not only comply with regulations but will be functional.

"There's no point going green for the sake of it. Packaging must be commercially viable and work for intended products, such as having a desired shelf life.

"MBL was set up 116 years ago as a co-op to serve butchers and this is the latest example, taking the worry out of changes for butchers.

Red-letter day for green trays

Windsor Meats co-owner Sam Burt was delighted when his first order of Ikon Pack Green Eco-Cane trays arrived from MBL, and he wasted no time in spreading the good news.

His message on the Malvern shop's Facebook page stated, "Foam trays are OUT, compostable trays are IN!

"We have made the change over to compostable packing trays so make sure when you are done with the trays, they go in your green bin."

Customers, in turn, were quick to post encouraging comments, confirming Sam's expectation that "going green" would be warmly embraced.

Comments included, "Just love what you are doing", and "Great to see great local businesses making sustainable choices."

The vast majority of comments were from women. Most kept it short and sweet, with messages such as: Thumbs Up To You, Fantastic, Excellent, Great Stuff, Good Work, Well Done, and Yassss!

Windsor Meats was one of SA's first butcher shops to introduce the Eco trays in early October after their delivery to Australia was delayed overseas for months by COVID-19 issues.

Sam says, "Every time (MBL rep) Mark Rosewarne visited, I'd ask him about when they were coming because I was keen to switch from foam trays.

"Interrupted shipping meant a delay and we

GOING GREEN

"The cost of the Eco trays is initially higher but we expect the cost to come down as they become widespread and the scale of manufacture increases."

CEO Jamie Higgins says MBL, is an major supplier of packaging products to the meat, seafood and bakery industries, is in a strong position to be a green leader.

To this end, MBL has become a signatory of the Australian Council of Recycling, an industry association for the recycling and

resource recovery sector.

"Ultimately, it's about doing the right thing," Jamie says.

"MBL is showing the way as a leader, helping the food industry meet growing customer expectations. It's about being socially responsible and doing what's right."

Jamie's sentiments are being increasingly

Continued page 6



Alannah Cozamanis, of Windsor Meats, with one of the Ikon Pack Green Eco-Cane trays.

were excited when the new trays arrived and we could make the change.

"This is not something we've decided to do on the spur of the moment. I'd been thinking about it for several years on environmental grounds but I needed to make sure any new trays would be good quality to do the job.

"I didn't want to change just for the sake of it so I waited until a good quality compostable tray became available from MBL.

"As we move our business completely away

from all single use plastics, I'll be keeping an eye out for more (green) products as they come to MBL."

Sam says he expects the cost of green products will probably come down as they become more popular and manufacturing volumes rise.

"As individuals, we generate plastic and if we can do a little bit to change, it all adds up. If anyone who can do it does do it, everyone benefits," he says.

"Ultimately, it's the right thing to do and the more people who get on board, the better."

From page 5

shared by butchers, including AMIC Master Butcher Dave Armstrong, of Goodwood Quality Meats, in a recent Instagram post.

“We are transitioning from the black foam trays to a sugarcane tray. These trays are compostable and can go straight into your green bin,” he wrote.

“Over the next year, we will be swapping out a lot of single-use items and going greener.

“This is something our supplier (MBL) has been working tirelessly on for a long time and seeing the results of their hard work is amazing.”

Bexley says it has taken 18 months of persistence for MBL to “get where we are now.”

“It took a while to get these products (home compostable trays and vacuum bags) but it has been worth it,” he says.

MBL has been doing its own green research and has also been involved in investigations by the Ikon Pack group which consists of six leading food industry suppliers – one in each mainland State and one in New Zealand.

“Being part of the Ikon group is vital. For example, the moulds alone for the Eco trays cost \$70,000 and all six businesses chipped in to cover the cost,” Bexley says.

“Once you make the moulds, you need a minimum scale for manufacturing to be viable. This scale was reached only by the six suppliers combining.”

It also took time for MBL and the Ikon group



to gain appropriate certification for the Eco trays and vacuum bags to be labelled as biodegradable and compostable.

The products passed rigorous certification tests under the Home Compostable Verification Scheme run by the Australasian Bioplastics Association (ABA).

“Proper certification is important. The approved use of official logos allows consumers to easily identify packaging materials as biodegradable and compostable,” Bexley says.

“Just because a produce bag is coloured green doesn’t mean it has sustainability credentials.

“Across the food sector now, some products carry words and invented logos to give the impression they are green but it’s often a false impression.

“Education is going to have a play a big part in the whole process.”

Late last year, a national survey by Toluna of 1,035 Australians found an overwhelming majority of 82% wanted products that are packaged sustainably.

Nearly two thirds (63%) said the issue is more important to them now than it was two years ago.

The survey found 25% of consumers aged under 34 had stopped buying an item in the past six months because of sustainability concerns.

While shoppers under 34 were the most likely to drop brands they considered eco-unfriendly, 21% of shoppers aged 35-55 said they had done the same thing in the past six months. Only 9% of consumers aged over 55 had done so.

Bexley says MBL only recommends green products that are suitable for specific needs.

“We’ve had a case of a fairly large producer of ready meals who uses our CPET (Crystal-line Polyethylene Terephthalate) trays which are fully recyclable but not compostable,” he says.

“He asked about compostable



➤ trays but at this stage they can't do all that CPET trays can do so it was best for him to stick with CPET.

"Suitable compostable trays will eventually be available for him as we're only at the start of an evolving process."

Chairman of AMIC's SA Retail Council, Trevor Hill, says it's appropriate for independent retail butchers to build green credentials.

"It will be fantastic, of example, if we can change 80% of bags to being biodegradable," Trevor says.

"We'll get into it (at Bruce's Meat) but it will be an additional cost to the business. People may want to be green but, in the

end, they'll have to pay for it.

"We might have to reduce tray sizes to keep the price down. It's about understanding the price barrier."

Butchers will probably be guided by the demographics of their local areas. Going green might be important in some areas but not in others where people are more price conscious.

Bexley says there's no escaping that the extra cost of green packaging will be passed onto shoppers in some way.

"It will be important for butchers to appeal to customers by advertising their green credentials, including using social media," he says.

"The fact is that single-use foam and plastic packaging will be banned eventually. The food industry will need to get on the front foot so let's start doing it now."

In the transition period, some retailers may give shoppers the choice of foam trays or compostable trays but this process could cause delays in serving and be problematic, especially at busy times.

"With the compostable trays being more expensive, butchers would soon know just how serious customers are about the whole green issue," Bexley says.

"However, retailers will eventually have no choice but to bite the bullet and adhere to new regulations. We're working hard at MBL make the change as smooth as possible."



Nicola Gauci, of Barossa Fine Foods at Golden Grove, says the Eco-Cane trays are perfect for all manner of meat products.

Sustainability drive by Barossa group

The take-up of Ikon Pack Green Eco-Cane trays from MBL is a first step in a concerted sustainability drive by the Barossa Fine Foods group.

The Eco-Cane home compostable trays have been replacing polystyrene trays at Barossa Fine Foods, Standom Smallgoods and Angelakis seafood stores.

But this is just the beginning, says the group's National Sales Account and Marketing Manager Stephen Edwards.

"As part of our company vision, we have added a sustainability section to enable us to source sustainable products, packaging and implement sustainable work practices in our factory and stores," Stephen says.

"This year, we will implement a recycling program and also move more packaging into recyclable plastics and cardboard.

"We are now members of APCO (Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation) and are putting strategies in place to guide our choices to the benefit of the environment and company."



50 BIG YEARS

There's no stopping Jimmy Lambos

A teenage Jimmy Lambos didn't want to start work as a butcher but now, 50 eventful years later, he doesn't want to stop.

Jimmy was ordered by his Greek family to become a butcher but his initial trepidation turned into a love of the trade and a satisfying career across three capital cities.

"I'm still excited to open the front door of my shop every morning," says Jimmy, 67, a larger-than-life character at Mr Meats, West Hindmarsh.

"I love the work and I love the interaction with customers. I have no plans to retire – I'll keep going until I drop because I love my job.

"I was forced into becoming a butcher but I took it on as a challenge and I have never regretted it, owning my own shops in Sydney, Darwin and Adelaide."

Jimmy applied the name Mr

Meats to most of his shops, with accompanying signage featuring a smiling caricature of himself.

"It has been a good trademark that has worked really well for years. I'm a grasshopper,

moving from place to place, and it comes with me," he says.

"Old customers see it and drop in to say hello. Just the other day, a bloke came in and said, 'I saw you on your signs. You used to be my butcher at Unley.'"



Jimmy, marking 50 years as a butcher, has no plans to retire, saying he still loves the work and interacting with customers.

Jimmy celebrated his 50 years as a butcher in January, recalling how in 1970 at age 17 he had to leave the family home in Darwin to work in his brother-in-law's butcher shop in Sydney's eastern suburbs.

"He had a shop in Oxford St, Paddington, and my sister said I had to be his apprentice. I had no choice, that's how Greek families work," Jimmy says.

"I distinctly remember starting on the 13th of January because, being superstitious, I thought it would be an unlucky day. But looking back, it was lucky because it was the start of a long career.

"It turned out I wasn't given an apprenticeship. The boss said I'd learn more from him in the shop than at trade school and funnily enough, he was right.

"I've always been self-driven so I worked hard for success."

Jimmy liked the trade



and saved hard. He recalls, "After two years, I had \$11,500 so I said I wanted to buy the business.

"The boss's jaw dropped, but he agreed to sell.

"People said I was crazy, that I was only a country boy from Darwin. They said I'd go broke in three months. How wrong they were!

"I threw myself into the deep end. I had big ambitions, wanting to be the master of my own destiny. I wanted to control my life."

Jimmy succumbed to homesickness after four years in Sydney, returning to Darwin to run his first Mr Meats shop until Cyclone Tracy struck.

Cyclone Tracy hit Darwin in the early hours of Christmas Day in 1974, killing 71 people and devastating 80% of the city, including Jimmy's house and shop.

He returned to Sydney to run a thriving butchery on a main road in the inner suburb of Rozelle. He called it Tiger Butchery, in a nod to the local Balmain Tigers rugby league club.

"I was booming. I was the kingpin of Balmain. I never had a day off and I worked my fingers to the bone. I wore myself out after about five years," Jimmy says.

"This is what I have done all the way through my career. I could never stand the thought of losing customers if I took time



A great team... Jimmy and his wife Kathy have complemented each other for decades.

off, so I'd keep working.

"I'd get burnt out and sell the shop, taking a break before buying another one and building it up."

In 1981, Jimmy moved to Adelaide to buy a shop at Unley.

Stunned by the affordable real estate prices, he purchased a house at Cowandilla and has stayed put.

The Unley shop was the first of five he has owned in Adelaide. The others have been at Fulham Gardens, Welland, Cowandilla and now West Hindmarsh.

Jimmy trained his sons Nicholas and Stephen as butchers. Both eventually became plumbers but they pick up the knives to help Jimmy at Christmas and Easter.

Through thick and thin, Jimmy says his wife Kathy has been his rock. "I walk around thinking

I'm the boss but Kathy's really the boss," he says.

"She says I get too emotional about things and talk too much but that's me. I am very grateful and very appreciative of Kathy."

As well as serving and making value added products, Kathy looks after the administrative side, including doing the books.

She says, "I've been doing this for years and I still enjoy it. Like Jimmy, I enjoy coming in every day."

Jimmy says, "You need a good woman behind you, otherwise you're wasting your time and you might as well throw away the shop's keys.

"Working as husband and wife cuts down overheads. I've also survived because I've avoided shopping centres where the rents are so high.

"When you're running a little

butcher shop, it's all about survival."

Jimmy says it's vital to "hit the sweet spot" with pricing. "There needs to be a happy mix of quality and price," he says.

"One of the hardest things over my 50 years has been to maintain constant quality due to variances in the meat supply chain.

"Customers will dump a butcher if he sells something that's not up to scratch. They never forget."

Jimmy has developed into a goat specialist, in tune with his Greek origin and location in the heartland of Adelaide's Greek community.

"It's part of our Greek tradition to have a whole baby goat or a lamb on the spit for Christmas and Easter. A baby goat of 8-10kg feeds 12 people while a lamb will feed 30," he says.

"These days, I also sell a lot of goat to the Indian community for curries."

Adapting to the needs of customers has not only been essential for survival but has helped Jimmy maintain his strong interest in butchering.

"After all these years, you'd think I'd want to put the knives away but this is my life and this is my last shop," he says.

"My use-by date is nearly up but I've a few more years left yet."



How good is your lease?

Having a good lease in place is vital to the security and value of your business.

Negotiating a low rental is an important part of making sure the business is profitable and, in the future, attractive to prospective purchasers.

But a low rental is only one part of a good lease. There are many other factors which together will determine the security of your lease and your ability to continue business in your present location.

What constitutes a 'good lease'

There are many factors to look at when working out what constitutes a good lease and some may be specific to the business location or the tenant. Some common factors include:

- Lease registration to improve the lessee's security of tenure;
- A low rental and rent reviews (a lease with a high rent and high fixed rent reviews may not only affect profitability but could also put off prospective purchasers of the business). Ideally, rent reviews would be linked to CPI but capped so that they cannot be higher than, say, 3%;
- The absence of certain clauses, such as the landlord taking a mortgage over all of the tenant's property including the tenant's home, or clauses which allow the landlord to move the tenant to another part of the shopping complex;
- A lease term that is not too long. A

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10-year lease at the beginning of a significant and prolonged economic downturn would almost certainly spell disaster for many operators.

Better to have a shorter lease term or, even better still, to have a long lease term with the lessee having "rights of termination" every few years; and

- As many options to renew the lease as possible.

Is lease registration necessary?

Lease registration - the process of registering the lease on the title to the property - is generally highly desirable but it is not a requirement.

Conveyancers or solicitors arrange lease registration via the PEXA electronic conveyancing system.

The process is carried out pursuant to the Real Property Act and is managed by the Land Titles Office.

While generally highly desirable, lease registration is not recommended in some situations, such as where there is a very short lease or where the landlord and tenant are the same but have different company structures.

Lease registration cost

Cost of lease registration can vary but at its most basic it is \$173 for the Land Titles Office registration fee and \$114 for the PEXA (electronic conveyancing fee). It is likely that the solicitor or conveyancer may want something for their troubles as well (estimate \$200).

If the premises are only portion of the whole of the land in the Certificate of Title, it may be necessary to have a plan prepared by a surveyor and lodged at the Land Titles Office.

Including further registration fees, this may add another \$1,000 to the equation.

Advantage of Lease Registration

The primary benefit of lease registration is statutory protection from purchasers of the property under the Real Property Act.

If your lease is not registered, a subsequent purchaser of the property could refuse to recognise your lease and either require you to vacate or to enter into a new lease on much less favourable terms.

The take-home message is that unless you are very confident it is not necessary, have your lease registered on the title.

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From humble beginnings...

Making smallgoods was a basic affair in South Australia's early years, as evidenced by this Barossan smokehouse from the mid-1800s.

Looking more like an outside dunny, the smokehouse sits in the backyard of the quaint Luhrs Cottage Museum which was built around 1846 at Light Pass near Nuriootpa.

Made of pug and straw, the cottage was built by the village's first Lutheran schoolteacher, Johann Luhrs, and its smokehouse is typical of those which dotted the Barossa.

The preserved cottage now serves as a small museum, displaying heirlooms from the early Germanic settlers. At the rear is an old school room, cellar, shed with farming imple-

HISTORY

ments - and the smokehouse.

A simplistic plaque states, "The smokehouse was used to smoke pork, beef, mutton, sausages and mettwurst.

"A smouldering fire was lit at the bottom and the meat was hung from hooks above. Smoking times varied with the type and size of the meat.

"Salting and smoking were the two methods available to preserve meat so that it could be eaten long after animals had been slaughtered."

It's a sobering thought that the Barossa's famous smallgoods heritage began with such basic "backyard" smokehouses.



ABATTOIR UNDERWAY

Work has begun turning a greenfield site near Murray Bridge into a world-class abattoir for Thomas Foods International.

Earthworks are under way at the new site, 10km outside the town centre, three years after TFI's old plant was devastated by fire in January 2018.

Construction and commissioning of Stage One is expected to be completed over 24 months.

The exact timing of the project's subsequent stages is yet to be determined but the abattoir will ultimately be capable of processing 1,200 head of cattle and 15,000 head of sheep and lambs per day.

The huge new abattoir is expected to create more than 2,000 jobs.

"We made a commitment on Day One of the fire to rebuild. We said we'd come back bigger, better and stronger," says TFI Chief Executive Darren Thomas.

"Since then, we've focussed on fulfilling that

promise. We've faced droughts and a global pandemic along the way but we've persevered and maintained a positive outlook.

"We see this becoming the most advanced multi-species meat processing facility of its kind in Australia, if not the world. It will service our global operations for decades to come.

"This represents the single largest investment by our company in our 30-year history. We can't wait to see it all begin to take shape."

The new plant is being built about 8km from the old plant, near TFI's existing wastewater treatment ponds.

The old plant was destroyed by a huge fire that burned for more than a week. It was ignited by sparks from a welder working on an offal bin.

Darren says the final stages of the new development will provide for considerable expansion and greater footprint to that of the old plant.

Holco renamed

Holco, prominent in wholesale and food service for more than 60 years, has been rebranded as Thomas Foods.

Thomas Foods International has also included its NSW-based wholesale business Country Fresh under the Thomas Foods label to give its domestic operations a clearer identity.

"We see a positive future and strong growth potential within the wholesale and food service sectors," says TFI Chief Executive Darren Thomas.

Thomas Foods now has wholesale and food service facilities in SA, Victoria, Queensland, NSW and the NT.

Holco was formed in 1955 and had different ownership and locations before it was purchased in 1995 by Mike Rankin who built it into SA's largest meat food service business with turnover of \$130 million and over 300 staff.

Mike, MBL's longest-serving Director, sold half of Holco to TFI in 2012. TFI acquired 100% ownership in 2018.

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MBL's 'carrot' for new apprentices

In a generous two-pronged incentive to Members, MBL is offering to help pay for the training of new apprentice butchers.

Butchers now have every reason to start training the next generation after crying out for good apprentices during the skills shortage of recent years.

MBL is offering to reimburse butchers for the standard set-up costs, of up to \$930, of starting the Certificate III in Meat Processing course at TAFE SA, Regency Park.

As well, MBL will cover the wages, normally borne by employers, for the time that the apprentice attends training sessions at TAFE. This usually involves 16 days a year, one a week between the start of May and the end of September.

Wages reimbursement by MBL will be upon proof of TAFE attendance, and will apply for the full three years of the course.

MBL's twin offers, designed to complement a generous series of Federal and State

government subsidies and payments, removes any financial pain from training apprentices.

Such a collective financial "carrot" has never before been offered to butchers. If butchers don't start apprentices now, they probably never will.

MBL CEO Jamie Higgins instigated MBL's involvement as yet another benefit of Membership of the Co-op.

"We're assisting our members in the short term while helping the development of the next generation of butchers to continue the industry," Jamie says.

MBL is keen for apprentices to attend TAFE for a day a week to ensure they are exposed to the full range of butchery skills, including the breaking of bodies.

As well, TAFE attendees are exposed to different butchery strategies and get to meet other young butchers for the chance to develop long-term networking opportunities.

Cut-off date to enrol for on-campus training is April 23, ahead of starting in the first week of May.

To register your interest, email MBL at ApprenticeButcher@mblsa.com.au



Giovanni Rocca, a new apprentice with butcher Matthew Cursaro at Trafford Meat & Smallgoods, Campbelltown, is set to begin training at TAFE SA, Regency Park.

RETURN OF AMIC COMPS

AMIC is planning this year's return of all its competitions, including Sausage King, after COVID-19 restrictions saw the cancellation of all 2020 competitions across Australia.

"Unless something untoward happens (with COVID-19), the competitions will return bigger and better than ever this year," says AMIC's SA rep Chris Kelly.

Chris is planning SA Sausage King and smallgoods competitions in four zones – West Coast, Riverland and South East, Mid North, and Metro.

The first will be the Riverland and South East competitions at Renmark on March 20, followed by West Coast competitions at Port Lincoln on April 17.

The Mid North and Metro competitions will be on May 29 and August 27 respectively at venues to be announced.

"This year, we will be holding the regional competitions on Saturdays in an outdoor environment in an effort to lift the profile," Chris says.

"Once judging has been completed, the public will be able to access free tastings of the judged products to help promote participating butcher shops.

"Later, in the evening, we plan to recognise the regional winners and place getters at a presentation and member network meeting."

An Apprentice of the Year competition will also be held, along with the Independent Local Butcher of the Year award.

"A new award has been added this year for Wholesaler of the Year, with details to be announced soon," Chris says.

Entry forms will be distributed soon.



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