

TWIN FIRSTS: MBL car park sale
& guided tour of Wingfield plant

P3

OPTIMISM PREVAILS

Buoyed by strong Christmas trading, most MBL members have weathered 2023's unsettled economic climate and over half expect business growth this year.

MBL's latest member survey found 62% of the 92 respondents expect their business to grow, up from 54% in the 2022 survey.

Of these, 47% say they will rely on MBL to support their growth, an increase of 12% over the previous survey and confirming

62% of surveyed MBL members expect business growth this year

the co-operative's key role in keeping businesses ticking over.

The independent survey's exposure of business confidence comes against the backdrop of 2023's uncertain economic

climate and escalating cost of living pressures involving inflation and rising interest rates.

With lingering reports of consumers struggling to make ends meet, butchers were generally unsure of what Christmas would bring but most reported "really good" festive sales on par with Christmas 2022 or a little better.

At the top end of the scale, some shops reported 25% increases in turnover compared with the previous Christmas (*full story page 2*).

The happy Christmas set up most butchers for a strong 2024, hopeful that the worst of the economic uncertainty is over as inflation slowly eases and interest rates stabilise as expected before predicted cuts late in the year.

In further positive signs, a number of butchers have been busy expanding their shops or moving into new ones nearby. Recent examples include:

- Chris Pfitzner planning a March opening of a new shop at Mt Barker after his Stirling shop was gutted by fire. He plans to reopen at Stirling once the destroyed shopping centre is rebuilt, while retaining the Mt Barker shop (*see page 2*).

- Mt Gambier's Tim Von Stanke swapping his small shop for larger, brighter premises in a better location and attracting new customers.

Nigel's going great guns



Riverland butcher Nigel Rollbusch's expansion plans have hit significant milestones, with his sparkling new shop doubling his customer count at the same time as smallgoods production ramps up for breakthrough sales to two large Adelaide supermarkets. A promotional campaign for his boneless ham, judged the best in Australia, is set to begin. Nigel's inspiring story of expansion begins on page 6.

CHRIS SETS UP SHOP AT MT BARKER

Chris Pfitzner plans to open a new shop in Mt Barker in March, five months after fire destroyed his popular shop in Stirling.

Retaining the name Stirling Variety Meats, the shop will be next to Woolworths in a new centre with 265 car parks in Wellington Rd, Mt Barker South.

Chris's butchers from the old Stirling shop will work at the new shop, as insurance has been covering their wages since the October 15 fire.

"The new shop is 30% bigger at 130 square metres, so there'll be more room for production," he says.

Chris says he plans to retain the Mt Barker shop when he reopens at his old Stirling site once the centre is rebuilt in about three years.

"Most production will be at Mt Barker and we'll have a smaller shop in Stirling," he says.

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OPTIMISM PREVAILS

- Mick Lamond, also of Mt Gambier, increasing his shop footprint by 50% by moving into a shop next door. The new area is mainly for production, with Mick currently seeking MBL's support for new machinery.

- Rob Waters moving into larger new premises, formerly a church, in Kadina while retaining the old shop nearby for production.

As well, a new butcher shop will shortly open in fast-growing Nairne in the Adelaide Hills.

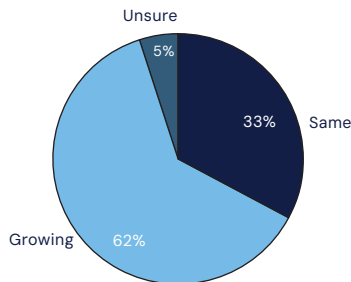
And Adelaide Central Market stalwart Tony O'Connell is awaiting a large cohort of new customers from four apartment towers now being built in the immediate area (*see pages 8-9*).

After doubling sales in the 2022-23

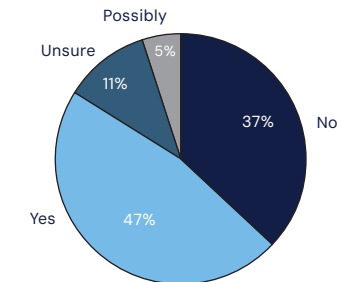


MBL MEMBER SURVEY FINDINGS

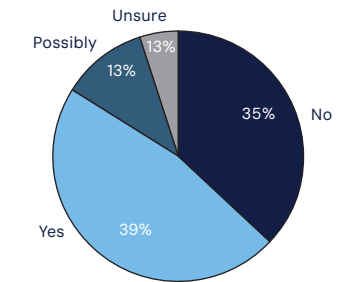
In the next year, do you see your business growing, staying the same or decreasing?



If growing, has additional investment or support from MBL been considered?



If yes, could MBL assist in planning a strategy for this growth?



Butchers' happy Christmas

It was generally a happy Christmas for independent butchers as most met or exceeded their expectations in tricky economic conditions.

Like traders everywhere, butchers were unsure of how Christmas trade would be affected by cost of living pressures but most were pleasantly surprised.

Some shops reported 25% leaps in trade over the previous Christmas, with smaller rises more the norm across the board.

MBL reps say most Adelaide and country butchers reported "really good" festive sales which were on par with Christmas 2022 or a little better.

"The butchers I've spoken to had a good Christmas; everyone was fairly happy," says Chairman of AMIC SA's Retail Council, Trevor Hill.

"With Christmas falling on a Monday, a full week of pre-Christmas trading took some of the usual pressure off butchers."

Trevor says his four-shop Bruce's Meat group had a 25% jump in Christmas turnover, with strong red meat sales outshining turkey and ham sales.

"People expected turkey to be in short supply and looked to red meat, while our hams were \$23kg compared to \$8kg in supermarkets," he says.

However, some other butchers reported strong sales of turkey and ham as usual.

At Goodwood Quality Meats, Dave Armstrong says turkey and ham sales were up by 16%.

"We had a great Christmas with a rise in turnover of 16% which was pretty outstanding, considering the economic climate. Also, beef and lamb pricing has come down since the previous Christmas," Dave says.

"Our overall customer count was up by 17% which was very pleasing. We are very happy."

At Waikerie, Rollbusch Quality Meats owner Nigel Rollbusch had "strong" festive trade, much better than Christmas 2022 when the Riverland was hit by flood.

"Customer numbers were up but the average spend was down," Nigel says.

Likewise at Mt Gambier, Collins Court Butcher owner Mick Lamond says, "We were very busy; trade was really good – definitely better than the Christmas before."

Three days before Christmas, thieves stole \$7,000 worth of seafood from a refrigerated trailer at the rear of Mick's shop but he was able to fulfill all orders.

At Port Elliot, Indulgent Meats owner Jeff Luxton says, "Our profit was higher (than Christmas 2022) due to the lower cost of protein and control of wages but our sales were down by 7%."

"We had the same customer count and we believe the average spend was down because of cost of living pressures."

➤ financial year, MBL Machinery is trading strongly, providing labour-saving equipment for expanding butchers, many of whom are increasing smallgoods production (*see page 11*).

The member survey finding of 62% of respondents expecting growth indicates that optimism prevails across the industry, dispelling outside talk of gloom and doom.

The annual survey was conducted by Melbourne consumer survey firm Saguity, whose founder Darrell Hardidge says, "The 62% response is an indicator of impending strategic growth.

"More people are growing, up from 54% in our 2022 survey, and the response gives MBL a marketing weapon.

"MBL has a list of those who said they are expecting growth. From here, MBL can see if there's a pattern. If, for example, it looks like it's medium-size shops that expect growth, let's go talk to all medium shops."

(The survey again recorded high levels of membership satisfaction with MBL's overall service and support.

It showed that 95% of those surveyed were more than happy with MBL's overall performance. When asked about value for money during a time of rising inflation, 76% rated MBL eight, nine or 10 points out of 10.

MBL management has sifted through the survey, investigating responses to a wide range of questions with a view to further improving our performance.)

Merchandise and machinery sales continue to grow, reflecting growth among members.

"We're on budget; we're up on last financial year," says General Manager of Sales and Marketing, Kane Paues.

"From what we're seeing, the regions in particular have been really strong in the past 12 months; the bush is really going well with some good operators doing good things."

AMIC SA State Manager Chris Kelly says, "The 62% growth figure doesn't really surprise me.

"Most butchers I've been speaking with have been going along quite well; most are reasonably happy after Christmas. The fact that so many expect growth shows they have a positive mindset."

Chairman of AMIC SA's Retail Council,

Continued page 10



HOP TO IT

Don't miss our car park sale & guided tour of Wingfield plant

In twin first-time events for March, MBL will hold a pre-Easter car park sale of excess merchandise at Athol Park plus a guided tour for members of the nearby Wingfield proteins plant.

The two-day clearance sale of selected merchandise will be based around our Hanson Rd shop and carpark on Thursday, March 21, and Friday, March 22, from 8am to 4.30pm, with sales on a first come, first served basis.

"The shop will open as normal at 8am and we'll be operating a barbecue through the day," says MBL's General Manager of Sales and Marketing, Kane Paues.

"The merchandise on sale will be broad. There'll be a big range of PPE, some packaging and more."



Wingfield's dedicated chicken plant.

The sale has come about because MBL cleared a warehouse to allow for the pending development of a first-class blending facility to cater for growing markets for our blended products.

"We're holding a sale to move excess stock and reduce inventory levels – there's still a slight carry over from Covid years when shipping was tight," Kane says.

Also on March 21, a guided tour of the Wingfield plant will be held for members with RSVP required.

Members attending the Wingfield tour must meet at Athol Park at 8.30am and, if circumstances permit, a tour of the show-room and blending facility will be offered.

They will travel as a group to Wingfield in a minibus which will return them to Athol Park for a barbecue lunch.

The plant takes organic waste material from the meat, poultry and seafood industries and processes it into sought-after commodities such as tallow, meat meal, blood meal and feather meal for Australian and overseas markets.

The March 21 tour marks the first time members have had the opportunity to inspect the fascinating facility.

MBL CEO Jamie Higgins says, "We want to engage more with members. Some have never been to Wingfield so here's a chance to have a look."

RSVP As numbers are limited, members wishing to go on the Wingfield plant tour are asked to RSVP by Monday, March 4, by emailing Mackenzie Beames at mbeames@mblsa.com.au

Charcuterie awards are now firmly embedded as IFFA inclusion looms

AMIC's Australian Charcuterie Excellence Awards has taken just two years to become firmly entrenched as a prestigious event, and its stature set to keep growing.

Replacing AMIC's long-held regional, State and national smallgoods awards, the charcuterie awards drew 725 entries in 2023 to more than double the 354 in the inaugural year of 2022.

The number is fully expected to climb further this year, with 2024's gold medal winners joining the gold medallists of 2022 and 2023 in qualifying for IFFA's world regional smallgoods competition in 2025.

"We are preparing our smallgoods masters for the German IFFA competition which is the pinnacle of the art of smallgoods making," says head judge of the Australian awards, Barossa Fine Food founder Franz Knoll.

"This will be the first time Australians have been able to enter the IFFA awards, giving a fantastic opportunity to showcase Australian charcuterie products to the world."

Because overseas charcuterie products are not allowed to enter Europe, IFFA conducts competitions with German judges in 16 countries.

In early 2025, German judges will visit Australia to judge our Australian gold medallists from 2022, 2023 and 2024, with the results announced at the huge IFFA expo in Frankfurt in May 2025. The IFFA expo is held every three years.

"The schedule is for the Australian awards in Melbourne in August this year, with the Germans coming out to judge in February or March next year, in time for IFFA in May," Franz says.

"Australians can collect their IFFA awards in Frankfurt when they are announced or, if they don't go, the awards will be sent to them."

A total of 495 gold medals were won at the Australian awards in 2022 (167 gold medals) and 2023 (328) with the highest points scorer in each category named Australian Category Champion.

(South Australians fared strongly, winning



Passionate about smallgoods.... Franz Knoll at the 2023 charcuterie awards night.

nine of 36 Category Champion awards in 2023. Barossa Fine Foods won four top awards, Mt Pleasant Butcher and Skara Smallgoods won two each, and Rollbusch Quality Meats won one).

"We will be tightening scoring in 2024 so it will be harder to get gold medals but this is our third year and we expect the standard to have risen," Franz says.

For the IFFA judging of our 2022, 2023 and 2024 gold medallists, a German panel of fleischmeisters will bring expectations of high standards.

"The German judging system is harsher

than ours. They say, 'This is the standard for the perfect product' and they judge to that standard. To earn gold, no negative points are allowed," Franz says.

"However, the Germans will be taking on key aspects of our judging system, including judging products that are cooked.

"Traditionally, the fleischmeisters judge only products that are uncooked but they'll be adopting our system of judging cooked products.

"They will see a better way of judging, as products can be judged as consumers experience them. Heating brings out different flavour profiles.

"Also, for the first time at a world competition, the fleischmeisters will judge fresh sausages."

While the Australian charcuterie awards are growing and evolving, Franz says there's a bigger picture than the competition itself.

"In previous smallgoods awards, you had winners and losers. Now, the competition is about you and how good you are – it's not about beating someone else," he says.

"A key part of the awards is providing greater feedback from judges to encourage product improvement.

"By lifting the overall standard of the industry and the individuals in it, we'll all be doing a better job providing superior charcuterie products to the consumer.

"The awards can also fast-track the development of the next generation of smallgoods makers."

So far, the judging and presentation nights have been in Melbourne but Franz says AMIC's goal is to spread the event around the states on a rotating basis.



Charcuterie awards judges at work... their tastebuds cop a serious hammering.

Customers have voiced their support for Clare butcher Mike Day cutting his shop's opening hours to just three days a week because he can't find skilled staff.

Mike had seven staff a decade ago but he's now the shop's only butcher and, with just one general assistant, his workload tops 70 hours a week which is not sustainable long-term.

"I don't want to burn out by 55," says Mike, 51, who is mindful of his health after being diagnosed with a brain tumour in 2004, taking six months off work to recover.

"Working the long hours that we work in such a high-risk environment, butchers have a duty of care to our customers and ourselves.

"There are preservative counts plus cleanliness and tidiness standards to maintain, and if I were to be injured – it only takes a momentary lapse with a saw or a knife – there would be nobody to take over."

Mike's carefully-considered solution was to begin 2024 by slashing his shop's trading hours to Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays only, 7am to 6pm.

So far, the shorter opening hours regime is working well, with Mike working at the customer-less shop on Mondays and Tuesdays to produce more products for the shop and his wholesale and catering businesses.

He contacted MBL News in the hope his story interests other butchers who are battling with long hours because of the general shortage of skilled staff.

"This is not just about me. It's about people like me who are soldering on with skeleton staff," Mike says.

"We could continue but we have to ask, Is it worth killing ourselves? No.

"I say we need to find time to be with our families, away from the pressure.

Skilled staff shortage sees Mike slash shop hours - but he finds silver linings



Mike Day with Bethanie Sutcliffe, his sole server and general assistant. Photo: Plains Producer.

"We, as butchers, need to work smarter for better returns and consider our own health rather than always putting customers and staff first.

"I've always put others first but I reached the stage where I had to look after myself."

Chairman of AMIC's SA Retail Council, Trevor Hill, says the story of Mike's struggle without skilled staff was the tip of the iceberg.

"We are not just talking about butchers, this is affecting all small businesses across Australia," Trevor says.

Mike's plan to reduce his workload revolved around closing his five-day shop to customers on Mondays and Tuesdays, and using the two days to concentrate on making more products to compensate for reduced shop turnover.

"Wanting to get on the front

foot, I made a point to discussing reduced hours with customers during the last three months of last year," he says.

"I wanted them to understand the reasons why I was doing this; they needed to understand why we'd be opening less.

"All I got, and continue to get, from customers is not only understanding but support and encouragement."

Mike uses customer-free Mondays and Tuesdays to concentrate on products for shop sale later in the week.

He also prepares products for wholesale to the local hospital, schools, childcare centres and hotels, and for the popular catering business he runs with his wife Kylie for weddings, birthdays and other assorted gatherings on Saturdays.

"Closing for two days early in the week takes pressure off me



Mike's shop now opens only three days a week. In 2014, it became SA's first butcher shop to serve brewed coffee.

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GOLDEN RUN: Nigel's six whirlwind months

A new eye-catching shop has seen customer numbers double for Waikerie butcher Nigel Rollbusch, capping a whirlwind run spanning the past six months.

The large shop, next to Woolworths, has exceeded Nigel's expectations, attracting new customers in a more convenient location with better parking than his old nearby shop, which he now uses for fulltime production.

"Location is king, plus we benefit from more space," says Nigel, who spent five months and \$180,000 designing and fitting out the stylish shop.

The October opening came hot on the heels of Rollbusch Quality Meats:

- Winning the coveted award for the nation's best boneless ham at AMIC's Australian Charcuterie Excellence Awards, along with four gold medals and two silver medals for other products.

- Launching into the Adelaide market by selling assorted Rollbusch-branded smallgoods, including sausages, at the Chapley's Foodland supermarkets at Frewville and Pasadena.

- Adding fresh sausages to its supply of fresh ham and bacon, plus packaged smallgoods, to the large Koch's Foodland supermarkets in Renmark and Loxton.

As well, Nigel was elected to AMIC SA's Retail Council with the aim of contributing to the wider industry.



Artwork at Nigel Rollbusch's new shop celebrates his boneless ham being judged Australia's best. The ham is set to be heavily promoted at four large supermarkets.

"Everything seems to have happened at once," says Nigel, 52, a former national Sausage King winner whose son Alex heads smallgoods production.

"I have a passion for the business. I bounce out of bed and I enjoy every day.

"I'm enjoying expansion but I'm a little

nervous at the same time. We've done a lot and I sometimes wonder if we've done too much, too fast."

Nigel has been buoyed by brisk recent trade at his Waikerie and Barmera shops and the sale of his smallgoods at supermarkets.

The winning of a swag of AMIC awards over the past five years, including two national titles, has given Nigel a reputation for quality and laid the foundations for expansion from a small shop.

He won a national Sausage King crown, in the Continental category, for his bratwurst sausage in 2019, and his maple cured and mallee smoked boneless ham was judged Australia's best at the national charcuterie awards last August.

"The bratwurst award launched us. We sold tonnes of it; people drove from Adelaide to get it," Nigel says.

"Likewise, the ham award is big for us. We're pushing it on radio and in



Nigel's customer numbers have doubled at his new shop next to Woolworths.

other Riverland advertising, and supermarkets will be pushing it and giving samples. We have labels with barcodes ready to go.”

Nigel is quick to credit son Alex for the huge role he plays in the production of smallgoods at Barmera, 40 minutes’ drive from Waikerie.

Smallgoods production is in a large updated area behind the old Carter’s butcher shop which Nigel purchased in 2022 after outgrowing his first shop in Waikerie.

A retail side has been maintained at Barmera but the main focus is on smallgoods, with Nigel calling on MBL’s expertise to supply and install the latest labour-saving machinery.

He recently added extra machinery from MBL as production ramps up to meet rising demand from supermarkets.

“Alex manages the smallgoods side to a tee. He’s all over the various settings of the new machinery. I certainly wouldn’t be able to do it (grow the business) without him,” Nigel says.

“In fact, I wouldn’t have bought the Barmera premises and would have stuck with the small old shop (in Waikerie) had it not been for Alex. He is the future of the business.

“Alex is only 24 but he has really stepped up. He has matured so quickly and has developed good confidence.

“He’s a hard worker. He’s like me – if there’s fat to be chewed, we’ll chew the fat.”

After qualifying as a butcher and co-owning a shop in Loxton, Nigel spent several years



Kransky packaged for supermarket sale has the Rollbusch Quality Meats logo.



Alex Rollbusch... gives top marks to the MBL-supplied Rex RVF 327 Vacuum Filler.

as an Elders stock agent before buying a Waikerie butcher shop and renaming it Rollbusch Quality Meats in 2016.

Offering premium local meat, he steadily built the business and expanded into the shop next door. He has not looked back since winning his national Sausage King title in 2019.

He again outgrew the McCoy Street shop and jumped at the chance to relocate a few hundred metres down the road next to busy Woolworths.

“If I hadn’t opened the new shop, I don’t think we would have survived in McCoy Street. We needed bigger premises for bigger turnover,” Nigel says.

“Our trade greatly improved from day one, with customer numbers almost doubling. Turnover is up by two-thirds, reflecting more daily shopping.

“The days of the bulk of our customers doing one shop for the week are over. Now, 70% to 80% shop daily.

“What our new location comes down to is its convenience. Parking is the big thing, along with being next to Woolworths.”

Many new customers say they no longer buy meat from the supermarket now that the town’s butcher is right next door.

“It was previously inconvenient for many people, including young mums with a car load of kids, to drive up to our old shop and try to find a park,” Nigel says.

“Our old customers love the big new shop and the fact that car parking is much easier.

“People also appreciate the spaciousness of the new shop. In the old one, it would seem crowded with six or seven people inside. Since Covid, people want more space.”

Nigel has hired a barista for take-away coffee. Freshly-made meat and salad rolls are sold, along with homemade pies.

While smallgoods are produced at Barmera, the old Waikerie shop is used for other production, including crumbed and marinated products. A chef produces ready meals from a separate kitchen area.

Wanting to increase smallgoods production, Nigel purchased the latest machinery

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Tony's still as keen as ever after half a century at Central Market

After 50 “lovely” years at Adelaide Central Market, Tony O’Connell says his daily working life remains “a buzz” - and he sees a bright future with fresh opportunities.

Rather than sitting on his laurels, Tony, 65, has a sparkle in his eye as he talks about the current construction nearby of large city apartment projects ushering in a new era for the Market.

“Four big apartment towers are being built right here, right now to bring a lot of new people into the area. More people are living in the city and Market traders will benefit – this will be the place to be,” he says.

(The building splurge is headed by a \$400

million, 39-storey project on the Central Market Arcade site with 234 apartments, a hotel, offices and retail space).

Tony has seen a myriad of changes at the Market over the years and has always been on the front foot to adapt, resulting in him prospering at the helm of one of Adelaide’s busiest butcher shops.

“It’s been lovely. I’ve had a good working life here and it has been lovely working with my son Ben for the last 12 years,” he says.

“I have no thought of retirement – I’m enjoying the job too much. I’ve had opportunities to sell the business but I’ve never been interested.”

He is leaving the door open for Ben to eventually take control of the business but no firm plan is in place. “It’s Ben’s if he wants it,” Tony says.

Always a loyal MBL member, Tony has been 5AA’s meat expert for many years on news and current affairs programs. He is a regular with Michael Keelan on Saturday mornings.

“I always talk positively about the meat industry and farmers. I promote all meat, especially SA pork on the bone,” he says.

Tony enjoys the anticipation of each working day which begins with a gentle ride into the city on his old mountain bike.

“I love working here. I love it when it’s buzzing and I feel lucky to be here. You never know who will turn up and how the day will pan out,” he says.

“I’ve served multiple generations. I’m now giving fritz to kids whose parents came here as kids with their parents. It’s nice.

“With people from all over the globe coming here to shop, we are continually asked to provide different cuts and every type of offal you can think of.

“We get special requests every day and if we don’t have it, we make every effort to get it. We say if we can’t get it, no one’s got it.

“The language barrier can be a



Tony O’Connell with his son Ben who has the option of taking over the business.

> real problem. Some people show us photos in cookbooks. It's better these days with people using their phones to show us what they want."

Tony has spent almost all his working life in the Central Market area, doing his apprenticeship from age 15 under former MBL Director Howard James.

On completing his apprenticeship, Tony managed another shop in the arcade for Metro Meats for two years.

"The arcade used to have seven butcher shops in a row. There was lots of spruiking and lots of sell-offs at the end of the day," he says.

"A wise man – my father – said if I could make money for others, I should do it for myself. It was very good advice."

Tony's first business was in Folland Ave, Northfield, but after two years he returned to Central Market, buying a two-man shop in Grote St in 1983.

He outgrew it after three years and bought another shop in the Market on the Gouger St entrance, operating for about 10 years.

Again needing more space, he took over two shops and later a third at his present site off Grote St.

The multicultural element continually tests the knowledge, skills and flexibility of Tony and his butchers. "We learn something new every day," Tony says.

Some shoppers ask for meat to be cut in ways specific to their native lands and the butchers do their best to oblige.

"Some customers want fat and gristle left on belly of pork. In cooking, the fat and gristle acts like a protective piece of foil and they eat the meat inside," Tony says.

"We sell huge amounts of offal, all types for people of all nationalities – hearts, liver, brains, kidneys, ox tongue, you name it..."

"For Greek Orthodox, the cooking of lamb is a big part of Easter after a period of fasting, and they want lamb shoulders, livers, hearts and heads.

"We have a big Asian market wanting lean, boneless pork and lots of chicken including all chicken offal. We get in small whole chickens – the smaller, the better."

Tony says 20 years ago, Chinese people as a whole did not buy lamb.

"Pork, chicken and beef are China's main meats. Chinese people weren't used to lamb," he says.



'It's been lovely. I've had a good working life here. I have no thought of retirement – I'm enjoying the job too much' – Tony O'Connell

"But how things have changed! Today, our Chinese customers love lamb, particularly ribs and chops; racks of lamb are huge!

"We sell a lot of young goat for Indian curries. They want young goat diced on the bone.



Tony as he appeared in a past MBL News.

"In the last 10 years, we have seen a big increase in Columbians and Argentinians. They are big meat eaters, loving barbecues and slow charcoal cooking."

Tony watches cooking shows such as Masterchef knowing his customers will want to buy the same meat as cooked by the TV chefs. "You must keep up with modern trends and cuts," he says.

While he values all staff, he has special regard for Darren, an intellectually impaired man who has worked here for 16 years.

"Darren is passionate and he puts in a big effort, making all our burgers. Working here gives him pride – he calls this his shop," Tony says.

"Maybe more butchers could do well from hiring people like Darren. I've had a few impaired people work here and they have all been good, loyal workers."

Mike Day cuts trading hours

From page 5

and allows me to better spread out the work. It's much more relaxing," Mike says.

He says while he may lose \$2,000 from lost shop sales on Mondays and Tuesdays, he's able to make up the shortfall by having the time to produce more products.

"We open the shop on Wednesday with full trays and other products ready for the following days," he says.

"I'm now doing more \$80 crumbed or schnitzel packs. We sell 80 of these packs, with 40 or 50 going to new customers.

"I've also started doing more pre-cooked meals, including Chinese-style ones, after buying a food wrapping machine from MBL.

"So I'm busy on Mondays and Tuesdays but I sometimes have time to go home for lunch or to mow the lawn."

Mike says the general shortage of skilled butchers is amplified in most country areas because a severe housing shortage puts the brakes on city butchers making the move.

"A dentist in Clare bought a house so he could bring in two staff," he says.

"I simply haven't been able to find butchers and other staff so it has just been me in the shop with a local mum Bethanie Sutcliffe who continues to be a huge help."

Apart from staffing issues, Mike – like all small business operators – has been hit by general escalating costs. He says fuel, freight and power hikes cause ongoing stress.

He says the support afforded employees is not given equal attention when it comes to small business owners.

"In terms of mental health, we support those that work for us and give them the best help we can, but there is no one looking out for us," he says.

Trevor Hill agrees, saying workplace stress was something only taken seriously by the government when considering employees.

"The government has passed all responsibilities on to small employers, but is not supplying any support for the employers suffering the same issues," he says.

OPTIMISM PREVAILS

From page 3

Trevor Hill, says, "As butchers, we tend to hold optimism and see opportunity.

"I'd like to think that most of the 62% who expect growth do so based on what they've experienced over the past year, rather than hoping for the best."

MBL CEO Jamie Higgins says, "Our confidence is unwavering in the offerings local butchers can provide."

Jamie says local butchers stood tall against Woolworths and Coles when wholesale meat prices fell dramatically from November to January.

"Wholesale prices went down by 40% but Woolworths and Coles dropped their prices by only 8% because they are locked into

pricing agreements a year in advance," he says.

"The gouging was insane. As one example, they sold lamb loin chops for \$35kg but butchers had them for \$18.99.

"While the big supermarkets have 12-month advance pricing agreements, the pricing flexibility of local butchers is second to none.

"Local butchers were trumping the big supermarkets with prices significantly more reflective of farmers' costs. It's vital that we continue rallying around our independent butchers."

Chris Kelly says, "Independent local butchers need to stay in the wheelhouse, delivering the quality and service that gives them point of difference over supermarkets."



Barista-made coffee has proved a hit at Nigel's new shop. This is Carol at the controls.

Nigel's golden run

From page 7

from MBL, beginning with a \$100,000 investment in a Rex RVF 327 Vacuum Filler and a Viking 1020 Auto Swing Lid Vacuum Packer with gas flushing attachment.

"They are just brilliant, greatly saving labour and reducing production times to make expansion possible," he says.

Last Christmas, some 800 hams, including half hams, were produced with the aid of a new dip tank which helps with the listeria program and extends shelf life with shrink wrapping.

"It saves a lot of manual labour and greatly increases production. We also bought another brine injector as we couldn't afford

a breakdown, and all our ovens come from MBL as well."

Nigel made a point of thanking MBL Machinery Manager Ryan Mercier for his ongoing help.

"Ryan puts his heart and soul into his work. He'll help you out no end to get you over the line and if there's an issue, he'll fix it," he says.

"The supermarket people, at Chapley's and Koch's, are also great to work with. There are no issues to deal with. We're looking to grow with them.

"I don't know how far our growth will go but we do have plenty of room at Barmera to expand further."

Cam Mansueto was at a loose end when he began what he thought was a short-term job as a general hand in MBL's Athol Park warehouses.

"It was supposed to be only for a month, moving pallets around, but I'm still here nine years later," says Cam, 30, who is now 2IC of MBL's machinery department.

His multiple roles include organising a technician to install, commission, service and repair MBL members' machinery, and sourcing and ordering spare parts. He also orders most new machinery from interstate and overseas suppliers.

"He's reliable and very good at what he does," says MBL Machinery Manager Ryan Mercier, who oversaw the doubling of machinery sales last financial year.

Cam is among a host of staff who were in the doldrums career-wise until being given the opportunity by MBL to shine in an environment where commitment and initiative are rewarded.

"I love my job. Machinery is where I belong; I wouldn't want to be anywhere else," he says.

Yet had things gone to plan, Cam would now be a plumber and gas fitter like his father and uncle.

"I followed their footsteps, completing a four-year apprenticeship in April 2014," he says.

"But I couldn't get work after qualifying. The industry was quiet, jobs were hard to get. I wasn't sure what I'd do until my Mum heard from a woman at her work that MBL wanted warehouse staff."

The tip came from the wife of former MBL executive Bexley Carman. Cam went for an interview and was initially hired for a month before joining fulltime at the end of 2014.

After several years of warehouse work, Cam was transferred to the meal room where he enjoyed learning about MBL's blending operations.

He moved to the shop and showroom in 2019, honing his customer service skills behind the counter and taking phone orders.

"I did some work in machinery before becoming more involved in 2021. I've been here ever since," he says.

"Some things I learnt as a plumber and gas fitter help now, giving me an insight into how things work, including how to assemble brine pumps."

"Meet the Team"

Profiles on MBL staff members



Cam is first contact for members requiring a technician to service and repair machinery. This work is done by contractor Ryan Clemente.

"The first step is finding out what needs doing and putting all the information on a job sheet which I email to Ryan who slots in a time for the work," Cam says.

"Having easy access to a reliable technician is huge. It's an important service provided by MBL."

Cam says machinery sales, for small butcher shops right through to large processors, have been growing since Ryan Mercier first took the reins in 2022.

The machinery showroom has never looked better, displaying a good variety of equipment from leading manufacturers. We have a high level of stock.

"If you don't have machines, you can't sell them – customers will look elsewhere," Cam says.

"Our range has grown; we no longer only stock standard machinery but a bigger range of the latest models to improve efficiency.

"Automation is playing an increasingly important role in saving labour costs at a time when many businesses find it hard to get staff."

In a recent development, MBL has begun making our own machinery, beginning with our multi-purpose Inline Tenderiser/Stir

Fry Machine which has the potential for wide sales.

A strong trend over recent years has been the number of butcher shops turning to MBL for advice and delivery of machinery for smallgoods production.

"There has definitely been more smallgoods production to give butchers a bigger range of their own products," Cam says.

"Butcher shops that are growing are those offering something different – new lines or new products."

Q & A

Do you have a special interest or hobby? I am President of and play for Eyre Royals Cricket Club. I also enjoy fishing with my dad on his boat.

What would you do with a spare \$50,000? I'd take an overseas holiday and put money towards a new car.

If you were a car, what would you be? A HSV ClubSport R8 Tourer Wagon.

What food can't you live without? The Aussie BBQ!

If you could meet anyone, living or dead, who would it be? Andrew Symonds. He was a great all-round cricketer, always enjoyable to watch.

What's the best thing about working at MBL? The great people I get to work with, as well as all the customers.

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CORN FLAKES *Crumbs*

Deliciously crisp & golden

— THE ORIGINAL & BEST —



No artificial
colours, flavours
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Made from
Australian corn



Made in Australia
from at least
99% Australian
ingredients

Kellogg's Corn Flakes Crumbs are crushed, crispy golden flakes of corn, perfect for cooking. Here are some golden ways to use them in your cooking:



MINCE FILLER



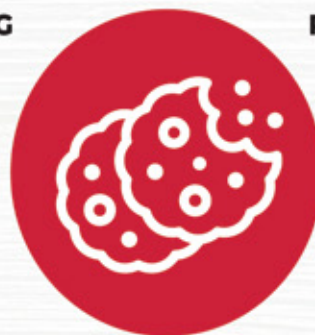
CRUMB COATING



PIE CRUSTS



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PACK DESCRIPTION:

- Bulk box of 4 x 3kg clear bags of Kellogg's® Corn Flakes Crumbs
- Ideal for butchers and food processors
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