

WE'RE ROCK SOLID

MBL records another year of strong growth as outside challenges mount

Despite a challenging year, MBL has reported solid growth for the 2020-21 financial year with increased revenue and profit lifting the Members' rebate by 5.5% to a lofty 17%.

The Co-operative's overall revenue rose by \$4 million to \$77 million and net profit reached \$6.6 million.

CEO Jamie Higgins delivered the good news at the well-attended Annual General Meeting, followed by a networking barbecue, on November 1.

He reported the Proteins Division achieving strong sales and prices for meal and tallow, aided by improved efficiency and output at Wingfield's low temperature plant.

Sales in the Merchandise Division, with a changing product mix and more custom blending, were 10% higher than in 2019-20. Machinery sales were almost 17% higher.

However, Jamie and Chairman George Ujvary have tempered delight at another strong year of growth by cautioning that MBL faces the twin challenges of global supply chain issues and skyrocketing shipping charges.

As well, MBL has to deal with a disruption in the supply of ovine (sheep) material for the Keith recycling plant.

"We had a very solid year and we're continuing to perform well so far this financial year, but we will need to work hard to meet challenges," Jamie says.

George says, "While there are a number of challenges, I'm cautiously optimistic of MBL, with lots of hard work, continuing our growth in the next few years."

Full report pages 3 and 12



FLYING HIGH *The traditional formula of offering prime local meat backed by friendly service and expert advice is seeing business boom for award-winning butcher Mick Lamond in Mt Gambier.*

Mick heads a staff of 10 to cater for 140 customers a day plus a strong wholesale base and is looking to expand his shop for a second time to cater for ever-increasing demand. His story is on pages 6-7.

MBL Christmas Trading Hours



Please note showroom counter sales and customer / members pick up will be closed early on the days detailed below.

These hours WILL NOT affect customer / members deliveries, however phone orders will be closed in line with these trading hours.

Country deliveries will be limited by regional transport timetables.

DATE	TRADING STATUS	TIME
Friday Dec 24	Early close	8.30am to 2pm
Monday Dec 27	CLOSED	CLOSED
Tuesday Dec 28	CLOSED	CLOSED
Friday Dec 31	Early close	8.30am to 2pm
Monday Jan 3	CLOSED	CLOSED

Take a bow, MBL staff, for rising to the challenge of reaching a double-dose vaccination target of 90% by December.

CEO Jamie Higgins set the target, with incentives, in early August and says he's delighted with the positive response from staff of our three sites at Athol Park, Wingfield and Keith.

"Our staff deserve congratulations for rolling up their sleeves for the vaccination," says Jamie.

All our employees will be rewarded with a \$100 gift voucher, as promised when the target was set.

MBL staff smash 90% target for double-dose vaccination

"The safety of our staff and customers has always been MBL's priority throughout the pandemic and we wanted to do our bit to accelerate the national vaccination program," Jamie says.

"As well as safeguarding people's health, a high vaccination rate also allows necessary staffing levels to be maintained across MBL's businesses should

a Covid outbreak occur in the wider community."

On August 6, Jamie announced two core incentives for staff to reach the 90% double-dose target.

Jamie announced the granting of paid leave for Covid-19 vaccination appointments as well as offering \$100 gift vouchers to all employees if the 90% target

was reached by December.

The paid leave offer is continuing for those MBL workers who are unvaccinated.

MBL is offering up to two hours paid leave for both appointments for two-dose vaccination during working hours.

Vaccination leave has to be booked in advance. Preferred appointment times are early morning or late afternoon within close proximity of the work site or home address to avoid excessive down time.

MBL NEWS

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Adelaide on ice

This year's prolonged interstate Covid-19 lockdowns have forced AMIC to cancel its national competition final planned for Adelaide in 2022.

However, the disappointing news comes with the strong possibility that Adelaide may host the prestigious national event in 2023.

"It's still Adelaide's turn to next host the nationals, which will now be in 2023, but nothing has been announced," says AMIC's SA State Manager Chris Kelly.

National finals are traditionally rotated around the States, held in the February after the previous year's regional and State finals.

In 2020, all AMIC competitions

across Australia were cancelled due to Covid-19, denying Adelaide's planned hosting of the national final in February 2021.

This year, Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns played havoc with competitions in some States, while Tasmania canceled all its competitions.

Prolonged lockdowns in Victoria and NSW saw competitions delayed and postponed.

This meant AMIC could not set a date or lock in a venue for the nationals in Adelaide. Victoria has still not held its State final.

With the schedule in tatters and Tasmanian representation not possible, AMIC had little choice but to cancel the national final.



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HACCP
CERTIFIED

MBL's AGM on November 1 was very well attended, with Members staying on for a networking barbecue which included sampling winning products from the MBL-sponsored AMIC awards a few days before. Here is an edited version of CEO Jamie Higgins' report to the AGM.

Revenue and profit upsurge delivers a huge 17% rebate

MBL had a very solid year in 2020-21, with our overall revenue up by \$4 million to \$77 million and net profit for the year reaching \$6.6 million.

As a result, a 17% rebate on merchandise sales was paid, which was 5.5 basis points higher than the 11.5% rebate paid in the previous year.

Key drivers of the pleasing result included:

- The Proteins Division achieving strong sales and selling prices for meal and tallow, and improved efficiency and output from the low temperature plant at Wingfield.
- The Merchandise Division's changing product mix, with more custom blending and diversification into other food manufacturing markets. This has achieved better margins than our traditional blending business.

Merchandise

Merchandise sales were 10% stronger than 2019-20 and again fared well through Covid. Machinery sales were nearly 17% higher and continue to grow.

Throughout the year, we have been

constantly bombarded with supply issues and price increases from suppliers of ingredients, PPE and packaging.

The Merchandise team has done a very good job trying to maintain our margins and find alternatives.

Athol Park

We appointed Chris Mountford to manage operations at Athol Park, including warehouse and distribution, blending and purchasing.

Chris has implemented some good changes, appointing a new warehouse and distribution manager and adding a new position of blending manager to ensure we are properly resourced to grow the blending business.

Operations have performed reasonably well over the year, given some of the supply challenges we have seen with imports, including packaging and PPE, being delayed by global shipping issues.

Split shifts were established during the peak of Covid to ensure we had two teams to produce, pick and pack orders in case one team went down.

Continued page 12



COMMENT

By MBL Chairman
George Ujvary

The Board and management of MBL are absolutely delighted at the strong results posted by the Co-operative for the 2020-21 financial year.

This continuation of robust results achieved in recent years confirms MBL as a strong and stable organisation with a very bright future.

We have started this financial year well and while we're trying our best for another bumper year, we will need to overcome some outside challenges.

Like so many businesses, we are increasingly being impacted by global supply chain issues and rising costs which have arisen during Covid-19.

We are being hit hard by freight costs going through the roof with increases of up to 500%, a cost that comes straight off MBL's bottom line.

Freight cost increases are being compounded by the global shortage of shipping containers and unreliable freight schedules.

Our exports of meal and tallow are being affected, and our imports of merchandise are getting more erratic and unreliable despite the world coming out of Covid.

As an example, staggered delivery schedules flew out the window recently when 11 shipping containers of merchandise suddenly arrived at MBL at once from a ship from Singapore.

This resulted in frenzied unpacking and a mountain of merchandise to sort and distribute, adding to the accumulated frustration of Covid for MBL and our Members.

On another front, we are working to resolve the potential difficulties of a shortfall in the availability of ovine raw material for our Keith rendering plant.

So while MBL enjoyed a very successful 2020-21, we can never take continued success for granted as we face a number of challenges.

However, I'm cautiously optimistic that, with lots of work, MBL can continue our growth over the next few years.



GREAT WORK, MBL

Members give ringing endorsements for our service, support and value for money

A new independent survey has recorded extraordinarily-high levels of Membership satisfaction with MBL's overall service and support.

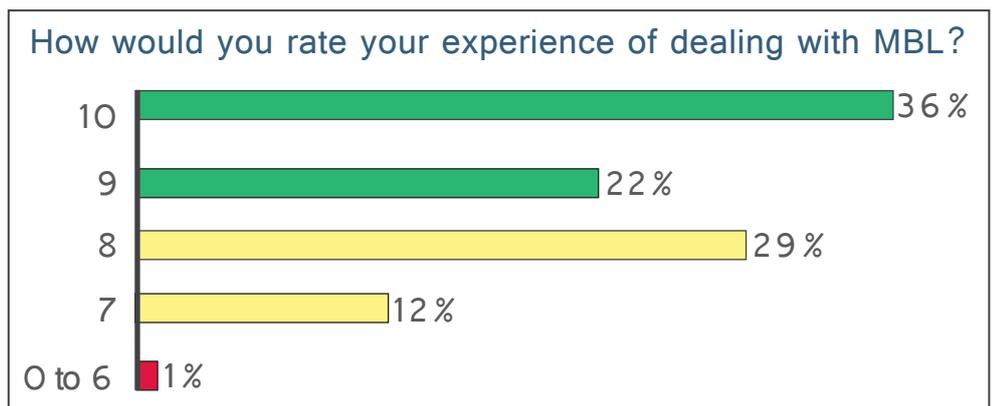
It found that 99% of randomly-picked Members were more than satisfied with MBL's overall performance, up from 90% in a similar survey last year.

And when asked about MBL's value for money, 84% of surveyed Members rated MBL eight, nine or 10 points out of 10.

"After working to improve on last year's results, we are delighted with the new survey results and we appreciate our Members' strong support," says MBL's General Manager of Sales and Marketing, Bexley Carman.

Chairman George Ujvary says, "It makes me happy to know the Members are happy with our Co-operative."

The survey's core question – *How do you*



rate your experience of dealing with MBL? – resulted in 36% of surveyed Members scoring MBL a perfect 10 out of 10.

A further 22% of respondents rated MBL nine out of 10, 29% voted eight, 12% scored seven and 1% gave six or less.

Melbourne consumer survey firm Saguity says the bottom line is that 99% of respondents were "at least satisfied" in their

dealings with the Co-operative.

"Scores of 10 and nine translate to loyal customers while scores of eight and seven indicate satisfied customers," says Saguity founder Darrell Hardidge.

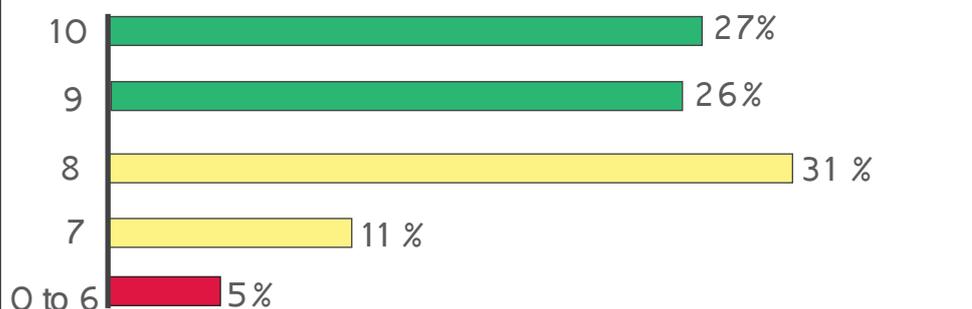
"For MBL to have 58% in the 'very happy' 10 and nine bracket is extremely good. These people are loyal, rusted-on customers who are with MBL forever.

"The eight out of 10s are happy with MBL but the sevens, although satisfied with MBL, are open to doing business elsewhere."

Saguity further crunched the numbers to calculate MBL's performance "net score" as 57% which was 12% higher than in the similar survey last year.

"For MBL's net promoter score to go up by 12% is really good. MBL is in great shape and holds a strong and stable

How would you rate MBL in regard to value for money?



position in the market,” Darrell says.

Bexley says MBL strived to make performance improvements in a number of areas, particularly our communication with Members, in response to findings in last year’s survey.

“Members last year identified communication around the availability of products and the progress of orders as the key area where MBL needed to improve,” he says.

“We took steps to address this, as reflected in the new survey. Last year, 45% of respondents rated communication as an issue but this has dropped to 26%.

“Both surveys were in Covid years with severe global supply chain issues, including unavailability of products from overseas, severely delayed delivery and skyrocketing shipping charges.

“This put MBL under stress and in turn our Members were affected, identifying stock, range, freight and delivery issues in the surveys.

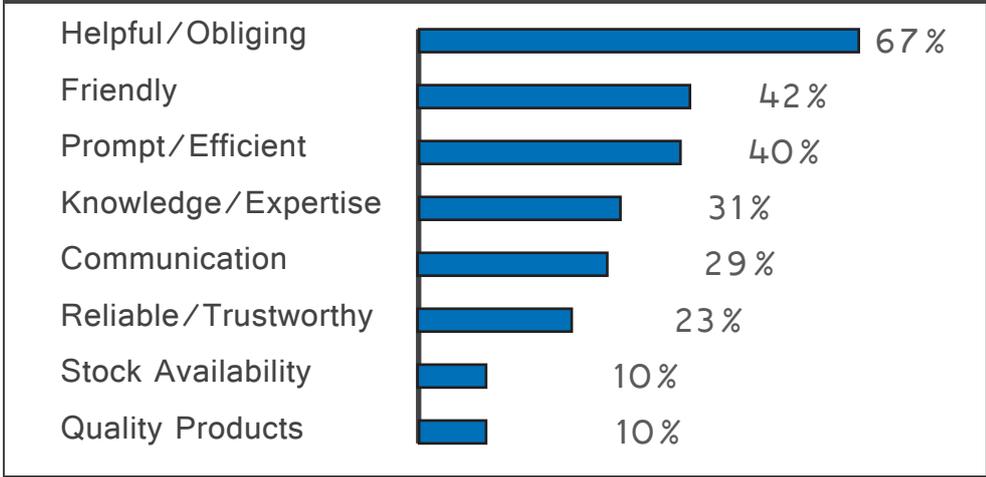
“It has been pleasantly surprising how highly Members have rated MBL overall in the surveys, considering the years we have been having.

“The Membership deserves credit for understanding global supply issues are out of our control and we are always trying to do our best.

“Unfortunately, supply issues are getting worse. Not only is shipping unreliable at best, but shipping costs have risen by up to 500%.”

Darrell says Members’ latest survey responses – using words such as helpful, obliging, friendly and efficient – showed

Key reasons for Members’ appreciation of MBL



Survey co-ordinator Darrell Hardidge.

MBL has improved communication.

“Customers need to know what’s going on. If there’s bad news, tell them. Members are saying MBL is really helpful, they are doing their best, they are looking after me, they are proactive and keeping up information,” he says.

Darrell says the survey showed providing value for money is another of MBL’s strengths.

“We found that 84% of people were satisfied, at minimum, with MBL’s value for money. A perfect 10 out of 10 was scored by 27%,” he says.

“This shows they don’t have a problem with pricing. MBL is market-leading regarding value and prices.”

Asked how they prefer to place their orders, 59% of respondents said via the MBL reps.

“This shows that the reps are highly valued and a great asset for MBL,” Darrell says.

Bexley says, “MBL is one of the few companies who still do regular face-to-face visits, which are often necessary because of the complexity of orders.”

Darrell says the overall MBL team was rated very highly for knowledge, reliability, friendliness and understanding.

He says, “The people of MBL are a major benefit to the Members. The human connection and the service side comes out strongly.”



The survey showed the high regard Members hold for MBL staff, from office and warehouse workers at our Athol Park headquarters to our frontline people, including the travelling reps. Pictured here at the recent AMIC SA Industry Awards night are (from left) MBL General Manager of Sales and Marketing Bexley Carman, Sales Manager Dale Rowe and reps Greg Goodfellow, Mark Rosewarne and Chris Rowe.



It's quality all the way as custom booms for Mick

When Mick Lamond took over a small Mt Gambier butcher shop 15 years ago, he and one offsider served an average of 30 to 35 customers a day.

He doubled his space into a shop next door three years ago and now heads a staff of 10 to cater for 140 customers a day plus a strong wholesale base.

With his Collins Court Butcher business continuing to grow, Mick's again considering expanding next door, this time into a large pharmacy which will shift across the road.

The question is: just how big does this former national Sausage King champion want his business to become?

"The chemist takes up a large area which was designed for eight small shops. I have the opportunity to expand into there," says Mick, 38, a strong supporter of MBL.

"There's a lot to consider and I have until June to decide. I'll get Christmas out of the



way before I really look into it."

The popularity of Collins Court Butcher was shown last December when a local newspaper's online poll identified it as the South-East's most popular butcher shop.

Mick's shop polled more than 30% of votes in a field of 10, prompting him to declare, "We must be doing something right!"

He has been further encouraged to expand by "really good" trading over the past two

Covid-19 years when local butchers came into their own.

"People got into the habit of cooking more for themselves and realising what we offer is better than supermarkets. There's no reason why this won't continue," Mick says.

Success for Mick is built around the traditional cores of premium meat and polished customer service with expert advice, but he says he has no single ingredient for sustained growth.

"It has been good, really good, with wholesale on top, but I honestly can't tell you precisely why it has gone so well over our 15 years. It just has," he says.

"Most of our new customers hear about us by word of mouth which is the best advertising. We have a good reputation and news spreads.

"Conversely, in a town like Mt Gambier, word soon spreads if you start selling inferior products. >

➤ “We take pride in the quality of our meat, and people want quality.

“Quality products, from the South-East if possible, and good customer service are so important.

“We are always trying to help our customers and we will source anything for them or do anything we can for them.”

Mick’s buy-local policy includes sourcing some of his beef and lamb from his uncle and brother on family farms south of Mt Gambier.

He always thought he would end up working on a family farm but became interested in becoming a butcher after going on an organised hunting trip.

“I saw a deer being cut up and I thought it was interesting,” says Mick, who remains a member of hunting group Field and Game Australia.

“I thought about the cattle we raised on our farm and how they were processed, so I organised a week’s work experience with Jim Maney at Margaret Street Meat.”

Mick loved working in the Mt Gambier shop and took up the offer of a four-year apprenticeship.

“I spent over six years at that shop, but by then I was looking for a change, maybe going back to the farm,” he says.

In a timely development, the Collins Court Butcher business came up for sale. Mick recognised the potential of the shop, in a small shopping centre on busy Jubilee Hwy.

He bought the shop in 2006. “Time has flown. Back then, it was a small operation with only 30 to 35 customers a day but I could see potential to improve,” he says.

With hard work and smart thinking, Mick impressively built a loyal customer base.

He also developed a wholesale side to supply hotels, clubs and cafes in Mt Gambier and further afield at Mt Schank, Port MacDonnell, Tarpeena and Beachport.

“They all remain as long-time customers. Wholesale now makes up 30% of the business,” he says.



Mick Lamond... repeated Sausage King success enhanced his shop's reputation for quality.

Mick’s customer base has partly grown due to his highway location on the western approach to Mt Gambier.

“The town has expanded this way with several new housing estates and we get a lot of customers going to and from places like Millicent and Robe,” he says.

Another factor is the drawing power of a large combined general store, takeaway and cafe next door to the butcher shop.

“They get 800 customers a day next door, starting with tradies at 5.30 for breakfast. It’s incredible. I get benefit from the passing foot traffic,” says Mick, who opens at 6am.

Mick is a South-East man through and through, prominent in the community and living on a 4.5ha (11 acre) property with wife Amy and daughter Sienna, 9.

An SA rep in competition shooting and a keen golfer, he is Vice-President of Mt Gambier Harness Racing Club, sits on the management committee of Kongorong Football Club and is a CFS volunteer with his local Yahl brigade.

His reputation as a quality butcher has been hugely boosted over the years with success in Sausage King, particularly for his pork sausages, using MBL Old English Pork meal.

This sausage won the title as the State’s best Traditional Pork sausage over four successive years from 2016 to 2019 inclusive.

He also won SA titles in other categories, including in Australian Lamb for his Lamb, Feta and Sundried Tomato sausage in 2018.

The crowning glory was in 2018 when Mick won the national pork sausage title against Australia’s best in a hotly-contested final.

The trophies remain on display in the shop, giving great ongoing PR value.

“If you win awards for your sausages, people figure your other meat must be pretty good, too,” Mick says.

“I started making 8kg of the pork sausages a week but after they kept winning competitions, we went past making 100kg.”

At one stage, six pubs in the South East promoted his pork sausages in their menus.

Mick says, “We get a lot of people coming into the shop and saying, ‘I want some your pork snags that I had in the pub.’”

He has a strong range of pan and oven-ready products, with plans to use MBL’s Butcher Banquet ready meals package, and does well from the sale of local seafood, including crayfish from Carpenter Rocks.



HOME COMPOSTABLE hero!

MBL's Home Compostable Hero promotion is open to Members and customers who buy any two products from our Home Compostable packaging range.

They will go into the draw to win a weekend away in an Airbnb Eco Getaway of their choice to the value of \$600.

And each month until June, we will select a Hero who will be featured in MBL News and receive point-of-sale marketing displays and social media support.

NOVEMBER HERO: First Fruits



Brendan Whennen.

Fresh food home delivery business First Fruits says freeing produce from plastic packaging is at the forefront of providing a sustainable shopping experience.

"We're very passionate about the environment and we're continually working to supply produce with sustainable packaging," says Brendan Whennen.

"We have been changing over to products with less plastic packaging and MBL is playing a big part by supplying home-compostable products including vac bags, soakers and eco-cane trays."

First Fruits home delivers fruit and vegetables, meat, dairy, seafood, bread and other products across Adelaide.

It was an established business when purchased by Brendan who had earlier founded his own home delivery service, Adelaide Fruit and Vegetable Delivery.

He was inspired to form Adelaide Fruit and Vegetable Delivery at the start of Covid-19 when people over 70 were urged to stay at home and get family or friends to do their shopping.

Realising that not every older person had such support, he distributed leaflets offering to buy people's fruit and vegetable and deliver the orders to their homes.

The volunteer service evolved into a business which complemented his later purchase of First Fruits.

DECEMBER HERO: SA Gourmet Meats Unley

Butcher Brian Annandale (pictured) naturally turned to MBL when customers began asking him to use eco-friendly meat trays.

MBL rep Shane Reynolds soon had Brian up to speed on our range of green packaging, resulting in SA Gourmet Meats Unley switching to our home compostable eco-cane trays and produce bags.

"We didn't really promote the changes, we just switched and we've had good comments from customers," says Brian, the shop's manager.

"We use different sizes of eco-cane trays. They are fantastic, doing a good job, so it was a seamless switch from foam trays.

"The compostable bags feel different than plastic bags and can be stickier, but we're working around it by using tongs for the long-term benefit.



"We're now also getting paper carry bags from MBL, to go into home recycling bins while our trays and produce bags go into home green bins."

Brian says the transition to green packaging makes business sense. "Our customers are happy that we've made the switch ahead of mandatory changes," he says.

New faces join old hands

The rise to prominence of a number of small country butcher shops producing first-class products was a standout feature of this year's AMIC SA Industry Awards.

MBL was the major sponsor of the awards night attended by 250 people at Adelaide Zoo.

Winners and placegetters were spread from the Riverland to Port Lincoln and up to Burra as more country butchers than ever shared State success with their city cousins.

The emergence of new faces coincided with the amazing 80% increase in entries for this year's SA Sausage King and smallgoods competitions over the last year of competitions in 2019.

The total entries surged to 548 and came from 54 businesses – more than double over 2019.

“There's good vibes among butchers across the State, reflected in the surge of entries,” says AMIC State Manager Chris Kelly.

Unlike in past eras of city “big boys” dominance, this year's six sausage and two burger categories were won by eight different businesses spread across city and country.

Sausage King winners were:

Beef: Mount Pleasant Butcher for its Traditional Beef sausage.

Pork: Standom Smallgoods, Edinburgh North, for Scottish Pork.

Poultry: Our Butcher @ Cowell for Chicken Curry.

Lamb: Coopers Butchers, Burra, for Station Saltbush Hogget.

Continental: Ellis Butchers, McLaren Vale, for Traditional Italian Pork, Fennel, Pasley & Chilli, and

Gourmet: Costello's Smallgoods, Fulham Gardens, for Saltbush Pork.

Burger competition winners were:

Beef: Jamestown Meats for its Memphis Burger, and

Gourmet: Bruce's Meat, Mitcham, for Chimichurri Lamb.



Passionate... Mount Pleasant's Jamie Hylan won a Sausage King and both ham awards.



Triple award winner Doug Costello-Smith, of Costello's Smallgoods, with wife Alice.

In smallgoods, Mount Pleasant Butcher and Costello's Smallgoods each won two sections to add to their Sausage King wins.

Mount Pleasant Butcher's Mallee smoked hams triumphed in both the Bone-on and Boneless ham sections, and Costello's won gold for its bung fritz and saltbush jerky.

In the Mettwurst/Salami Fermented section, Skara Smallgoods, of Totness in the Adelaide Hills, won the gold trophy for its

pork and fennel salami as well as bronze for its chorizo salami.

Indulgent Meats, of Port Elliot, won the Mettwurst/Salami Heat Treated gold trophy with its mild pepperoni salami.

Rollbusch Quality Meats, of Waikerie, won the bacon section for its rind-on rasher, and Desmond's Meat Service, of Kadina, won Cooked Sausage in a Casing for its cheese & jalapeno kransky.

Barossa Fine Foods won the Deli Meat section for its smoked wagyu beef, and Riverland Country Style Meats, of Renmark, won Value Added Products for its lamb shank pie.

River Farm Products, on the shores of Boston Bay near Port Lincoln, performed strongly to win four silver awards and one bronze in smallgoods.

Lynne Zammit, pictured with her butcher husband Lou, won the SA Legends Award. A full story on her many contributions to the industry will be in the next MBL News.



Sarah carves and cuts her way to a stunning victory

Sarah Hopgood was happy working as a shop assistant before her strong work ethic led to Whyalla butcher Tim Wendland persuading her to become a butcher.

The new apprentice thrived with the knives, as the owner of two-shop Carve 'n' Cut Meats knew she would.

Two years later, Tim was again at his persuasive best to convince Sarah to enter the 2021 AMIC SA Apprentice of the Year competition.

"I didn't really want to enter. Tim encouraged me, telling me I'd do well, but I had to think about it before agreeing," says Sarah, (pictured).

The second-year apprentice, 29, was stunned when her name was read out as Apprentice of the Year at the AMIC State awards presentation night.

"I'd entered for the first time and had no idea I was in the running. I was caught off guard and speechless, not knowing what to say," she says.

"The response back in Whyalla has been pretty overwhelming. People have been congratulating me everywhere I go. It's great to have so much support."

Sarah was the only female among 10 of the State's best apprentices to battle it out in the one-day competition at TAFE SA, Regency Park, in August.

She impressed judges with her knowledge and skills in the mystery box competition where apprentices break down beef, lamb and pork before making assorted products from a selection of supplied ingredients.

A highlight for Sarah was in the beef section. She boned out a whole rump and made products including fillet mignons, a pocket roast, marinated steak, beef yiros and stir-fry strips.

A late bloomer, her awards success follows an unremarkable entry into the meat game in the Mid-North.

The daughter of a railway worker, she grew up in Laura and, after leaving school, she took a job as a server at a butcher shop in nearby Jamestown. She enjoyed the work, staying for five years.



Sarah later moved to Whyalla and again took a job as an assistant in a butcher shop, joining Carve 'n' Cut Meats.

"Tim saw that I was interested in the work and he showed me how to do some things. After about a year, he asked if I'd like to be an apprentice and things went from there," she says.

Tim says he was impressed by Sarah's self-motivation and drive, as well as her ability to listen and quickly learn.

"Sarah has been here for nearly four years now and she has done very well. She is a very conscientious worker who will have a go at anything," he says.

"She has the ability to think for herself but she's willing to ask for help if she thinks something can be done a better way.

"She already acts as a manager without having the title as such."

Ten people work in the overall Carve 'n' Cut business, with Sarah playing an integral role in the larger street-front shop which supplies finished products to a smaller shop in busy Westland mall.

Her duties include placing orders with the suppliers of meat and putting together the order for MBL rep Shane Reynolds who visits monthly.

She enjoys breaking beef and inventing new flavours of sausages such as roma tomato & caramelised onion and jalapeno & cheese.

Sarah is also equipped to give good cooking advice to customers. "I love cooking generally. I have a meat smoker and probably have three barbecues too many," she says.

"It's good to able to give practical tips," she says.



Retailers of the Year celebrated

The evolution of the traditional butcher shop to better meet contemporary customer needs is being perfectly demonstrated by Brett Gerhardt and crew at Renmark.

“There have been lots of changes in my 35 years in the industry. We’re part of the evolution of shops,” says Brett, of thriving Riverland Country Style Meats.

“We’re trying to stay in front in a very competitive game. We are familiar with what supermarkets are doing and we listen to customers.”

Brett, wife Sue and their eight staff were recognised for their innovative endeavours by being named AMIC’s Regional Retailer of the Year.

“We’re humbled to win the award,” says Brett, who also won three smallgoods trophies.

Brett ran his own butcher shop in Mildura for 10 years before crossing the border to Renmark in 2015 to open his present shop. He is big on value adding.

“So many people want help with meals. They want ideas and love the thought of someone doing the cooking for them,” he says.

Port Elliot butcher Jeff Luxton and wife Anj are still on cloud nine after winning the Retailer of the Year Award for AMIC’s Metro zone, which includes Fleurieu Peninsula.

They also won a major smallgoods award for their heat-treated mild peppercorn salami, resulting in a sustained sales boom.

“Building up our shop has involved a lot of time and pressure, and to receive recognition from the industry is really very nice,” Jeff says.

“The response from our customers has been great. They have been very excited to share our success, bringing in everything from celebration balloons to cartons of beer.

“But success won’t change us. We’ll always be humble people, always looking at the next things to do and working to improve.”

Jeff heads a team of two butchers and two apprentices while Anj mainly looks after the business side. They have four young sons.

They took over the shop in 2016 and expanded it two years later. They have more

Riverland Country Style Meats



Delighted... Renmark's Brett Gerhardt and wife Sue with their latest AMIC trophies.

With a big range of value added products popular in their butcher shop, Brett and Sue went the whole hog about a year ago by taking over the shop next door to open a takeaway food shop.

Riverland Country Style Kitchen is proving extremely popular for light lunches as well

as meals for family dinners. Four servers are often working flat-chat in a packed shop.

“It has been fantastic. Basically, anything we sell in the butcher shop is sold cooked next door,” Brett says.

“It’s all about moving the business forward.”

Indulgent Meats, Port Elliot



Winners... Simon Bryant, Jeff Luxton, Anj Adams, Corey Anderson and Hamish Barrett.

than tripled the customer base through sheer hard work, innovation and insistence on providing high quality products.

Customers can look through a large window into a dry-aging room to see the shop’s flagship prime local beef. The butchers work out front in full view, giving people an appreciation of traditional butchering skills.

Anj says, “We’ve worked to create our dream shop with quality products backed by good old-fashioned advice and service – a place where kids get a piece of fritz from a smiling butcher.

“We have created something pretty awesome within our community and it’s great to be recognised by the industry.”



The MBL Food Service crew was well represented at the AMIC awards night, giving them a rare opportunity to socialise with Members away from workplaces and, in some cases, put faces to names from over the phone.

Back row (from left): Jamie Higgins, Shane Harrison and Greg Goodfellow. Middle: Darrel O’Sullivan, Dale Rowe, Bexley Carman, Mark Rosewarne and Chris Rowe. Front: Mackenzie Beames, Tayla Meaney and Susie O’Brien.

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Warehouse and distribution costs remained steady as a percentage of sales. Other costs were maintained during the year.

This year we will be adding a new position of Inventory Controller to manage sales forecasts, safety stock and lead times.

We are currently implementing a new warehouse management system to scan in and out all stock and orders.

Proteins

A continued focus on costs and margins across the business included renegotiating some of our major raw material contracts for the Proteins Division.

Pricing for meal and tallow have been increasing, and this in turn put pressure on raw material pricing which is always challenging to manage.

New agreements have been signed with our major poultry raw material suppliers and increased poultry volumes helped to underpin volume efficiencies.

Energy costs are significant. Gas, in particular, was at record highs for the second half of the year.

The cost of electricity is finally starting to fall and the contracted price for 2021/22 has come down nearly 10%.

Revenue and profit upsurge

Wingfield

Wingfield operated under pressure for most of the year, with most commodity prices under pressure at different times.

This year we will be developing the Wingfield site with a new warehouse to replace the old asbestos sheds.

We are currently negotiating to develop the vacant land at Wingfield and leasing it to our next-door neighbours.

We have also purchased and will be installing a new cooker in the high-temperature plant this year to increase our capacity.

Keith

Keith struggled with raw materials supply as our Victorian suppliers had their production limited by the Victorian Government during Covid lockdowns.

Our major supplier of ovine from Victoria was acquired by Thomas Foods International. As a result, raw material from Victoria is now supplied to TFI at Murray Bridge, putting our Keith business under significant pressure.

This pressure further increased in August this year when our other Victorian ovine

supplier installed and commissioned their own rendering plant.

The good news from Keith is that feather meal production is going well after we signed new feather agreements with our poultry suppliers. Feather meal prices are strong.

This current year 2021/22:

The Keith division performed well in the first quarter, given the supply challenges. The second quarter at Keith will be tough, but we expect significant improvement in the second half of this year.

Wingfield’s first quarter started very well, with the utilisation of the low temperature plant exceeding expectations in terms of volumes and efficiency.

The first quarter for Merchandise and Machinery is on budget, with new blending volumes up and a strong focus on sales and operational improvements.

Our insurance premiums and the risk appetite of insurers is a significant issue.

We are seeing our insurance costs move from around \$800,000 for the current period to around \$1.8 million. The increase is mainly driven by our ISR policy.