

Attraction and Retention Strategies for the Meat Retailing Industry



Craig Peacock

Skills Victoria (TAFE)/ISS Institute Fellowship

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Industry and Regional Development, Victorian Government





International
Specialised
Skills
Institute

ISS Institute
Level 1
189 Faraday Street
Carlton Vic
AUSTRALIA 3053

T 03 9347 4583
F 03 9348 1474
E info@issinstitute.org.au
W www.issinstitute.org.au

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Executive Summary

During the Fellow's time in both Canada and North America he aimed to gain an insight into how meat retailing in these countries differed to that of Australian meat retailing and how these findings may allow the meat industry to adapt to some of the changes that are happening in Australia. The Fellow also wanted to look at different strategies for attraction and retention of staff in this low paid industry.

What the Fellow found was that there were very few independent retailers throughout both countries, with the market being dominated by fresh food supermarkets. These supermarkets ranged from budget through to very high quality and that this depended predominately on location and demographics.

There was one very successful independent meat retailer that the Fellow visited. This was a shop called Lobel's of New York in Manhattan, New York City, and the main reason for Lobel's success was not only its high quality product but also its online ordering system. This store has a fantastic website and the product is sent throughout North America via courier in a specialised dry ice package that does not require refrigerated transport.¹

Low budget supermarkets such as Walmart sell large quantities of bulk and ready-to-eat meals with a wide variety of Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP) and Vacuum Skin Packaging (VSP) options. These supermarkets offer affordability and convenience with very large pre-pack and frozen cases. These supermarkets also have a large selection of halal and kosher lines along with sections of the frozen cabinet set aside for frozen goat, cut roughly into 4 cm cubes to cater to a large Middle eastern market in a number of American states.

High-end fresh food supermarkets such as Wegmans, Whole Foods and Choices are focused on quality, variety and above all else customer service. These supermarkets have large pre-pack display cabinets as well as traditional meat cabinets where value-added and high quality meat is sold. The majority of these supermarkets also have dry aged cabinets as a centrepiece behind their main service counters.

These high-end meat retailers also sell a substantial amount of organic product with the demand for organic product continuing to grow. In line with this trend is also the need to look at more environmentally acceptable ways to package this product with these supermarkets now using biodegradable meat trays. Initially these trays had limited success, as they were made from potato starch and would break down before the end of the product shelf life. These supermarkets are now successfully using meat trays made from sugar cane pulp and corn starch.

In the majority of these supermarkets meat cutters are employed with little to no skill in relation to carcass meat, making smallgoods, curing and corning, breaking and boning product or bandsaw work. The reason for this is that the main duties of meat cutters in supermarkets are that of slicing, trimming, packing, ordering and customer service.

The majority of the training for these meat cutters is not in relation to slicing and trimming but focused on customer service. These meat cutters and packers have an excellent knowledge of the product that they are selling with nearly all of the staff that the Fellow interviewed being able to give accurate and detailed information on the following items:

- The best meat selection for customer requests
- Meat processing from paddock to plate
- The best cooking method
- Time and temperature advice in relation to cooking
- How long to rest meat
- Storage
- Origin of product

Executive Summary

- Grass- and grain-fed product
- Organics
- Nutrition
- Side dishes
- Matching wines.

This knowledge was evident in the majority of mid to high-end stores with training occurring both internally and externally. Training for these stores is a major investment, with staff members excelling in customer service due to the confidence they have gained from training in both sales skills and product knowledge.

Due to the dominance of these fresh food supermarkets there is a very large wholesale sector for the meat industry in both Canada and America. These wholesalers supply both supermarkets and the food service sectors.

Workers in the wholesale sector are highly skilled in boning, slicing, trimming, bandsaw work, breaking carcass, mincing, smallgoods making, value-adding, portion control and packaging. These wholesale plants are usually very specialised with workers trained on the job in specific skill sets.

The majority of these wholesale plants in North America are established in low socio-economic areas with high unemployment rates so there is no shortage of staff to do these labour intensive low paid jobs. In Canada where there are skills shortages in the meat industry due to a resource boom in the oil sector, employers have had to come up with a number of strategies to attract and retain staff.

Meat cutters and process workers can either be trained on the job or at colleges that offer full-time courses in the industry. The only course that offers training in both processing and cutting is at Olds College, Alberta, Canada, with graduates from this program being highly sought after from all areas of the meat industry.

The main themes around the success of attraction and retention in the industry are:

- Communication and engagement
- Training
- Mentoring
- Assimilation (immigrant labour force)
- Career pathways
- Flexibility of rosters
- Stability.

Pay rates are also a major factor when dealing with the issues of attraction and retention.

From these findings the Fellow believes that there will be a significant skills shift in the labour intensive skills that are currently present in the meat retail sector, and that these labour intensive skills will shift back to the processing and wholesale sectors. The processing and wholesale sectors will need to build on their skills in relation to value-adding, slicing, trimming, smallgoods and packaging. It will also mean that meat retailers will need to enhance their skills in relation to product knowledge and customer service. This being said, independent Australian meat retailers are still far superior in their ability to value-add product and provide a point of difference to the consumer.

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

APL	Australian Pork Limited
AMIC	Australian Meat Industry Council
BIC	Beef Information Centre, Canada
CBD	central business district
cm	centimetre
ESOP	Employee Stock Ownership Program
HR	Human Resources
MAP	Modified Atmosphere Packaging
MINTRAC	National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council Limited
MLA	Meat & Livestock Australia
NAIT	Northern Alberta Institute of Technology
NRA	National Restaurant Association
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
RCC	Recognition of Current Competence
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
USA	United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VETASSES	Vocational Education and Training (VET) Assessment
VFITB	Victorian Food Industry Training Board
VSP	Vacuum Skin Packaging

Definitions

Design

Design is problem setting and problem solving. Design is a fundamental economic and business tool. It is embedded in every aspect of commerce and industry and adds high value to any service or product—in business, government, education and training, and the community in general.²

Halal

Describes food, cosmetics and beverages that contain products that are derived from animals slaughtered and processed in a way that abides by the religious practices and standards of Islamic law.

Innovation

Creating and meeting new needs with new technical and design styles. (New realities of lifestyle).³

Kosher

Describes foods that conform to the regulations of the Halakha or 'Jewish law'.

Skill deficiency

A skill deficiency is where a demand for labour has not been recognised and training is unavailable in Australian education institutions. This arises where skills are acquired on-the-job, gleaned from published material or from working and/or studying overseas.⁴

There may be individuals or individual firms that have these capabilities. However, individuals in the main do not share their capabilities, but rather keep the intellectual property to themselves. Over time these individuals retire and pass away. Firms likewise come and go.

Sustainability

The ISS Institute follows the United Nations for Non-Governmental Organisations' definition on sustainability: "*Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*".⁵

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Awarding Body – International Specialised Skills Institute (ISS Institute)

The International Specialised Skills Institute Inc is an independent, national organisation that for over two decades has worked with Australian governments, industry and education institutions to enable individuals to gain enhanced skills and experience in traditional trades, professions and leading-edge technologies.

At the heart of the ISS Institute are our Fellows. Under the **Overseas Applied Research Fellowship Program** the Fellows travel overseas. Upon their return, they are required to pass on what they have learnt by:

1. Preparing a detailed report for distribution to government departments, industry and educational institutions.
2. Recommending improvements to accredited educational courses.
3. Delivering training activities including workshops, conferences and forums.

Over 200 Australians have received Fellowships, across many industry sectors. In addition, recognised experts from overseas conduct training activities and events. To date, 22 leaders in their field have shared their expertise in Australia.

According to Skills Australia's 'Australian Workforce Futures: A National Workforce Development Strategy 2010':

Australia requires a highly skilled population to maintain and improve our economic position in the face of increasing global competition, and to have the skills to adapt to the introduction of new technology and rapid change.

International and Australian research indicates we need a deeper level of skills than currently exists in the Australian labour market to lift productivity. We need a workforce in which more people have skills, but also multiple and higher level skills and qualifications. Deepening skills across all occupations is crucial to achieving long-term productivity growth. It also reflects the recent trend for jobs to become more complex and the consequent increased demand for higher level skills. This trend is projected to continue regardless of whether we experience strong or weak economic growth in the future. Future environmental challenges will also create demand for more sustainability related skills across a range of industries and occupations.⁶

In this context, the ISS Institute works with Fellows, industry and government to identify specific skills in Australia that require enhancing, where accredited courses are not available through Australian higher education institutions or other Registered Training Organisations. The Fellows' overseas experience sees them broadening and deepening their own professional practice, which they then share with their peers, industry and government upon their return. This is the focus of the ISS Institute's work.

For further information on our Fellows and our work see <http://www.issinstitute.org.au>.

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Fellowship Sponsor

The Victorian Government, Skills Victoria is responsible for the administration and coordination of programs for the provision of training and further education, adult community education and employment services in Victoria and is a valued sponsor of the ISS Institute. The Fellow would like to thank them for providing funding support for this Fellowship.

Supporters

- Arthur Blewitt, Chief Executive Officer, AgriFood Skills Australia
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- Kevin Cottrill, Chief Executive Officer, Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC)
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- Scott Hansen, Managing Director, Meat & Livestock Australia
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- Jenny Kroonstuiver, Chief Executive Officer, National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council Limited (MINTRAC)
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- Melinda Waters, Manager Business Development, Vocational Education and Training (VET) Assessment (VETASSES)
- Brendon Watts, Victoria Retail Chairman, AMIC; Owner, Brendon's Quality Meats

Employer Support

- William Angliss Institute of TAFE

Organisations Impacted by the Fellowship

Government

- Skills Victoria, Victorian Government

Industry

- AgriFood Skills Australia
- AMIC
- Australian Meat Retailers
- Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA)

Education and Training

- MINTRAC
- TAFEs and RTOs that have meat qualifications on their scope of registration
- VET in Schools

About the Fellow

Name: Craig Peacock

Employment

- Coordinator – Flexible Delivery, Food Processing Programs, William Angliss Institute of TAFE

Qualifications

- Diploma of Vocational Education and Training, Box Hill Institute of TAFE, 2008
- Diploma of Vocational Education and Training Practice, Box Hill Institute of TAFE, 2007
- Recognition of Prior Learning/Recognition of Current Competence (RPL/RCC) Assessment, Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE, 2002
- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS), Consultation, Work Cover NSW, 2002
- Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment, Murray Mallee Training, 2001
- Understanding Legislative Compliance for Work Safety, Coles Supermarkets, 2000
- Monitor a Food Safety Program, SGS (formerly Société Générale de Surveillance), 1999
- Workplace Training (Category 1), Victoria University (TAFE), 1998
- Certificate III in Meat Processing, William Angliss Institute of TAFE, 1995

Memberships

- AgriFood Skills Australia
- AMIC
- MINTRAC
- MLA Red Meat Network Club

Brief Biography

The Fellow first became involved in the meat industry in 1992 when he undertook an apprenticeship in butchery for a small retail shop in Deniliquin, NSW, where he was born and raised. He then moved to Melbourne in 1993 to complete an apprenticeship with Coles Supermarkets, and was trained at William Angliss Institute of TAFE.

Working for a larger organisation provided the Fellow with a wide range of opportunities and he was offered the chance to manage the meat department of Coles Supermarkets in Deniliquin in 1997 and moved from Melbourne back to Deniliquin with his fiancé to take up this opportunity. He remained with Coles Supermarkets for three years and became involved with compliance and training, which is where his interest in education and training began.

The Fellow then started work for a private Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Murray Mallee Training, and was responsible for educating trainees in the areas of Retail and Administration throughout rural NSW and Victoria. He was also contracted to deliver training for William Angliss Institute of TAFE in remote rural areas where apprentices were unable to travel to Melbourne due to costs and/or personal situations.

After five years with Murray Mallee Training he was offered a position with William Angliss Institute of TAFE and moved to Melbourne with his family to become a Teacher in Meat Processing – Retail.

About the Fellow

After three years of classroom-based teaching, the Fellow moved into the role of Flexible Delivery Coordinator for Food Processing Programs, which enabled him to offer quality on-site training to apprentices in rural areas as well as keeping employers up to date with the latest trends and technologies.

It is with this rural upbringing that he enjoys being able to provide education, to advise and to identify opportunities for students in both metropolitan and rural areas, and to ensure no student is disadvantaged. It also gives him great satisfaction to be able to do this in an industry that has provided him with so much, and has so much to offer in the future.

Aims of the Fellowship Program

The aims of this Fellowship program were many, summed up by the following list of activities and investigations:

- Investigate trends in meat consumption in the United States of America (USA) and Canada
- Research dietary trends in these countries
- Investigate the different cuts and species that are consumed by different demographics throughout these countries
- Meet with supermarkets, processors and labour hire companies to see how the labour force is sustained in this low paying industry in both the USA and Canada
- Visit education facilities linked with the meat industry to see what the current and future needs for training are in these countries
- Visit meat processors to analyse the shift of retail skills to the processing sector
- Visit large supermarket chains and processors to evaluate systems of packaging for meat retail cuts
- Visit facilities that produce packaging material and analyse how these plants reduce carbon emissions
- Meet with independent retail shops to determine points of difference between small retailers and large chains
- Meet with independent retailers that are targeting particular demographics with specialist halal and kosher products
- Meet with importers of Australian meat products and analyse future trends
- Visit large supermarkets and processors to analyse the strategies in place to lessen their carbon footprint in relation to meat.

The Australian Context

The Australian red meat and livestock industry is comprised of producers, lot feeders, processors, retailers and exporters who together are responsible for guaranteeing the supply of red meat and livestock to domestic and international markets.

The red meat industry has a combined value of A\$15.8 billion and has become one of the world's largest exporters of red meat and livestock. Approximately 350,000 people are involved either directly or in the supply chain or in businesses that service this industry, with over 50,000 people employed in the meat processing and retail sectors.

Meat retail has changed dramatically over the past 20 years with a rapid decline in the number of small retail shops, due to the increased number of large supermarket chains. The way meat is cut, packaged, displayed and labelled has also changed dramatically and will continue to do so in the future.

There has also been a change to the different types of meat consumed in Australia with the growing number of culturally diverse consumers, with halal and kosher meat becoming more in demand. With this cultural change we will also see an increase in the consumption of goat's meat in the future.

One of the major issues facing the meat industry at the moment is a severe skills shortage highlighted in Australia's Red-Meat and Livestock Industry Meat Industry Strategic Plan 2010–2015.⁷ This plan looks at the need to attract, develop and retain a productive workforce for the future success and viability of the industry.

The first skills deficiency that the Fellow looked to address was the need to develop sustainable strategies for the meat industry. In particular, the Fellow looked at attraction and retention strategies as well as environmental issues in relation to recycled packaging. The Fellow has provided a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis for each skills deficiency below:

SWOT Analysis

Develop Sustainable Strategies for the Meat Retail Industry

Strengths

- Australia's Red-Meat and Livestock Industry Meat Industry Strategic Plan 2010–2015 is looking to address labour and environmental issues over the next five years
- Support from peak industry bodies such as MINTRAC, MLA, AgriFood Skills Australia and AMIC in relation to these issues
- Meat retail is being included on the government skills shortage list; therefore, extra funding is available for employment and training.⁸

Weaknesses

- Industry not marketed well to young Australians with little understanding of career opportunities that the industry has to offer
- More school leavers looking for tertiary qualifications
- Low paid work competing with unskilled labour in the mining and construction sectors
- Increase in vacuum sealed meat by the retail sector that is not recycled.

Opportunities

- Growing awareness of environmental impact of the industry and understanding of our carbon footprint
- Increased financial support from government for attraction and retention of workers to the industry
- Increased financial support from government in relation to environmental strategies

- USA and Canadian supermarkets such as Costco and Walmart are already making significant advancements in relation to environmental issues
- Meat industry in the USA and Canada has implemented attraction and retention strategies in consultation with education facilities and has achieved positive results.

Threats

- Changes to government funding in the areas of employment and environment
- Increased employment in mining and construction.

The meat retail industry in Australia has also undergone major changes in relation to the way we process and prepare meat products. This change has occurred due to a number of factors including increasing demand for more value-added and ready-to-eat products, meat retailers needing to increase profit margins, consumers becoming more health conscious in relation to food products and a growing culturally diverse population.

SWOT Analysis

Meat Retailing to Meet Current and Future Markets, and Meat Retailing to Meet Diverse Cultural Needs

Strengths

- Retailers looking for new ideas to maintain competitive edge
- Retailers more aware of dietary and culinary requirements of consumers and looking to supply a wider variety of product
- Processing sector has an ingrained training culture and strong support from MINTRAC and would be able to successfully up-skill workers to cover the shift of traditional retail skills to this sector
- Currently a very strong focus on the environmental impact of packaging in the meat industry
- Retailers more aware of changing demographics in their local area and looking to cater for cultural needs.

Weaknesses

- Lack of knowledge of different cultural needs
- Labour shortages in both the processing and retail sectors
- Low pay in both the processing and retail sectors of the meat industry
- Little knowledge of products such as halal and kosher to meet a growing culturally diverse population in Australia
- Lack of training in cultural needs in relation to meat products throughout the retail industry.

Opportunities

- Large quantities of halal and kosher products already produced throughout Canada and the USA
- Increased demand in the USA and Canada for ready-to-eat meals due to consumers being time poor
- Extensive work done on packaging of retail cuts in the processing sector for the retail market in both the USA and Canada

- More opportunities for professional development and training with a shift of retail skills to the processing sector as well as an increased demand for additional skills for workers in the meat retail sector
- Opportunities for growth to provide products to an increasing culturally diverse population (such as goat meat, which is one of the most consumed red meats worldwide and has become increasingly popular in the USA).

Threats

- Funding for training for culturally diverse products may not be available
- If change does not occur the industry will be at great financial risk when carbon taxes are implemented
- Expense of packaging systems that are of a higher quality and more environmentally sustainable may not be economically viable
- Industry unable to compete financially in relation to wages with sectors such as mining and construction.

Identifying the Skills Deficiencies

1. Develop Sustainable Strategies for the Meat Retailing Industry

Analyse and evaluate the effectiveness of attraction and retention strategies for meat workers in the USA and Canada.

- Compare strategies used by the meat industry and education sector in different demographics to address the apparent skills shortage in the Australian meat industry
- Evaluate the effectiveness of environmental strategies for packaging in the meat industry
- Positively contribute to peak meat industry bodies in relation to attraction and retention strategies that address skills shortage areas, and to help implement sustainable strategies to address this deficiency
- Investigate and understand the relevant market experience in the USA and Canada with regard to retail supply chain processes and activities.

Aim: To contribute to solutions to environmental issues which will impact on the Australian meat industry in the future.

2. Meat Retailing to Meet Current and Future Markets

Compare and contrast the traditional retail skills required in the meat processing sector with the future skills and knowledge required by visiting processing plants and education facilities involved in this process in the USA and Canada.

- Evaluate how effective this process is and the training required to achieve a quality outcome
- Evaluate systems for packaging and labelling for retail sale
- Formulate an opinion on the range of skills that will be required by meat retailers in the future by comparing retail outlets across the USA and Canada
- Conduct an analysis of how these skills will be best acquired by comparing the effectiveness of both academic and workplace training
- Evaluate future requirements for new cuts of meat in order to meet fast food preparation trends

Aim: To contribute to the implementation of updated retail skills in the meat processing sector, and to gain skills and knowledge on methods of packaging and labelling for retail sale.

Aim: To have a greater understanding of the skills and knowledge that will be required by meat retailers in the future

3. Meat Retailing to Meet Diverse Cultural Needs

Analyse and evaluate current and expected future trends in meat retailing to meet specific cultural needs in different demographics throughout the USA and Canada.

- To analyse butchery skills required to meet specific cultural needs and to identify different species that may be processed for this
- To establish an understanding of the skills required to analyse how various meat products are viewed by current and future cultural customers and to identify opportunities to differentiate products
- Develop an understanding of the design of specific procedures for storing and handling meat for diverse cultural requirements.

Aim: To determine current best practice techniques to assist meat retailers and processors to identify, understand and meet future demands for different cultural requirements by visiting/ interviewing suppliers and retailers of meat for culturally diverse groups in the USA and Canada.

The International Experience

Visit 1: Olds College

Location: Olds, Alberta, Canada

Olds College is a specialist agricultural college in the town of Olds in Alberta, Canada. It is the largest of its kind in Canada and offers courses in everything from meat cutting, boning and slaughtering to rodeo riding, and a farrier's course.

It is the only college in Canada and the USA that offers a 'Gate to Plate' Meat Processing Certificate that covers all aspects of slaughtering, boning, grading and cutting, as well as smallgoods manufacturing customer service and merchandising. The Meat Processing department is managed by Brad McLeod, a very well respected and well-credentialed meat trainer, very highly skilled in all aspects of this program.

Students travel from all parts of Canada to attend this course as it offers them an excellent chance of gaining employment in a range of sectors within the meat industry. This is a full-time course that runs for 15 weeks and starts in either February or September at a cost of C\$5,000 for the student with no government assistance.



Meat processing classroom, Olds College

Visit 2: Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)

Location: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

NAIT is a culinary college in Edmonton and delivers a specialist meat cutters course for people looking to find work in the meat retail industry.

The meat cutters course is a full-time, five-month course specifically aimed at developing participant's skills in line with the skill set required by the supermarket sector in Canada. The course costs participants C\$2,500 and the Canadian government funds the college C\$2,500 for each registered student.

There is no traineeship or apprenticeship in the USA or Canada for retail butchery and this course is designed to deliver all of the underpinning knowledge required and a strong base for the practical skills needed to gain employment in this sector. Students are exposed to carcass meat in this course by the way of demonstrations but will not work on actual carcasses as this is not an essential skill required in the retail sector. Students are, however, given large volumes of product to develop skills such as slicing, trimming and mincing as well as a solid grounding in smallgoods making.



Practical classroom, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)

Visit 3: University of Alberta – Meat Science Unit

Location: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

The University of Alberta has a food science unit in which graduate students can complete a master's degree in Meat Science. At the time of the Fellow's visit the meat science unit was conducting research into how to best control bacteria such as E.coli, Campylobacter and Salmonella.

Some of the research into controlling these food poisoning bacteria included testing tenderising equipment and multi injectors that penetrate red meat primals that could lead to contamination issues when dealing with product that can be served without reaching a safe internal temperature.

Students were also conducting research into high pressure processing where pressure is used on product to kill bacteria and this has been very successful when dealing with liquids and ground meats. This process is also used to tenderise product by using the pressure to break connective tissue. This technology is still in its infancy in relation to meat products and there are issues around solid products holding their shape as well as texture.



High pressure processor, University of Alberta

Visit 4: YB Quality Meats

Location: Red Deer, Alberta, Canada

YB Quality Meats is a small provincial abattoir that also specialises in smallgoods manufacturing and has an attached retail outlet. Being in a regional area, this company has struggled to retain staff due to higher paid work in the oil fields in Alberta.

To overcome this skills shortage YB employs workers from the Philippines on working visas in specific skills shortage areas. The owners of YB are also involved in an exchange program with meat industry workers from Germany and Denmark in which their staff are able to further develop their smallgoods knowledge and skills. In return, workers from these countries are able to further their skills in slaughtering and boning, as well as work on different species such as Elk.



Elk processed at YB Quality Meats

YB Quality Meats

Visit 5: Sunterra Meats

Location: Innisfail, Alberta, Canada

Sunterra Meats is a medium sized abattoir that has a large Filipino workforce (again due to the specific meat industry skills shortage in Alberta). Sunterra Meats also has an issue with staff retention with workers leaving for higher paid jobs.

The Fellow met with both the HR and production managers who were working on strategies to address this staff turnover. The HR manager informed him that this process began by conducting staff satisfaction surveys and working on strategies based on the results of these surveys.

The overwhelming theme to come from these surveys was a reported lack of communication through all facets of the business. The first action to be taken in relation to this was to conduct daily morning meetings to discuss daily work plans, thus empowering staff to contribute ideas and have some input into how production targets could be met. In a follow-up survey employees indicated that these meetings were very important to them and that they made them feel more valued as well as feeling part of the company. Another issue raised in the initial survey was that of long-term employees feeling undervalued. This has been addressed by a commitment of ongoing training for all employees, as the focus in the past had predominately been for the training of new staff. All staff now also get significant discounts on products, a benefit that increases with time served.

These strategies have already had a significant impact on retention rates and staff overall are feeling more satisfied at Sunterra. Staff satisfaction has been a priority for Sunterra meats as it is more cost effective for them to employ local workers rather than imported labour due to the significantly higher hourly rate as a result of a government levy on imported labour.

Visit 6: Costco

Location: Red Deer, Alberta, Canada

The Costco supermarket in Red Deer is one of the larger supermarkets in the area and has six full-time meat cutters on staff. The Fellow spoke with the meat manager of this store who had previously worked for Safeway and he explained that all of his staff had previously worked for other supermarkets in the area.

The manager explained that they had a very good retention rate with the average time served for this store being over six years, which is very rare in this oil-rich state. The meat manager receives an average of two applications a week from meat cutters from other supermarkets looking to gain employment with the store. This is due to Costco's excellent reputation throughout Canada, one of looking after its employees, which it does in several ways:

- First, Costco pays meat cutters US\$22 per hour, which is US\$4 an hour above the average wage, with all staff receiving a US\$3,000 bonus for each 12 months of service. Costco also has an excellent healthcare plan that all employees are entitled to after 12 months of service.⁹
- Second, all employees undergo monthly internal training relating to OHS and other compliance training. This monthly training also regularly includes product knowledge, with guest speakers from different sectors of the industry and suppliers regularly conducting training for staff on their products. This is clearly reflected in the level of customer service that the Fellow observed throughout the store.

Costco also has the most modern equipment of any of the meat retailers that the Fellow visited throughout Canada. All primals are tenderised by being fed through a tenderiser that uses needles to break connective tissue before being sliced. This improves palatability greatly without any great change to the appearance to the product. The only downside to this being the discolouration of the product within 24 to 48 hours; however, with sales in the region of US\$250,000 dollars a week¹⁰ in meat alone, this is not a major issue.

Visit 7: Cargill

Location: High River, Alberta, Canada

Cargill is a very large beef processing plant employing over 1,900 staff with the capacity to process over 4,500 head of cattle a day. Until recent years Cargill has had a very poor staff retention rate and had been sitting above the industry average of 40% turnover rate.¹¹ Some of this was due to the oil boom, however, after conducting extensive research into staff satisfaction it was discovered this was not the only reason.

Cargill has a high percentage of Filipino workers to help with the skills shortage in this sector. There was a high turnover of this group of workers and after looking into why this was occurring strategies were put in place that resulted in turnover rates decreasing to 17%, which is 23% better than the industry turnover rate in Canada.¹²

As part of this improvement process Cargill employed four full-time staff to help these workers to assimilate into society. Cargill also lobbied the government for better immigration services to help support these workers, particularly in regional areas. This has led to workers feeling more involved with the community that they live in and has enabled them to access services in these communities that they previously had little knowledge of.

Cargill also introduced strategies to help all staff feel more engaged at work. This included more actively involving them in decision-making processes, more internal training and team building exercises, such as regular basketball and soccer matches between teams picked by HR. Cargill now has a fully equipped gym with a gym instructor, physiotherapist and dietician on site, which has dramatically reduced the number of accidents and injury claims and given staff a greater sense of wellbeing.

Cargill now has a very stable workforce with 90% of applicants coming from referrals from other staff. A large number of these applicants are international, coming from word-of-mouth avenues from family and friends employed by the company.

Visit 8: Safeway Head Office

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The Fellow met with the HR manager of Safeway Supermarkets at their head office in Calgary to discuss attraction and retention of staff, as well as how stores are set up to cater for different demographics. Safeway have done a lot of work on staff attraction and retention over the past two years after losing many staff members to other industries and, more importantly, to competitors.

They first looked at what they could do better to retain current staff by conducting surveys and exit interviews. Based on this feedback they then implemented strategies such as:

- Training in relation to career and life management
- Providing advice and support in relation to career pathways
- Reimbursement of any university course of 80% relevant to professional development
- More relevant in-house training
- Flexibility of work hours to meet changes in lifestyle
- Cross department training for all staff
- More regular communication (such as meeting every morning with all staff before store opens, communication boards, newsletters, feedback forms)
- Partnering with the University of Alberta to develop a two-year retail degree
- More rewards and recognition, including prizes from 'secret shoppers' and rewards for years of service.

They then looked at how best to attract staff to Safeway based on what they knew was most important to their staff such as:

- Flexible work hours based around sport, social activities, family and religion
- Defining careers within the industry and setting out clear career pathways in the industry
- Advertising positions on social networking sites such as Facebook
- Enabling HR staff to work in stores with new employees to assist with them settling in to their new position
- Promoting stability

These strategies are slowly improving the retention rates across the country for Safeway.

Safeway also looked at how their stores are staffed based on the demographic of where the store is located. They have found this to be very successful with an increase in customer numbers in these areas. New lines have also been added to these stores, one of which is cubed goat meat. This particular line has been quite successful in areas heavily populated with people from the Middle East and parts of Asia.

Visit 9: Calgary Co-op

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Calgary Co-op has 23 supermarkets throughout Alberta and has struggled to attract staff to its meat departments because of the low wages in comparison to work in the oil industry.

Calgary Co-op's meat manager said that the company has developed an eight-month in-house training program to develop its meat cutters into meat managers, which has helped with retention. Calgary Co-op also pay school fees for all meat cutters employed by the company as part of a three-year contract. Another condition of this contract is the ability to relocate as required, which offers young employees a chance to travel to gain experience; however, it is not as attractive for those looking for stability.

Visit 10: Beef Information Centre (BIC)

Location: Calgary, Alberta, Canada

The BIC is the marketing division of the Canadian Cattleman's Association and is able to operate due to funding that comes from levies applied to primary producers and processors as well as some government funding. Marketing is mainly targeted at the domestic market as well as the American market with a strong focus on UK-owned stores in the USA, which will more readily use Canadian product.

The marketing manager of the BIC said that there has been a significant shift in the way consumers plan meals and also how beef is purchased. There has been a strong influence from cooking shows as to what products are purchased, but the most significant change has been that of consumers seeing beef as a large investment in relation to their overall grocery bill.

Due to this shift, beef is now predominately purchased on quality and not price, which is why purchases in Canada and America are made on how the beef is graded. The effect of this change is that AAA graded beef is now usually the most popular choice by retail outlets. There has also been a significant increase in the amount of non-Jewish consumers purchasing kosher products because of perceived quality.

Other considerations that influence customer's decisions when purchasing beef are Country of Origin labels, nutritional benefits and packaging of products. Hindquarter cuts of beef are predominately sold throughout Canada and Northern America, with forequarter cuts sold mainly in the southern states of America particularly in Hispanic regions.

Visit 11: Choices Markets

Location: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Choices Markets are a very high-end supermarket chain in Vancouver specialising in organic products, with over 80% of products in the store organically certified.¹³ Choices have a total of eight stores strategically placed in the more affluent areas of Vancouver.

The Fellow was taken on a tour of every store by the Choices' most senior meat manager. The manager explained that all meat cutters are trained at the main store until they demonstrate satisfactory competence, before going out to other stores. This training can take some time even for the experienced meat cutters that join Choices. All stores still 'break' beef and pork as well as make their own sausages, which is very rare for a retail outlet in Canada. In fact, out of all of the retail outlets in Canada and America visited this was the only company that still did this.

Choices were established in 1990 and still have the feel of a family owned business with the staff members that were interviewed having a great sense of ownership in the business. This in turn has lead to staff retention being very good, with a high percentage being there for over 10 years and some since Choices were established.

The meat departments in Choices sell high quality organic products. The sausages that are made in the stores use totally organic ingredients and have a seven-day shelf life without adding preservative. The sausage meat and flavours are made to order by a company that hand measures and mixes the ingredients for Choices and then packages them in freezer bags in the required amounts.

All packaging and labelling of products highlights the organic and natural theme that the company have created with a particular focus on local growers that supply Choices. The one issue that Choices have in relation to meat packaging is not being able to source good quality biodegradable meat trays, with product still being packaged on polystyrene trays, which does not fit with the company's image. They trialled a tray made from potato; however, the tray's shelf life was shorter than that of the meat that was packed on it.

Choices also have a selection of organic grass-fed lamb products that sell very well considering lamb sales in Canada and America are quite poor. This can be attributed to this product being organic and grass fed and perceived as a much healthier and natural choice.

The Fellow also met with store managers and the HR manager of Choices to speak to them about staff retention and attracting new staff to the chain. Choices have developed several strategies over the years, as follows:

- An employee share plan with bonuses for length of service and management promotions
- An excellent health care plan
- Continuous training with a particular focus on product knowledge
- Regular communication meetings and newsletters
- Staff social functions
- Creating a family environment in stores with the owners of these stores regularly visiting and getting to know all staff members
- Information days for school leavers with hands-on demonstrations with things like sausage making
- Being heavily involved in local communities and charities upon staff suggestions.

Choices also employ their staff strategically, based on community demographics, after they noticed a significant increase in customer numbers in one store after employing two Vietnamese ladies as meat packers in an area with a high Vietnamese population.



Information about suppliers is a common theme throughout Choices Markets Organic meat department at Choices Markets

Visit 12: Walmart

Location: Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

In other supermarkets visited in Canada, such as Walmart, the Fellow was unable to get a formal meeting with management. He did, however, speak to numerous staff and meat managers who were able to give an insight into the business.

Walmart stores are targeted at lower socio-economic areas and do not have the same quality of product as seen in other stores. These two Walmart stores sell many products in bulk and have price and convenience as their major selling point with a lot of ready-to-eat meals in their meat departments.

Although Walmart sells a lot of bulk product it is packaged in a way that still appeals to smaller families, couples and singles. Many of the products sold in bulk such as pork and beef steaks, chicken skewers, and burger patties were vacuum sealed with perforated strips between each one so that these could be torn off and used as required without having to separate and freeze.

Staff retention seems to be poor in these stores with a lot of staff leaving for higher paid jobs with competitors. Staff that the Fellow spoke to in these stores felt that communication was good but felt that pay and conditions were poor compared to competitors. They also felt that the lack of flexibility with rosters was a contributing factor to staff leaving as well a problem when trying to recruit.



Chicken skewers packaged using VSP (Vacuum Skin Packaging), Walmart Pork and beef steaks packaged using VSP, Walmart

Visit 13: Superior Farms

Location: Dixon, California, USA

Superior Farms is a small stock processing plant that was founded in 1963 and predominantly processes lamb. Superior farms has over 150 employees and supplies large chain supermarkets such as Walmart with lamb and veal products and has very advanced packaging and labelling systems with the most popular now being VSP for these chains. VSP sits on a flat backing and gives the product a three dimensional look and feel and is now one of the most popular forms for packaging meat in the USA and Canada.

Up until five years ago Superior Farms had quite a poor retention rate. This was a huge problem for them as Dixon, California, only has a population of 17,000 people. This shortage of staff was rectified by using workers on visas; however, the retention rate has not improved and Superior Farms moved to put strategies into place to improve this.

One of the main strategies was to give staff more ownership of the business and to do this they developed an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) whereby staff are given shares in the company. These shares then become vested after five years. Staff can also retain these shares if they leave the company after the minimum five years of service. This had an immediate impact on staff retention with a majority of employees wanting to get to the minimum five years of service.

Other initiatives include:

- Excellent health care options
- An attendance incentive program where employees receive a bonus for every six months of perfect attendance. This increases every six months with some employees receiving bonuses every six months of 30 cents per hour worked
- Work teams receive share bonuses for meeting production targets
- Bilingual newsletters
- The plant shuts twice a year for an employee lunch where awards are given for safety and productivity
- All new staff members are allocated a mentor.

These strategies have helped to dramatically turn around staff retention rates as well as to create a more harmonious and productive work environment.

Visit 14: Pete's Fresh Market Chain

Location: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Pete's Fresh Market stores are located in very diverse areas and mainly market product based on price, whilst also catering to certain cultures. The store that the Fellow visited was staffed based on the demographic of where the store is located. This store is located in a predominately Hispanic area.

The products sold in the meat department were primarily forequarter cuts from beef and pork, sliced very thinly, as well as 'bone-in' chicken pieces. These were mostly seasoned with dry rubs, as is used widely in Mexico.

The meat manager in this store said that there was a high turnover of staff, with the average time served being around two years. There has been little done to rectify this problem as this is an area of high unemployment and workers are plentiful; however, it is a financial burden to the business in relation to training.



Pete's Fresh Markets, Chicago

Visit 15: Fox & Obel

Location: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Fox & Obel is a very high-end supermarket that specialises in gourmet foods and is located in the central business district (CBD) of Chicago. The meat department carries a range of gourmet meats including Wagyu beef and dry aged sirloin. A dry aged beef display window is a feature of the store and this is the case with most high-end supermarkets in the USA. One of the more popular lines that is sold in the store is dry aged beef burgers at US\$42 per kilogram.

Due to the location of the store it has been very hard to attract staff, as travel time and costs are too expensive when compared with the basic wage of a meat cutter. It has also been difficult to employ experienced meat cutters, with most now working in the large meat wholesale sector as their skills are in demand in this area. The store employs four meat cutters, all of them being paid up to 50% more than the average meat cutter's wage.¹⁴

The main duties for meat cutters at this store are to slice primal and pack and display these in both the window and pre-pack cabinet. The meat cutters also perform certain limited value-adding actions with these products, such as marinating.



Fox & Obel, Chicago

Visit 16: Whole Foods Market

Location: Chicago, Illinois, USA

Whole Foods Market are a large gourmet supermarket chain throughout Northern America that pride themselves on being the world's leader in natural and organic foods. Whole Foods have a large meat department with a large display window, pre-pack cabinet and a large dry aged beef window behind the main counter.

The Fellow interviewed the store manager and meat manager who have both been with Whole Foods for over eight years. The meat department has very good staff retention with the average length of service being six years, with most staff starting with Whole Foods after leaving other supermarkets. The managers believe that this can be attributed to:

- Above award wages
- Good communication
- Excellent reputation in the retail industry
- Flexibility of rosters
- Good healthcare plan
- Continuous training with a particular focus on product knowledge.

The Fellow also interviewed three meat cutters and asked why they chose to work for Whole Foods and what had kept them there for so long. The overwhelming response was the flexibility of hours and the value that Whole Foods places on family and staff wellbeing.

He also found the staff to have excellent product knowledge and customer service skills. Staff were able to provide expert advice on meal decisions, cooking times and techniques, recipe ideas, origin of product and nutritional advice. There are limited butchering skills required in this store as most products are ordered in ready to go on the shelf.

Visit 17: Wegmans

Location: Chicago, Buffalo and New York, USA

Wegmans is another high-end supermarket that has been operating in Northern America since 1916 with a very similar layout to Whole Foods, but with an even greater focus on product quality. There is a large range of ready-to-eat products in very convenient packaging, all made with very high quality ingredients.

As with other high-end supermarkets in the US, Wegmans has a large dry aged display as well as a display of Wagyu sirloin and cube roll. Staff have an excellent knowledge of their products and are able to give information on types of breeds, how the animal is cared for, what it is fed, place of origin, nutritional value and a wide array of recipe ideas.

Wegmans also sells an irradiated beef mince, which is packaged in chubs and has a 23-day shelf life until it is removed from the chub, when it then has a three-day shelf life. The benefits of this product are not only the extended shelf life but also that this product is able to be consumed in a cooked state that ranges from rare to well done. The irradiation process kills any bacteria found in minced beef and this is done by passing it through an electrical energy field without changing its form or altering the nutritional value of the product. Wegmans also has information for consumers explaining this process.

Wegmans has an excellent retention rate, which it has been able to maintain even when unemployment rates were at their lowest.

The International Experience

After interviewing several staff and managers, the Fellow found that the main reasons for this were the importance that Wegmans places on their staff and the efforts the company goes to in order to recognise the value of its employees, such as:

- Monthly reward and recognition programs
- Competitive salary
- Clearly defined career paths
- Family days
- Investing in training, in particular product knowledge
- Flexible rosters
- Communication, including newsletters for all staff.

Visit 18: National Restaurant Association (NRA) Show 2011

Location: Chicago, Illinois, USA

The NRA Show is an annual event targeted at the food service industry with a wide range of suppliers displaying the latest machinery and products on offer. There was a particular focus on natural and organic products this year with consumers becoming a lot more aware of nutrition, organics and sustainability.

In relation to meat products, there were many suppliers from the wholesale sector displaying a wide variety of beef, lamb, chicken and pork products as well as an array of smallgoods. Australian products were well represented with MLA and Swift both displaying lamb products, a market they are trying to grow in the USA.

There were also two suppliers promoting biodegradable meat trays, which are being targeted at retailers selling natural and organic products. These trays are made from either corn starch or sugar cane and are able to keep their structure when exposed to moisture from meat, which is a weakness of the potato packs currently being used in the Whole Foods stores. There were also biodegradable trays and cutlery made from corn starch that were being promoted to the fast food industry and manufacturers of ready-to-eat products.

Visit 19: Hunts Point

Location: New York, USA

Hunts Point market is situated in the Bronx in New York and has 60 wholesalers selling meat products to the food service and retail industries. These wholesalers employ over 250 meat cutters that are skilled in boning, slicing and value-adding. Some deal with carcass product such as lamb, pork, veal and argentine of beef and all meat cutters are well trained in portion control.

The Fellow visited several wholesalers at Hunts Point one of which was David Mosner Inc. who specialise in lamb and veal and supply a wide range of restaurants in New York as well as Whole Foods. The meat cutters at this wholesaler all have very good knife skills and have come from either the abattoir or retail sectors. The majority of staff that are employed here were originally from the retail sector. Their skills then became more relevant to the wholesale sector, due to retailers purchasing pre-prepared product.

Hunts Point market is in a very low socio-economic area with unemployment at about 15%¹⁵ so there is no shortage of workers for this sector.

The International Experience

Inexperienced staff are trained on site and are given only a day or two to prove their potential before investing in employing them or training them further. There is no recognised training for this sector in Northern America with all training being conducted on site with skill sets being very specialised for each wholesaler.

Visit 20: Lobel's of New York

Location: New York, USA

Lobel's of New York is a very up-market butcher shop in Manhattan and supplies top quality meat products throughout Northern America. It has eight meat cutters working in this store with their main duties being slicing, portion control and packaging. Lobes is one of the few remaining stand alone butcher shops left in America and has survived mainly due to the quality of the product they deal with and their ordering and distribution facilities.

Lobel's has an excellent website with a very advanced online ordering system. Once products are ordered they are then sent by courier to anywhere in Northern America. This can be done without the need for a refrigerated vehicle as the product is packaged in a dry ice pack that keeps the product between zero and five degrees Celsius, thus avoiding the need to freeze.

Meat cutters at this store are paid well above award wages and this cost is recuperated from the very expensive price of meat that is sold through the store. Lobel's also sell literature on meat products and cookbooks that have been written by the owners of the business.



Lobel's of New York

Visit 21: Citarella

Location: New York, USA

Citarella is a high quality supermarket situated in Manhattan that specialises in fresh foods. The meat department sells a wide variety of high quality meat products and employs five meat cutters. There are some products that are boned and tied in this store, such as legs of pork and lamb; however, there is only one meat cutter that is able to do this. This store, like many others throughout the US, has a dry aged beef window as its main display with these dry aged steaks being one of the more popular products sold.

Meat cutters employed in this store were again paid above award wages to attract and retain them in this area of Manhattan. There have been problems with staff retention mainly due to the location of the store and the distance people have to travel to work here.

Knowledge Transfer: Applying the Outcomes

Since returning from this research trip the Fellow has had a number of opportunities to act on his findings in relation to transferring this knowledge:

National Meat Industry Training Advisory Council Limited (MINTRAC) Retail Conference

Date: 17th of November 2010

The Fellow was first asked to present at the MINTRAC retail conference in Pennant Hills Sydney and delivered a presentation of his findings to around 80 delegates from the meat retail industry. This presentation led to some lengthy discussions around training in the meat retail industry and shifting trends that are starting to emerge within this sector. There was a consensus that meat retail training needed to have a stronger focus on product knowledge and culinary skills to meet consumer demands.

This presentation also prompted discussions around attracting and retaining apprentices in the meat retail industry and strategies that can be implemented within the meat retail sector. This discussion mainly focused on how to sell the meat retail industry as part of the food service sector and to give potential employees a clear guide as to the pathways that the meat industry can provide. There was also a common belief that it was very important to look at how we retain staff once they have completed their qualifications, as a significant number of apprentices tend to try other industries upon completing their qualifications.

Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC)

A common theme throughout the Fellow's study tour in relation to staff retention was the need for adequate mentoring throughout the staff member's employment within the meat processing and retail industries. This focus on mentoring of staff has proved very effective in these demanding and low paid industries throughout Canada and America.

Upon returning to Australia, the Fellow met with the chairman and members of the AMIC Board in Victoria to discuss the merits of a mentoring program for apprentices that were close to completing their apprenticeship. These apprentices would be identified as potential managers and store owners in the future, but may otherwise be at risk of leaving the industry without sufficient support from mentors across the broader meat retail and processing industries.

This was given full support by AMIC it was decided that as part of the program tours would be conducted for apprentices in the industry to visit meat and retail establishments. The first tour was conducted at the start of August 2011 with great success. There were six apprentices chosen for this first tour and they were taken to seven different meat processing and retail establishments. This not only gave them an insight into different aspects of the industry but also put them in contact with leaders in the meat industry, all of whom have agreed to mentor these apprentices throughout their careers.

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) – Australia

Since returning the Fellow has worked closely with MLA both in Australia and Washington. It was very apparent after his tour that retail butchers in Australia were a long way behind when it comes to product knowledge and culinary skills.

The Fellow has worked with MLA Victoria to develop a culinary workshop for retail butchers that is aimed at training them in a range of cooking techniques as well as cut-to-cook methods for a range of retail cuts. In the past training for retail butchers has been aimed at value-adding product to help improve profit margins and offer convenient meal ideas. This concept of culinary skills is now helping retail butchers be able to offer better advice to customers on a range of cooking techniques.

Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) – Washington

Whilst attending the NRA Show 2011 in Chicago the Fellow met with Stephen Edwards the manager of MLA Northern America. From these discussions he was asked his opinion of the standard of lamb products that were on display in the retail outlets visited and if he could also provide feedback on stores yet to be visited.

The Fellow informed Stephen Edwards that although the product was of good quality it was not processed and displayed very well and none of this product had value-adding applied to it. Stephen agreed with this and asked if the Fellow would work with him to develop a value-added lamb cutting and cooking guide for the Northern American market.

This project began in October 2010 and is nearing completion with the soon to be released From Cuts to Cuisine: a Professional's Guide to Australian Lamb.¹⁶ This is a step-by-step manual of how to value-add and cook with Australian Lamb.

Victorian Food Industry Training Board (VFITB)

The Fellow has been involved in several meetings with Linda Baron from the VFITB to discuss attraction and retention strategies in the food industry and was invited to a meeting to discuss the labour market and training issues in the baking industry. He was able to relate his findings to members of the retail baking industry who are having very similar issues to the meat industry in relation to attraction and retention.

Recommendations

Training

The Fellow now believes that there will be a significant skills shift from the retail sector back to the processing and wholesale sectors. Units that are currently included in Meat Processing (Retailing) in the Australian Meat Industry Training Package will also become more relevant for the wholesale and processing sectors. He also believes there will be a greater demand for Certificate II and III in Meat Processing (Food Services) with the below units incorporated:

- MTMR102B Trim meat for further processing
- MTMR104B Prepare mince and minced meat products
- MTMPR201B Prepare and operate bandsaw
- MTMR201B Break and cut product using a bandsaw
- MTMR210A Make and sell sausages
- MTMR211A Produce and sell value-added product
- MTMSR201B Prepare and slice meat cuts
- MTMSR202B Trim meat to specifications
- MTMR308B Prepare and produce value-added products
- MTMR317A Cure, corn and sell products
- MTMR310B Bone and fillet poultry
- MTMR312B Prepare portion control to specifications
- MTMR313B Bone game meat
- MTMR316A Utilise Meat Standards Australia system for beef to meet customer requirements
- MTMSR302B Prepare primal cuts
- MTMR319A Break carcass for retail sale
- MTMS38C Smoke product

The Fellow believes that the demand for this training will be predominately in the meat wholesale sector and that this sector will become larger to cope with the demands of both food service establishments and supermarkets.

The Fellow also believes that there will be a greater demand for training in the retail sector in relation to product knowledge and cooking. These units are currently in the training package; however, there needs to be a more of a focus on these units from RTOs to ensure that apprentices are trained adequately by experts in these fields.

There will also need to be a unit that includes organic meats as this is a growing trend that consumers require accurate information about. This information will need to cover organic meat from paddock to plate.

Packaging is another aspect of meat retail that is ever changing. Students need to be well informed of trends and innovations in relation to pre-packaged meat with a larger number of retailers choosing to sell product in this manner. Students will need to better understand the process of new packaging such as Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP) and VSP so as to better inform customers and dispel some common misconceptions around these forms of packaging.

Recommendations

Attraction and Retention of Staff

International Staff

Where international staff are being employed in skills shortage areas particularly in meat processing plants it is imperative that these staff are helped to assimilate to ensure the longevity of employment. If staff are helped to assimilate into the community and mentored throughout their employment there will be significant benefits in relation to retention, staff wellbeing, efficiency and attraction of staff through referrals from existing staff.

If there is a need for immigrant labour in the future for the meat industry it is also imperative that businesses understand how to access immigration services and work with these agencies to ensure that this is sustainable.

Apprentices/Trainees

Apprentices and trainees in the meat retail industry have a tendency to look for other career paths upon completing their qualification. This can be for a wide range of reasons including financial reasons, job satisfaction, hours of work, impact on social activities and the belief that there are limited career pathways.

RTOs are in a unique position to be able to offer apprentices and trainees the opportunity to be mentored throughout their career by providing them with the opportunity to meet with leaders in both the meat retail, wholesale and processing sectors outside of their current employment situation. These industry leaders must also be willing to be available for these students throughout their career to offer advice and support in order to ensure the industry retains these future leaders.

Appropriate candidates also need to be selected for this program to ensure the integrity and sustainability of the program. William Angliss Institute are looking to give between 12 and 18 students a year the opportunity to attend this mentoring tour and will closely monitor the results of retention rates for these students.

Existing Retail Staff

There is a need to train existing retail staff so they are able to adapt to the ever-changing retail environment. MLA, Australian Pork Limited (APL), AMIC and other meat industry bodies are currently doing this, however, we need to look at ways of reaching a wider audience so as to up-skill a larger proportion of workers in the meat industry.

One way in which this could be done is by RTOs developing workshops in conjunction with some of these peak bodies with the aim of delivering these in both rural and metro areas that they are currently training in. These workshops should have a particular focus on cooking techniques, nutrition and product knowledge.

Biodegradable Meat Trays

With consumers becoming much more environmentally savvy there is a need to focus on meat trays that are biodegradable. There are many products on offer at the moment with the main two being made from corn starch and sugar cane; however, these products are used mainly for the food service industry for products such as plates and cups.

The meat industry needs to look at long-term solutions in relation to biodegradable packaging and needs to look at sustainable and cost effective ways to use by-products from products such as sugar cane that is readily available in Australia.

This biodegradable packaging is also necessary with the increase in demand for organic meat. Consumers that purchase organic meats in America and Canada are also very environmentally conscious and have in the past resisted purchasing these products if they have been packaged on polystyrene meat trays.

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