

STANDPOINT by Peter Hendry

After 90 years of growth, the future looks bright



The market gardeners who founded MG Marketing in Wellington in 1923 would be hard pressed to recognise the scale and diversity of the Co-operative's fresh produce business of today.

From a modest start in an auction shed, our enterprise has grown and changed vastly to encompass a national branch network, export and import lines, packhouses, retail support services, an Australian operation and new produce categories.

In our 90th year of operation it is timely to reflect on how MG has evolved into an organisation of over 600 staff committed to the success of grower-suppliers and the needs of domestic and international customers.

The keys to this productive expansion have relied on grower loyalty and support within our co-operative structure, coupled with the skills of MG staff and management, all working in a consistent direction towards shared objectives.

To achieve our current standing MG has continually adapted its operations to meet changing market demands and create new sales opportunities. In this respect our past is very much a pointer to the future and how we can further secure our business prospects in the decades ahead.

Certainly there will be more changes at every level of our business. In particular, these will impact on all facets of the produce supply chain, from growers through to retailers and ultimately the buying public. It is worth looking at each of these in turn. For growers, it will be imperative to interact with markets more closely through information sharing. Crop forecasting, ordering and transaction systems will need to be highly dependable and accurate in order to deliver the best results. The ability to maintain and enhance produce quality, continuity and price competitiveness will also rely greatly on pooling our awareness and understanding of market trends.

The same principle will apply to existing and prospective customers across our marketplaces. We will have to develop closer working relationships with retailers as they adapt to meet consumers' needs. New direct or indirect selling methods will evolve, each requiring appropriate levels of support from MG as the distributor.

Developing new products will inevitably be an important part of this process.

Consumers' needs and preferences will also change over time, as they invariably do. We will need to be constantly alert to emerging buyer patterns and to respond correctly with new products, extended seasonality, innovative packaging concepts and a focus on consistently high quality and taste.

Overall it will be our innovation, flexibility, service and efficiency that will drive our organisation to future success. As a Co-operative enterprise, we are in a strong position to keep growing together and to meet the changes ahead.

In this issue of SupplyLine we feature two enterprising growing initiatives as well as a profile on our Hamilton branch. I hope you enjoy reading this edition and gain some valuable insights to assist you in your own decisions in the future.

BRANCH PROFILE

Experience underpins Hamilton team's success

Not many produce distribution centres can claim the depth of staff experience at MG Marketing's Hamilton branch, where loyalty and co-operation are the hallmarks of its trading success.

Since MG moved into the fully cool-chained centre a decade ago, business volumes have grown significantly under predominantly the same team of sales, stores and administration personnel. Most staff at the Puketapu Industrial Estate premises can measure their experience in the produce sector not just in multiples of years, but in decades.

Hamilton's branch manager Brian Dale is no exception, having started out at the age of 17 as an auctioneer back in the 1960's. When MG acquired Central

Produce Distributors from Brian in 2001 he agreed to continue as the manager under new ownership.

Keeping things in the family, his wife Marilyn also opted to continue as the branch administration manager.

"As a team we have a great sense of pride in our track record and a close understanding of our respective roles on behalf of growers and customers," Brian says.

"Many of our sales people such as George Homik with over 40 years in the industry, Roger O'Sullivan with 30 years (the assistant

manager), David Spedding with 27 years and Grant Caddigan with 20 years have been with us for the long haul.

"Our warehouse supervisor Sean O'Neill has also been part of the team for 20 years, so there is a real depth of experience across all our operations."

Brian says they have seen and adapted to major progressive changes in the industry from a largely retail chain-driven model to a total customer-responsive marketplace.

"As a full-service branch responsible for covering a highly productive catchment area, the team relies heavily on its hard-won knowledge of the region.

"We look after a substantial geographic area, from the Bombay Hills to the north across to the Coromandel and Bay of Plenty, right down to Taupo and across to Raglan in the west," he says.

"Such a large region encompasses a very diverse growing environment and includes many different sub-tropical, stone and pip fruit, root crops, greens and speciality lines."

The variety and quantities of vegetables and fruit sourced make MG's Hamilton operation

the largest fresh produce wholesale distributor in the go-ahead Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions.

Currently with a total of 17 staff, it has kept pace with regional population and urban growth by more than quadrupling its volume of produce traded over the past decade or so.

Brian says the branch has developed an expansive network of over a hundred customers, many of them small to medium-sized independent outlets, as well as larger retail chains.

"We have built good trading relationships over the years which stand us in good stead and underpins our business growth," Brian says.

"One of our motivating factors of late has been the performance of the Chiefs in the Super 15 competition, and we take great pride in supporting them. That extends to inviting many of our clients to Chiefs' home games, where we really do enjoy the fruits of successful teamwork!"



1. Blair Fisher 2. Standing: Grant Caddigan, David Spedding, Warrick Gibson Seated: Roger O'Sullivan 3. Tom Blakeborough 4. Maria Henry, Marilyn Dale 5. Back Row: David Spedding, Blair Fisher. Middle Row: Warrick Gibson, Dane McCollum, Roger O'Sullivan, Tom Blakeborough. Front Row: Maria Henry, Marilyn Dale, Grant Caddigan, Sean O'Neill, Brendan O'Neill. Front: Brian Dale.