

## Business profile

## Sam the Butcher

**DOMINIC O'BRIEN** visits a growing retail business that combines Greek heritage with organic goodness. Sam the Butcher has overcome inconsistency of supply, won media attention and has high hopes for the future.

Sam Diasinos has it in his genes to be a butcher. With his father, grandfather, great grandfather, and uncle in the same profession, it was a fair chance that he would go in the same direction. Well, almost the same direction. Sam became concerned about the effects of conventional meat production after a family member was diagnosed with a hormone imbalance and warned off chicken because of it. Sam decided organic was the way to go. Sydney was short on certified organic butchers, and in 1999 Sam opened the first Sam the Butcher shop in San Souci in Sydney's south. It was a brave step to take but it's an encouraging success story – Sam now owns four stores in Sydney. After the San Souci store came Bondi in 2001, Beecroft in 2002 and Naremburn in 2004 – and there are plans for more in the future.

One of the first things you notice when you walk into the stores is the quality of the meat. Rich, healthy colour, fresh cuts – it looks impressive. This is coupled with an impressive range of products from spatchcock to duck to gourmet sausages to prime beef and lamb. I have also found the staff to be helpful and happy to answer my probing questions about the growers or organic livestock production (I have shopped anonymously in the past).

Sam the Butcher also sells online through the website < [www.samthebutcher.com.au](http://www.samthebutcher.com.au) >. Orders are taken online and delivered within 24 hours (Tuesday to Saturday) in and around the Sydney metropolitan area. No pre-packaged or pre-cut meats are used – every delivery is cut fresh to order.

In the early days, internet orders accounted for a greater percentage of sales than they do now but they are still important, with about 5% of sales coming from the website.

**VALUE ADDING**

Being a butcher from a strong Greek background – Sam's father and grandfather were born in the Greek Islands – Sam and his team put a lot into their value added products. Often using family recipes, they specialise in making their own sausages, curing their own bacon and turning out chicken liver paté, smoked trout, umbrian (stewed) lamb shanks, Mediterranean

**SAM THE BUTCHER**

Shops	San Souci, Bondi, Beecroft, Naremburn
Web	<a href="http://www.samthebutcher.com.au">www.samthebutcher.com.au</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:sam@samthebutcher.com.au">sam@samthebutcher.com.au</a>
Phone	(02) 9583 1144



sheftalia (wrapped meatballs with onion, garlic, and lemon zest) and pies.

From personal experience I can tell you they are impressive. The organic beef chateau sausages (shiraz, cracked black pepper and chives) are fantastic and the bacon (nitrate and nitrite free) is possibly the best I have tasted. They also sell a range of grocery items such as pasta, sauces, flour, oils, and even licorice.

Sam has also begun supplying a number of restaurants in Sydney. The restaurant trade generally has been slow to tap into the organic market due to cost and inconsistency of supply. But this should change with the quality and consistency of suppliers such as Sam. His commitment is to provide the best quality meat available at competitive prices.

## PROMOTION

Sam engages in several different types of promotion and marketing. They have a loyalty card program (50% off the tenth purchase), are part of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Good Food Month, are in the organics directory, advertise in papers, and promoted the business at the organic markets in Sydney for a while.

Significant interest from the media has also helped. The web site displays a number of articles that have appeared in print media, and the business has been featured in a number of television programs such as *Body and Soul*, *The Small Business Show*, *Destinations* and the *Lifestyle Channel*.

## SUPPLY

Sam sources his wide range of products from about 10 regular growers in New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland. Most products have reliable supply but he does experience shortages with pork, chicken, veal and duck. He has recently begun sourcing turkeys from Sunforest Farms (see product review in this issue) and would be interested to hear from other growers who might be able to fill in the gaps in his supply.

Supply has been affected by the ongoing drought (many of Sam's suppliers are in drought-affected regions) and can be affected by a variety of adverse weather, including the deluge that came down at the time I was writing this (end of June).

## CERTIFICATION

Sam the Butcher is a retail processor certified business, certified by ACO. Sam says certification offers the consumer integrity and traceability. He believes it is beneficial to his business because his staff have a strong answer to the eternal consumer question: 'How do I know it's organic?'

## PRICE

Although consumer awareness about the benefits of organic farming is growing, many still find it hard to justify the higher

price often associated with organics. Sam says price does contribute to keeping sales down.

"Price is still a major issue and I think it will always be my biggest obstacle to overcome," he says.

Sam expects prices to be affected in the month following our conversation because a number of growers have recently had to put stock down waiting for the rain. In one of nature's ironies the rain came shortly afterwards.

Part of the appeal of the organic industry is the return to quality and tradition. Sam the Butcher has captured both of these elements in his business and his continuing success suggests his customers feel the same. It is always good to see people act on their commitment to organic systems – and even better to see success follow. ■