

The Advertiser

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HD Dog day afternoon on a real SA meat 'n' greet
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SOUTH Australia's largest food exporter, Thomas Foods International, has increased its ability to supply fast growing international meat markets by building a new livestock handling lairage at the **company's** Murray Bridge plant.

Chief operating officer David McKay said that with exports exceeding \$900 **million** a year to more than 80 markets, the **company** needs to be able to use an increased throughput more efficiently.

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It is handling more than 120,000 sheep and lambs and 5000 cattle a week and planning to boost those numbers in coming years, he said.

"The worldwide demand for protein is at its highest level and we are confident in the future of meat exports," Mr McKay said. "We are contemplating a further upgrade of the Murray Bridge plant.

"The new lairage provides numerous benefits including greater plant efficiency, it sets the benchmark for animal welfare and is compliant with all regulations by helping to reduce dust, noise and odour from our facility. In traditional lairages, the livestock are unloaded on to a concrete floor, but this is raised and the animals walk on mesh, reducing water and increasing animal hygiene." The new facility has three unloading docks, providing for faster unloading – and animals can be quickly transferred into raised pens, which are out of the elements.

Mr McKay said the new multi-**million** dollar livestock handling facility is part of TFI's strategic plan to continue expanding the business.

"We're processing about 55,000 sheep and lambs and 5000 cattle a week at Murray Bridge each week and more sheep at Lobethal and Tamworth and Wallangara, (near Tenterfield in far northern) NSW," he said. The business has grown from a \$100 **million** turnover in 1999, when the Rowe and Thomas families bought it, to a total of \$1.3 **billion** in 2013-14 following the Rowe family's **sale** of its 50 per cent share in 2008.

Mr McKay said the **company** employed about 2500 people in Australia and internationally – 1400 of those at Murray Bridge. Ensuring adequate supply of stock was one of its biggest challenges and business was looking at every available option to provide livestock including feedlotting and buying stock in all markets and direct from farmers, he said.

"We're keeping a close eye on the weather because a good northern season would put short-term pressure on prices, but longer term create more opportunities and good prices," he said. "We've got a dedicated team of buyers spread across Australia helping to keep our plants at full capacity." Mr McKay said the **company** had just opened a new cold store near Philadelphia to give it more control over its supply of food to its markets in the United States.

"We send frozen and chilled beef and lamb to the US east coast and the cold store will help us service that market," Mr McKay said. "The **Chinese** market has also grown significantly and is taking a greater share of our lamb and beef products." He added that the lairage was part of a major environmental

improvement strategy at Murray Bridge. Other improvements have included development of a major wastewater storage treatment facility and implementation of a sustainable **energy** program to substantially reduce CO2 emissions.

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