

Weeknight Cook
EASY, QUICK, DELICIOUS!



Final report

Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu.

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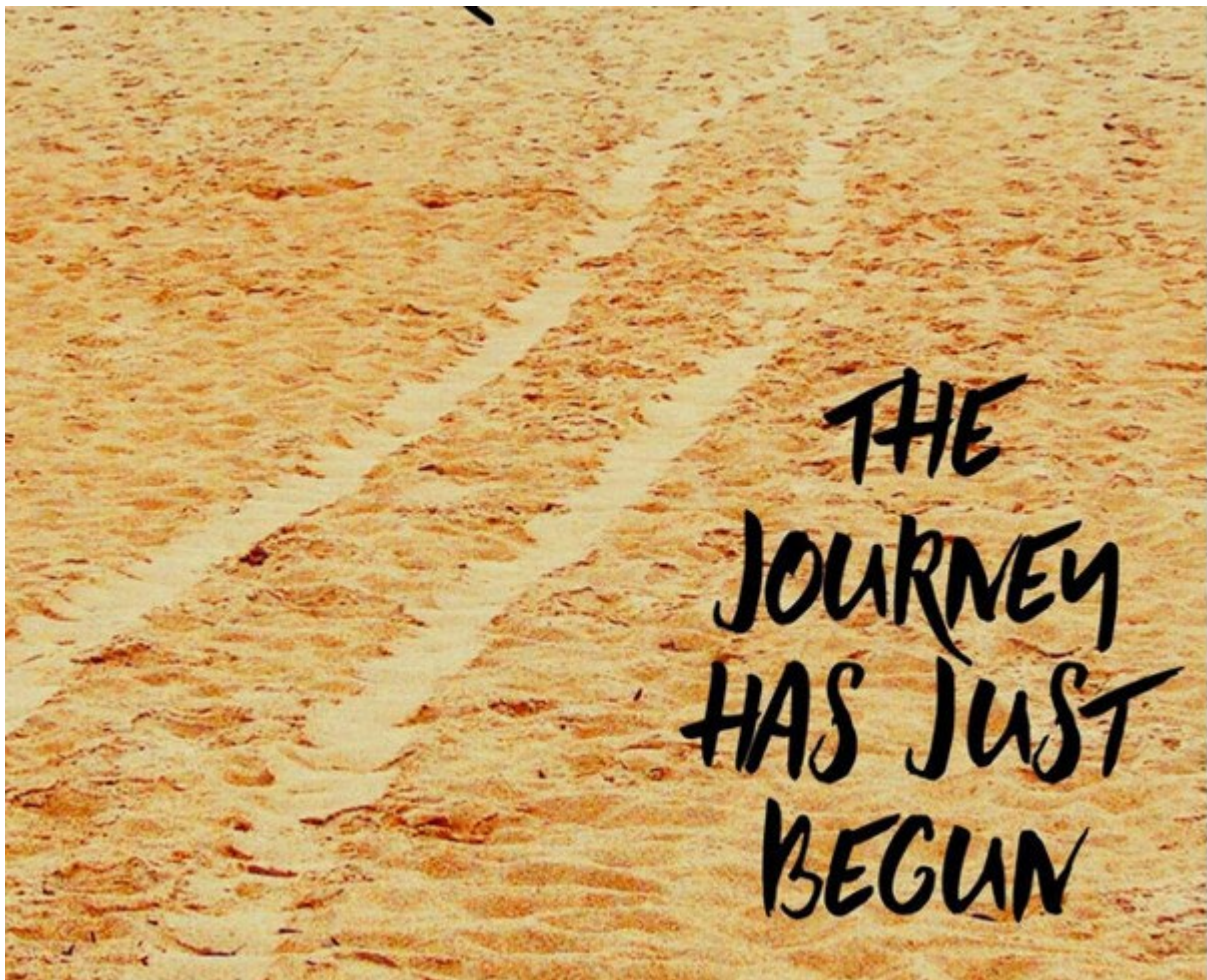
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Abstract

Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu sought to help future proof red meat by regaining market share (from chicken) in the mid-week dinner occasion by developing a range of beef and lamb products that were “Easy, Everyday”, and offered variety and confidence to cook.

Adopting a Design led thinking and lean methodology, a range of six (6) lamb and beef meal kits were tested in an in-store trial across Queensland. While learnings from this trial have been invaluable, the most significant outcomes have in fact been the opportunities for future projects, working directly with a major Australian retailer, to develop a number of different ranges of lamb and beef products that are scheduled to launch nationally in 2024.

Aligning directly with MLA’s Strategic Plan for 2025 and MLA’s 2024 Brand Campaign, through future project opportunities, including around *Premium Frozen Protein* and *Meal Kit solutions*, Weeknight Cook has the potential to help meet consumers unmet needs, challenging chicken’s dominance in the convenience space. Moreover, using non-primal cuts will help to reverse the current state of play, where 20% of the carcass delivers 80% of the value; capturing value for the entire Australian red meat industry.



Executive summary

Background

Weeknight Cook has evolved from producer roots, benefiting from the support of MLA and the MLA Donor Company over the course of the past 6-years. Armed initially with a goal to improve carcass utilisation the vision for Weeknight Cook has morphed more so into a passion to encourage more consumers to enjoy Australian red meat, more often.

Objectives

Weeknight Cook successfully developed a concept range of ready to 'quick cook', minimally processed, retail-ready family meals with beef or lamb as the core ingredient. To achieve this a number of processes have needed to be achieved including:

- Establishing supply, manufacturing and retail partners.
- Developing IP around packaging, processing and recipe development.
- Ascertaining quality parameters
- Validate consumer desirability within an instore environment
- Ascertain the benefits for the Australian red meat industry

Methodology

The core methodology that has driven the development and strategy of Weeknight Cook has been Design Thinking; taking a customer centric approach to solve problems and deliver solutions that meet their needs and pain points. This has been overlaid with a number of other business strategy tools, including Lean methodology principles.

Results/key findings

Key findings of this project are that "consumer is key" and for red meat to continue to retain, or better still improve its market share in the retail space, we must address the consumer's demand for "Easy Everyday" meal solutions that offer variety. Further, the importance of position and price is fundamental if we are to successfully compete with other proteins, in particular, chicken.

Benefits to industry

Learnings from this project offer invaluable insights to guide further product development and market penetration. However, it has been the opportunities that have arisen from the project, including the opportunity to work with retailers on product development over the next 12-months, that is expected to deliver the greatest value to the Australian red meat industry.

Future research and recommendations

With a plethora of data to highlight the unmet needs of our consumers and hence where the opportunities lie for the Australian red meat industry, future research and development should focus on *how* we provide customers with quality beef and lamb products that compete with chicken, particularly in the fast growing categories of frozen and the lunch time meal occasion.

Table of contents

Executive summary	3
1. Background.....	6
1.1 Why? The need is out there!.....	6
1.1.1 Our (red meat) challenges and problems.....	6
1.1.2 Why are people choosing other proteins (i.e. chicken) for mid-week meals?.....	8
1.2 What? The opportunity!.....	11
1.3 Who? Our targeted consumer.....	12
1.4 Where? Position is key!.....	13
1.5 How? Executing to drive take-off!.....	13
1.5.1 How do we market to encourage trial and repeat purchase with customers?.....	14
1.5.2 How will results of this project be used to benefit the Australian Red Meat Industry?.....	14
2. Objectives	155
3. Methodology.....	16
4. Results.....	18
4.1 Establish supply/ project partners: research, packaging, raw materials, processing, assembly, logistics and retailers.....	18
4.1.1 Retailers.....	18
4.1.1.1 Frozen Protein Project.....	20
4.1.1.2 Meal Kit Project.....	20
4.1.2 Supply partners- Raw materials, processing and assembly.....	21
4.1.2.1 Manufacturing.....	21
4.1.2.2 Raw Materials.....	22
4.1.2.3 Logistics: How this fits with different channels to market.....	22
4.2 Developing pilot processing and packaging requirements as part of the 'food design' to produce a ready to 'quick cook', retail ready beef and lamb range of products.....	23
4.2.1 Processing requirements.....	23
4.2.1.1 Research and development (R & D) and Intellectual Property (IP).....	23
4.2.1.2 Quality Assurance Programs.....	23
4.2.2 Packaging requirements.....	24
4.2.2.1 Sustainability.....	24

4.2.2.2 Pack size.....	24
4.3 Ascertain quality and food safety parameters including shelf life & Nutritional information (for panels).....	25
4.3.1 Shelf life.....	25
4.3.2 Nutritional Information Panels (NIPs).....	26
4.4 Validate consumer desirability-feasibility and viability.....	26
4.4.1 Shopper 360 (November 2021).....	26
4.5 Complete in market validation of the product, process and packaging solution in an in-store environment.....	28
4.6 Complete Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) and value creation including for the Australian Red Meat Industry.....	28
5. Conclusion.....	28
5.1 Key findings	28
5.2 Benefits to industry	29
6. Future research and recommendations	30
6.1 Premium frozen protein: How do we gain and retain customers in this space by ensuring we are controlling quality parameters?.....	30
6.2 Lunch Occasion: How do we make red meat more accessible and appealing, particularly for medium to high income SINKs and DINKs?.....	31
7. References	33
8. Appendix.....	35

1. Background

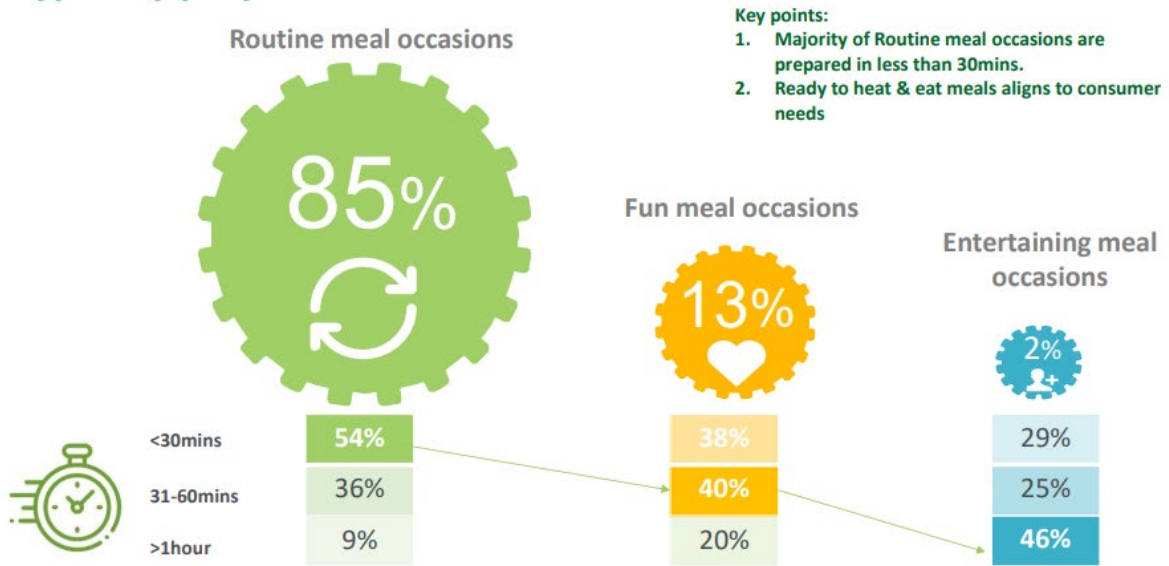
1.1 Why?: The need is out there!

Weeknight Cook has evolved from producer roots, morphing from a family beef operation’s goal to improve business sustainability through improved carcass utilisation. Recognising that 20 % of the carcass delivers 80 % of its value (MLA Strategic Plan 2025) through the support of MLA programs including Young Food Innovators (2017) and the Producer Fast Track program (2018/2019) we sought to establish *why (why not), when, what and how* people were consuming beef.

1.1.1 Our (red meat) challenges and problems

The Australian red meat industry has for some time recognised the importance of ‘Easy, Everyday’ meal solutions, acknowledging how other proteins, namely chicken continue to dominate this space.

2. OCCASIONS: Midweek meal occasions dominate share of meals, typically prepared in <30 mins.

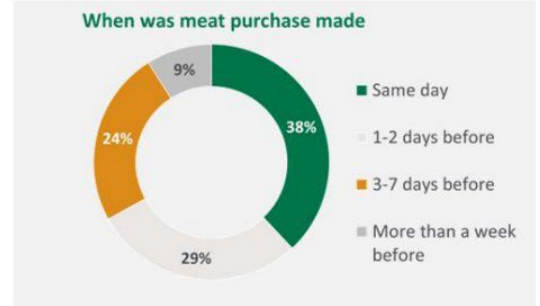
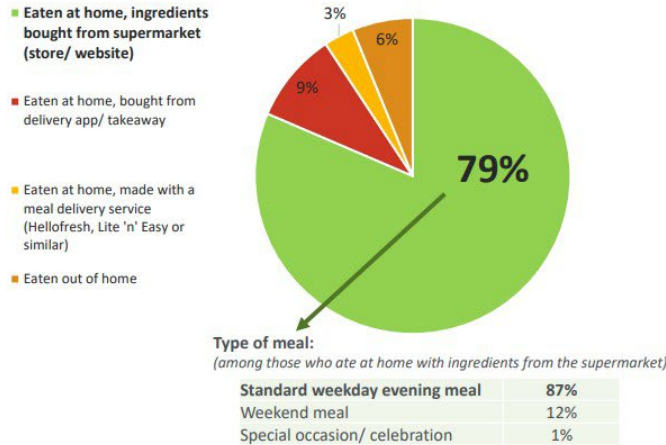


Source: *Shopper Insights: Leading Influences in Consumer Behaviour*

Recent data within MLA’s most recent Brand Campaign FY24 reported that 79% of respondent when describing what they had for dinner yesterday reported ‘eating at home with ingredients from the supermarket’, where further broken down 87% of these meals reported as *standard weekday evening meals*.

MWM occasion remains the biggest meal opp for Beef to win - Must be quick and easy

Which of the following best describes your dinner yesterday:



This meal **isn't** overly planned so a big opportunity to influence right up to the day of purchase

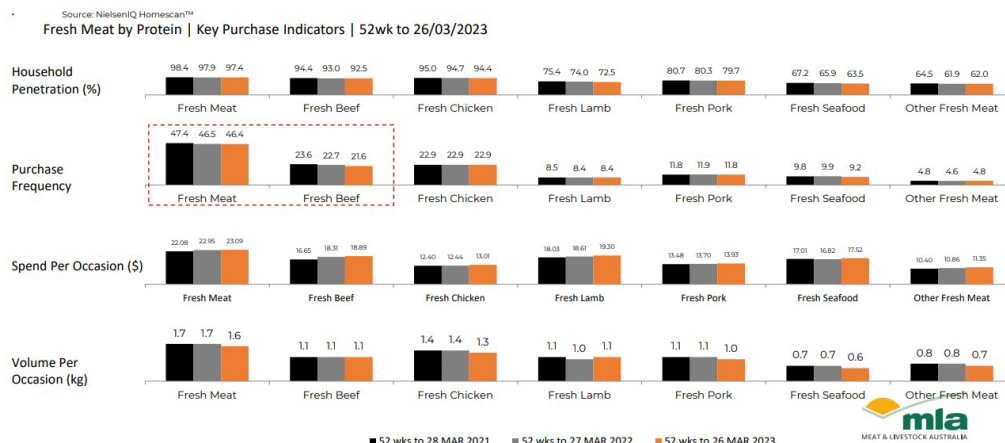


Source: MLA Brand Campaign Report 2024

Further, as shown on the above graph to the left there is a significant opportunity to influence the consumer right up to the day of purchase, where 38% of meat purchases are made on the same day of preparing/ eating.

Even more opportunity exists for red meat where industry research and data has revealed that 96% of Australian shoppers consider purchasing beef and 84% lamb [Source: Nielsen HomeScan MAT to 03/12/2019; MLA Domestic Consumer Tracker 2018]. However, despite this recent Nielsen IQ HomeScan data from March 2021 to March 2023 (as reported in the latest MLA Brand Campaign report) [Appendix 1] shows that fresh beef has dropped from a purchase frequency of 23.6 to 21.6, (lamb 8.5 to 8.4), while fresh chicken on the other hand has maintained a purchase frequency of 22.9 over this same period of time.

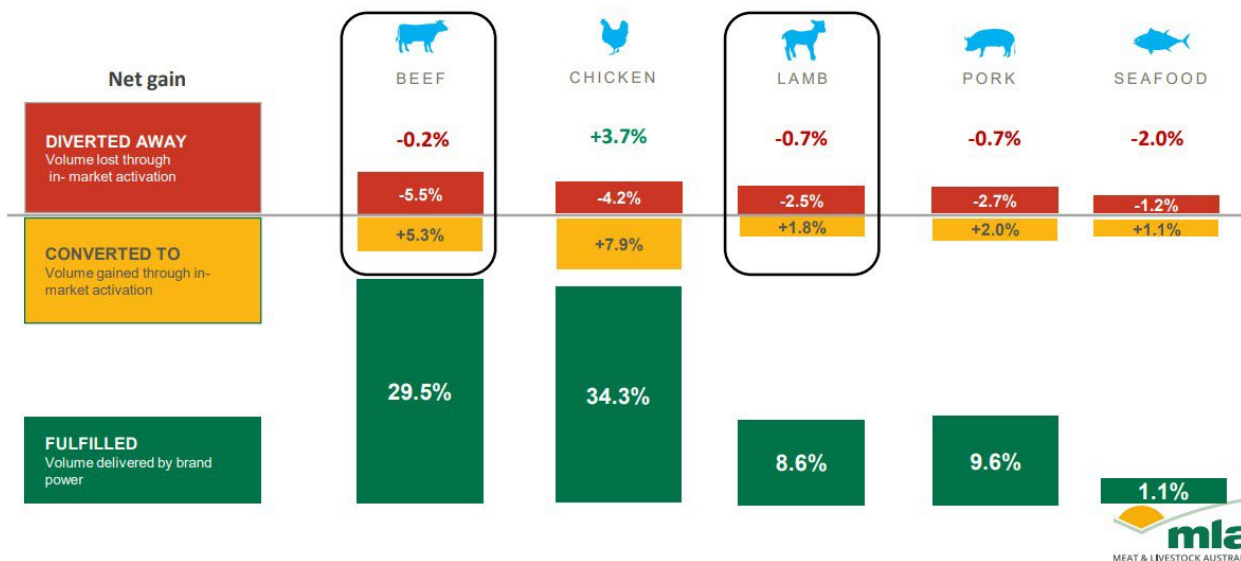
Frequency drop is the big loss driver for Beef – We need to get that extra meal back



Source: MLA Brand Campaign Report 2024

This clearly shows that we as red meat producers are losing Australian shoppers at the supermarket shelves, namely to chicken, with MLA Domestic Consumer Tracker- Brand Equity module June-August 2019 reporting that this loss is in the vicinity of negative -0.2% for beef and -0.7% for lamb with chicken benefiting with 3.7% gain at the supermarket shelf.

However, they are losing predisposed shoppers to chicken on the path to purchase



Source: MLA Domestic Consumer Tracker – Brand Equity module June-August 2019.

1.1.2 Why are people choosing other proteins (ie chicken) for mid-week meals?

As a lead up to this project the author conducted a vast number of consumer interviews exploring why (or not) people were eating beef and lamb, particularly outside of mince and steak.

Focusing on a customer segment of:

- Parents of young families
- Working professionals who like to cook

A number of trends in consumer pain points were identified including:

- *The 3'o'clock "what's for dinner" dilemma*; further they described a lack of inspiration for quick, healthy and tasty meals, particularly around beef compared to chicken.
- *Time poor*: dinner needs to be quick, easy, including purchase and clean up: *on the table in under 30-minutes*.
- *'Mummy guilt'*: described if one simply heated a ready-to-heat offering. As demonstrated by Betty Crocker, by simply adding the egg, you can take pride and ownership of the cake and be proud to serve.
- *Confidence to cook*: beef is expensive and can be hard to cook, particularly within short time frames. People reported a limited number of 'go to recipes' for red meat, with consumers reporting more consistent outcomes and less risk of failure when cooking other more familiar proteins, particularly chicken.



Source: Project Dalby, Understanding concept appeal. [Colmar Brunton (Kantar), July 2020].

Corroborating these qualitative insights is data published by MLA looking at consumer drivers of purchase choice (Source: Kantar Domestic Consumer Tracker 2022), clearly highly the importance for consumer perception around variety, suitability for everyday and confidence to cook and prepare.

1. Drivers of purchase choice – “Easy Everyday” and “Trusted Quality”



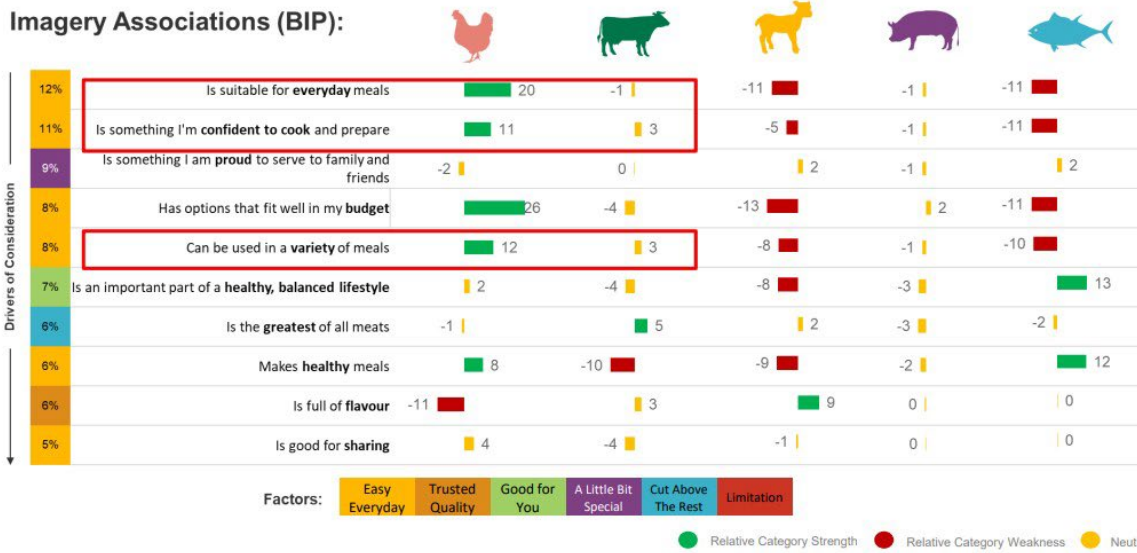
Source: Kantar Domestic Consumer Tracker 2022



Source: Shopper Insights: Leading Influences in Consumer Behaviour

However, unfortunately as noted in MLA’s Brand Campaign FY24 report [Source: Drivers to Brand Power / Equity (2022)] beef and lamb continue to lag behind in these purchase drivers.

Focusing on versatility, ease of cooking will reinforce Beef presence at Mid week dinner



Source: MLA Brand Campaign Report 2024

With the data clearly showing a strong unmet need by our consumer for “Easy, Everyday” beef and lamb offerings, there needs to be a call to action to turn the data into outcomes, providing red meat offerings that challenge chicken as the protein of choice for the mid-week dinner.

Weeknight Cook

Why? Because the need is out there!

There is a clear need for quick and easy weeknight options in the Red Meat space that don't compromise (in fact increase) health and variety.

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1.2 What? The opportunity!

Drawing on insights from consumer interviews, industry data, as well as insights drawn from research conducted on behalf of Weeknight Cook by Colmar Brunton (Kantar) in July 2020: *Project Dalby. Understanding concept appeal*; Weeknight Cook has sought to address red meat's mid-week meal occasion shortcoming by developing a range of premium products that deliver on the consumer's demand for *quick, easy and variety*.

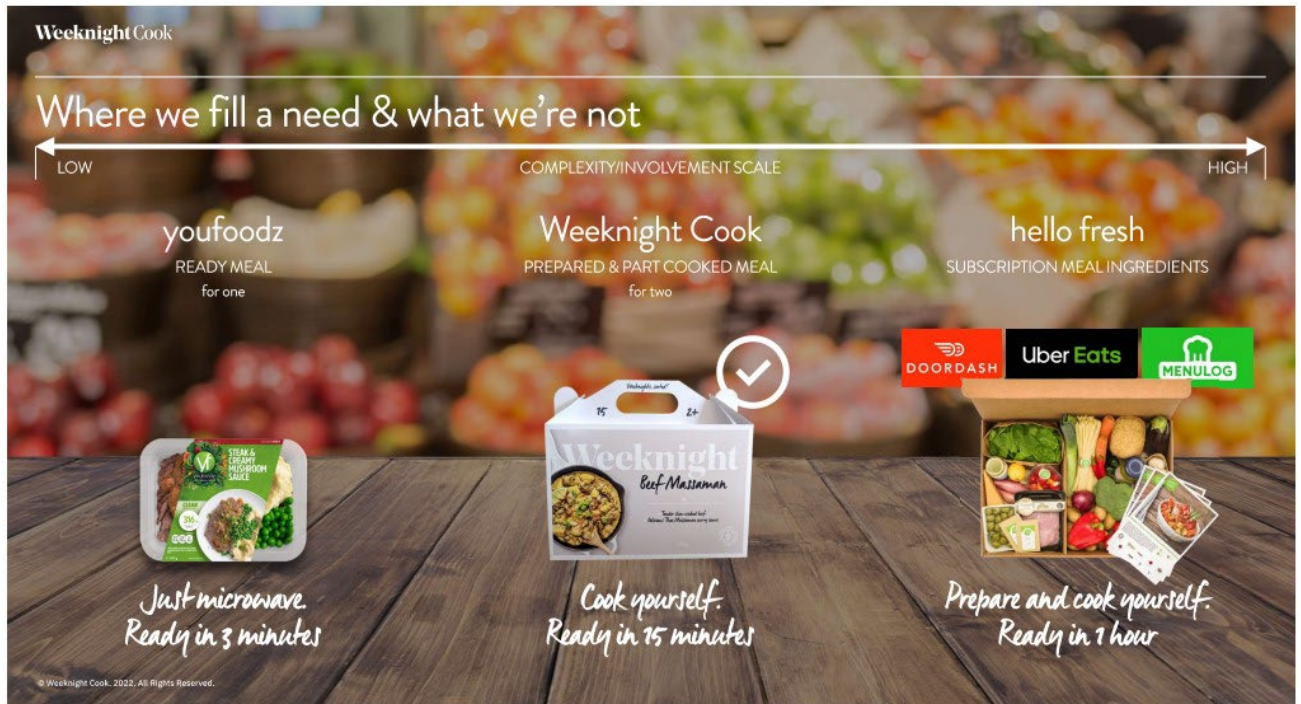
Weeknight Cook
EASY, QUICK, DELICIOUS!

GLUTEN FREE

- Italian Meatballs
Family favourite!
- Thai Green Curry Chicken Meatballs
Turist on a favourite!
- Beef Massaman
Full apart beef + potatoes!!
- Thai Red Beef Curry
Better than your takeaway!
- Swedish meatballs
Oh so mmm!
- Spicy meatballs
Nice and spicy!
- Lamb Meatball Korma
What's not to like?

- ✓ Dinner for 2 in 15... Sorted!
- ✓ 3 Easy steps
- ✓ Pre-cooked, to save you time
- ✓ 100% Aussie farming family owned
- ✓ Quality ingredients
- ✓ Gluten free

Weeknight Cook was designed to fill a white space in the market between ready-to-eat (RTE) meals and more complications meal kits, such as *Hello Fresh*. Whilst we recognised that there already exists in market a range of RTE options, we identified a significant level of negative consumer sentiment, particularly within young families and young professionals, around both the quality of these offerings, and the lack of “ownership” and a perceived “guilt” around simply *heating and serving*, rather than “cooking” for their loved ones.



1.3 Who? Our targeted consumer!

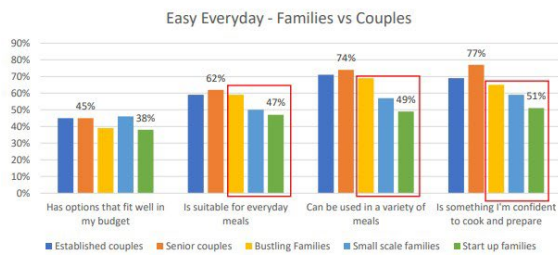


Recognising the need for and the opportunities for red meat to design products that provide increased variety, cooking ease and convenience, particularly for busy people who enjoy good quality, healthy food; Weeknight Cook has designed products, utilising serve/pack size and flavours to suit:

- Families with young children
- Dual income families with/ without children
- Time poor professionals.
- People who enjoy good quality food; 'healthier versions of takeaway' (i.e. different cuisines such as Thai and Indian)

Supporting this strategy is recent data released by MLA in the latest MLA Brand Campaign report FY24 [Appendix 2] which highlights the opportunities for the red meat industry to catering to families, particularly bustling, small scale and start up (young) families, who appear to have a lower confidence when it comes to preparing red meat and a limited perception of red meat’s versatility as an everyday meal option that can be used in a variety of meals.

Future proof Beef by being present at the family dinner table highlighting ease, variety and confidence to cook



Source: MLA Brand Campaign Report 2024

1.4 Where? Position is key!

Working collaboratively with key retailers to develop a range of beef and lamb offerings which compete with chicken at the point of purchase.

Understanding that convenience, quick and easy is not only about the preparation, cooking and cleaning process, a significant aspect of this project, *Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu* has been around identifying *where* products best sit both in terms of route to market (i.e. which retail settings), as well as instore citing.

As part of this project, we have launched and trialled 6 products across 18 different retail stores within Queensland, made up of 2 retail chains as of June 2023. This in-store trial tested a number of assumptions and gained a lot of insights, particularly around store customer demographic fit and in-store product positioning to drive take-off. These learnings have been instrumental in next steps, as we work with a major retailer on projects that will be rolled out nationally; while continuing to explore other market opportunities, including export channels.

1.5 How? Executing to drive take-off!

Industry and brand owners working collaboratively with key retailers to drive take off of a range of beef and lamb offerings which compete with chicken at the point of purchase.

With the support of the Funding and Work Agreement between MLA Donor Company Limited to execute this project; along with financial and in-kind marketing support through the MLA CoMarketing program, we have been able to execute a proactive marketing strategy to support the launch of Weeknight Cook.

1.5.1 How do we market to encourage trial and repeat purchase with customers?

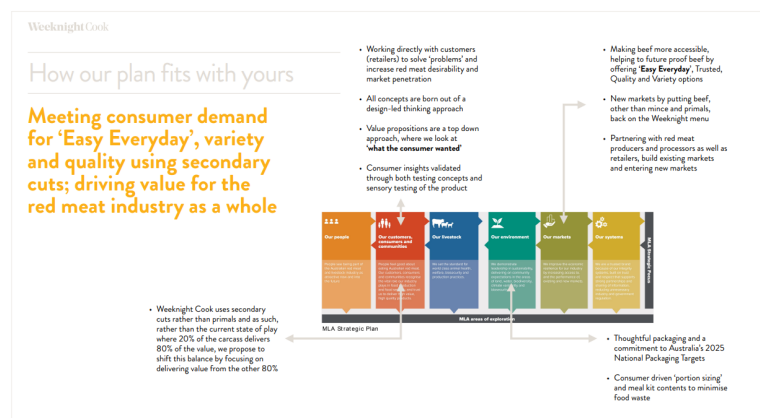
Over the course of this project, we have developed a go-to-market- tool kit to maximise take-off and encourage brand loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour amongst consumers. This has included:

- Packaging with point-of-difference
- Point-of-sale (POS) materials
- Website development
- Social media marketing
- In-store demonstrations
- Customer competitions
- Promotional activities and campaigns



1.5.2 How will results of this project be used to benefit the Australian Red Meat Industry?

Demonstrating to the industry that when we work together to directly address our consumers needs it will result in higher value for everybody: Selling more red meat and challenging chicken at the point of purchase by focusing on delivering greater value from 80% of the carcass that is currently only returning 20% of the value.



Source: MLA Strategic Plan 2025

Objectives of this project, *Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu* fits directly with MLA's Strategic Plan 2025 [Appendix 3]. As outcomes of this project, including learnings from and instore trial and opportunities to work with a major retailer on product development for national rollout in 2024, the Australian red meat industry as a whole seeks to benefit through:

- Meeting the consumers demand for 'easy, everyday' red meat options; thereby increasing purchase frequency of red meat.
- Focusing on providing quality, variety and cook with confidence meal solutions in the convenience space, improving consumer perception of red meat's *suitability for everyday meals*.
- Focusing on undervalued cuts, thereby driving value for the whole carcass.
- Working directly with retailers and hence gaining valuable customer and consumer insights and feedback to drive future product development.
- Working with processors and manufacturers on plastic packaging trials as we work towards meeting Australia's 2025 National packaging targets.

2. Objectives

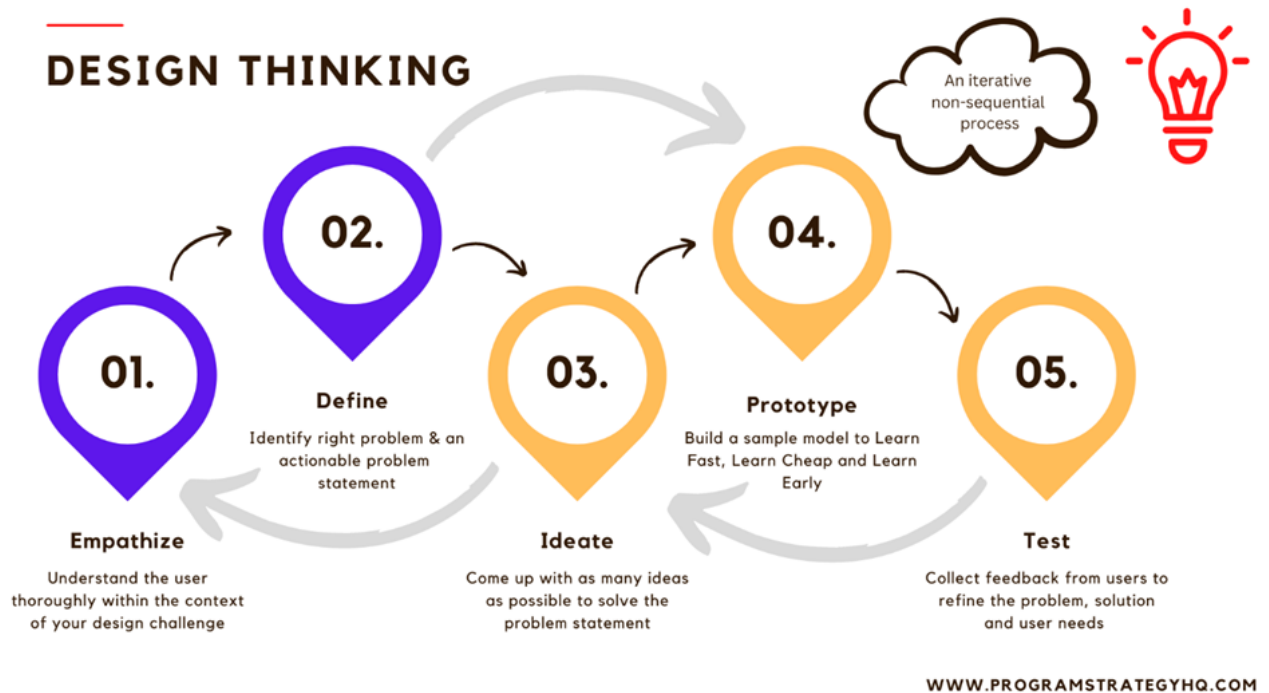
Agreed objectives outlines as per the Funding and work agreement were to develop a concept range of ready to 'quick cook', minimally processed, retail-ready family meals (for four) with beef or lamb as the core ingredient. As part of this process the project was to:

- Establish supply/project partners; research, packaging, raw materials, processing, assembly, logistics and retailers.
- Develop pilot processing and packaging requirements as part of the 'food design' to produce a ready to 'quick cook', retail-ready beef and lamb range of products. Traceability, sustainability, tamper resistant packaging and temperature integrity technologies will be investigated.
- Ascertain quality and food safety parameters including:
 - Shelf life
 - Nutritional information (for panels)
- Validate consumer desirability- feasibility and viability
- Complete in market validation of the product, process and packaging solution in an in-store environment.
- Complete Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) and value creation, including for the Australian Red Meat Industry.

On the whole the objectives have been successfully met and will be discussed in more depth under the results section of this report. However, it is fair to say that while much of this project has been far from smooth sailing with significant delays in meeting milestones, the learnings made and networks formed throughout the project have been invaluable, providing many opportunities going forward.



3. Methodology



Source: <https://www.programstrategyhq.com/post/design-thinking-process>

The core methodology that continues to drive the development and strategy of Weeknight Cook is Design Thinking; taking a customer centric approach to solve problems and deliver solutions that meet their needs and pain points.

As is the non-linear process of Design Thinking throughout this project we have *empathised* with the consumer and the customer (retailer) to *define* their pain points and needs. Working collaboratively with industry partners, retailers, manufacturers and consumers we have *ideated*, building *prototypes* that we have *tested* and refined.

Testing six (6) product stock keeping units (SKU's) within retail markets, across 16 retail venues across Queensland, covering different customer demographics, particularly within the 2 different retail companies that we were on shelf within has provided notable learnings, allowing us to re-evaluate and define the problems to be solved for our target consumer and customer (retailer). Working directly with a major retailer, we are currently back in an *ideation* and *testing* phase on projects that are scheduled to be launched nationally on shelf in 2024.

As Weeknight Cook continues to evolve, we are mindful to revisit and review business tools, including the Business Model Canvas and Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity and Threats (SWOT) analysis to ensure that our strategy remains effective and deliverable. In a competitive landscape as is the nature of the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector that we operate in we ensure that we remain relevant and competitive with the use of tools including frequent Competitor Analysis and apply the 7 Lean Methodology principles across all aspects of the business.



Source: <https://www.c-sharpcorner.com/article/principles-of-lean-thinking/>

Working with ProAnd Consultants we are awaiting the completion of a Cost Benefit Analysis (SBA) in order to estimate the potential benefits of this projects against the costs for both Weeknight Cook and the Australian Red Meat Industry. From here we will be able to set Objective direction and goals for Weeknight Cook going forward.

4. Results

From little things big things grow: Turning data into action to drive results!

Overall, the objectives of this project have been met with Weeknight Cook launching a range of 5 red-meat products in June 2023. On the back of this 'soft' launch we have attracted genuine interest from one of the two major retailers in Australia, offering real opportunities for the beef and lamb to increase their presence at the family weeknight dinner table.

4.1 Establish supply/ project partners: research, packaging, raw materials, processing, assembly, logistics and retailers

4.1.1 Retailers

Weeknight Cook launched within fourteen (16) Drakes Supermarkets stores across Queensland and two (2) Wholelife Pharmacy and Healthfood stores in June 2023. This launch was of six (6) SKU's in the format of a meal kit containing a 250gr packet of protein (either diced sous vide beef or 10 x sous vide meatballs) and a 450gr packet of sauce, where the 6 SKU's were:

- Red Thai Beef Curry (Diced Beef)
- Lamb Korma Meatballs
- Italian Meatballs
- Spicy Meatballs
- Swedish Meatballs
- Green Thai Chicken Curry (Meatballs)

A 7th SKU, Beef Massaman (diced beef) was developed and tested with consumers, including being sold at one retail outlet in Dalby.

While the in-store trial, particularly within Drakes Supermarkets, has been largely unsuccessful it has enabled significant learnings, and has allowed us to commence a journey leading to significant opportunities to work with other major retailers. In reflecting on "what went wrong", it appears to come back to 3 fundamentals of FMCG, *Product, Position and Price*.

Product: we consistently have received positive feedback on the product, which we were able to capture first-hand through in-store tastings; where over 20 were conducted across 14 different stores have been conducted and feedback provided. Comments such as "that is not *just* a meatball" and "the sauce, that is restaurant quality" have been encouraging.

Price: the recommended retail price (RRP) set initially by the retailer at \$25 per packet in retrospect exceeded the price cliff for the shoppers within the settings that we were on shelf. This appeared to be compounded by the position within store, where Weeknight Cook was positioned directly amongst RTE offerings (for 1-serve). Limited time promotions of 2 for \$39 and/ or 1 for \$21 saw a significant spike in sales data, and hence in negotiation with retailers these products currently sit on shelf at an (RRP) of 2 for \$39 and 1 for \$20.

Position: the saying 'position is key' could not be any truer, whereby *position/* shopper profile of store and position in-store appear to be a key component to the outcome of the in-store trial. In terms of store position/ shopper demographic, initially all negotiations to launch within Drakes Supermarkets were based on discussions that we would launch within 42 stores, 26 within South

Australia and 16 within Queensland. All due diligence by the Weeknight Cook team of shopper profile was carried out within South Australian stores. In the weeks leading up to launch a number of significant events took place 1) the key person who we had worked with within Drakes left their employment to take a position with a major Australian retailer and 2) a 'soft start' within *only* Queensland stores was agreed. Naively the Weeknight Cook team assumed that Queensland Drakes shoppers were of similar demographic, that being a premium customer, to South Australian Drakes shoppers; only to discover this not to be the case, as acknowledged by the Drakes team post launch. Therefore, it should be of little surprise that a product designed for a premium shopper did not take-off within a budget shopper environment.

Further impacting on the success of the in-store launch has been position *on-shelf*. Keeping in mind that a value proposition of Weeknight Cook is that is *not* a RTE, as a meal for 2+ persons, being positioned on shelf in store between the likes of Muscle Chef and You Foodz, both meals for one, priced around the \$10- \$12.50 price range appeared to place Weeknight Cook at a significant disadvantage in terms of perceived value. Further, this positioning appeared to confuse the shopper as to *what* Weeknight Cook was and *what it was not*. Feedback received through in-store demonstrations corroborated this theory, as did sales data from Wholelife Pharmacy and Healthfoods, where despite having significant lower foot traffic in the refrigerated section of the store, the products have been more successful, again suggesting the impact of shopper demographics and in-store position.



Drakes Supermakets



Wholelife Pharmacy and Healthfoods

Whilst a difficult lesson to learn, armed with these insights we have been able to better position ourselves in terms of 'position' in more recent negotiations with retail partners.



Taken with permission of the Woolworths Dalby Store Manager for demonstration purposes.

4.1.1.1 Frozen Protein Project

Findings reported by the American Frozen Food Institute (AFFI) nearly a year after the Covid-19 pandemic began revealed that “frozen food were among the fastest-growing categories in the grocery store, with clear signs that Americans’ fondness for frozen will continue to grow” (Bizzozero, 2021). In fact, Bizzozero (2021) goes on to report that “2020 frozen food sales grew both dollars (+21%) and units (+13.3%), with nearly all types of frozen foods seeing double-digit sales increases’, according to the “The Power of Frozen in Retail 2021” report by the AFFI.

Likewise, Australian retailers report comparable trends within the domestic retail market since the beginning of the pandemic, noting a relative gap within premium protein lines within the frozen aisle. Seeking to meet this growing demand we were fortunate to be invited by a major national retailer to submit products for their frozen category, scheduled to be on shelf in the latter part of 2024.

4.1.1.2 Meal Kit Project

In the past weeks we have been approached by a major national retailer to work with them on developing a range of chilled meal kits. Although the brief seems to be evolving, information that we have been given to date includes:

- 3-4 meal kits options - serves 2 and 3-4 meal kit options- serves 4
- Initially proposed to be listed under the *Weeknight Cook* brand

- MUST be a complete kit (much like the Aldi kits)



- Currently they are asking for the meat to be raw. However, we are hopeful that with the assistance of data/ intel from MLA and others, we will be able to convince them that, particularly red meat, would be more appealing and convenient to the customer in a par cook form.
- Proposed to roll out in greater than 500 stores nationally.

Responding to this request we have been working with a salad company who currently supplies over 50% of premium salad kits into domestic retail channels. They are able to supply all ingredients, apart from the protein, and have the capacity to assemble, package and distribute within their existing capabilities.

4.1.2 Supply partners- Raw materials, processing and assembly

4.1.2.1 Manufacturing

Since the commencement of this project, we have worked with a number of different suppliers and manufacturers. Initially we were working with a vertically integrated beef company for the supply and processing of beef, which was then freighted to another manufacturer for sous vide. Sauces to complete the meal kits were being manufactured in and freighted from South Australia. However due to a number of factors, including freight costs and process chain complexity, it became apparent that we needed to partner with a manufacturer who could do the majority of our meal kit elements within the one facility.

Therefore, for the past 12-18 months we have been working with a manufacturer in Brisbane. Under this current arrangement this manufacturer is responsible for the procurement of all raw materials for the production of the meals, invoicing for individual packages of food (protein pack and sauce pack). Weeknight Cook is currently supplying all outer packaging and cartons and has been responsible for all pick-and-pack; performed onsite at the factory.

However, due to a number of factors, including required capacity and accreditations, we have commenced discussions with possible alternate manufacturing partners. We are currently exploring a number of possibilities, including preliminary discussions with a significant beef and lamb

processing company who have recently built and opened a state-of-the art food manufacturing factory in south-east Queensland. Should ongoing discussions continue to be favourable, this would potentially be a significant milestone for Weeknight Cook going forward, particularly if we are able to continue to work with our current manufacturer for ongoing R & D around product and recipe development.

4.1.2.2 Raw materials

In terms of supply of raw materials, in particular protein, we have throughout this project tried to develop direct supply relationships with producers, both as a) a priority to supporting 'our people' within the red meat industry and b) to enhance our provenance, including around 'story' and environmental, social and governance responsibilities (ESG's). Unfortunately, this has presented some challenges, particularly when it has come to pricing, where historically, smaller producers and processors sell and quote within a fluctuating market, and are often resistant to committing to a fixed price, as is required to develop manageable COG's for commercial vendors who are supplying to a retail channels, at a contractual fixed price.

Moving forward we are currently focused on partnering with a company within the red meat industry who have an integrated supply chain, particularly for red meat. Whilst initially we may look to have our sauces and other non-protein materials manufactured and supplied in bulk packs from our current manufacturer, long term we would be hopeful that these too will be manufactured within the one facility.

4.1.2.3 Logistics: How this fits with different channels to markets

To date the vast majority of our deliveries have been direct to a Queensland based distribution centre (DC). Although remaining viable, largely due to lower margin expectations, the freight associated with direct-to-store, particularly where we are often dealing in small quantities, does make the feasibility of supplying smaller, independent retailers more difficult.

Likewise, the cost, both monetary and time, involved to supply direct to consumer (B2C,) such as through an online store remains difficult, as validated by a number of producers/ brands in south-east Queensland who have been doing direct-to-consumer "box deliveries" moving away from this model, citing that it is not feasible. In fact, Dwain Duxson in his Farmer's Club Newsletter: Monday's Club Notes on the 9th October 2023, under the heading *Paddock to plate is sooooo difficult* comments that "Many Farmers who decide to head down the track quickly realise how much time, effort and money goes into establishing a brand and the logistics of getting your product to the consumer".

Hence with this in mind, at this time we have been directing a lot of focus on working with larger retailers, where we cannot only work on greater volumes, but where we can deliver direct to state DC's. However, part of our discussions with possible new manufacturing partners have been around the opportunities to leverage off existing retail channels (both domestically and export) that they are supplying, sharing the benefits of freight and logistics.

4.2 Developing pilot processing and packaging requirements as part of the 'food design' to produce a ready to 'quick cook', retail ready beef and lamb range of products.

4.2.1 Processing requirements

4.2.1.1 Research and development (R & D) and Intellectual Property (IP)

Over the course of this project, there have been many parties involved in R & D to develop products and prototypes. This has involved trials around optimal:

- sauce recipes
- beef/ lamb cuts to use
- grind and chemical lean (CL) of mince for the meatballs
- meatball ingredients, including at one stage the development of a premix
- cook times and temperatures

We have also had to overcome processing challenges, including *how to cryovac raw meatballs without turning them into a hamburger patty?* Fortunately, with the assistance of year 6 STEM students from Dalby we designed a 3D printed meatball mould to fit into our manufacturers Multivac system.



In terms of our current core range of products, as well as products recently developed for submissions with retailers, all Intellectual property (IP) has been developed with our current manufacturer and protected through agreement.

4.2.1.2 Quality Assurance Programs

As part of co-manufacturing arrangements Weeknight Cook has not required their own accreditations nor HACCP plan. However, the Founder/ Managing Director, as part of our own quality systems, has completed accredited HACCP training.

Although our current manufacturer has third party HACCP Accreditation under Spotless, and meets all social and ethical standards in order to supply under Queensland Government contracts, they do not hold export accreditation, nor accreditations required to supply the major retailers, particularly under private labels. Hence, with the support of our current manufacturer we are in conversation with other manufacturing partners who have the required accreditations including:

- Supplier Ethical Data Exchange (SEDEX)
- British Retail Consortium Global Standards guarantee (BRCGS)
- Safe Quality Food (SQF) program

Further, where it remains a goal to explore export market opportunities going forward, we are also seeking to work with a manufacturer who already holds the required licences and accreditations.

4.2.2 Packaging requirements

Although throughout the project there have been a number of packaging prototypes developed and tested with consumers and retailers for feedback; all products sold within retail channels to date have been in the form of ‘takeaway’ style box, designed to stand out on shelf and give the feel of restaurant quality / healthy takeaway.



4.2.2.1 Sustainability

Weeknight Cook is a member of the Australian Packaging Covenant Organisation (APCO) and committed to *Australia's 2025 National Targets*, including the need for all plastics to be recyclable, reusable or combustible. In fact, this was a strong influence in the decision to move away from the plastic packaging above left and to our current cardboard format that is recyclable [Appendix 3]

In terms of inner packaging, currently there is no Australian supplied plastic suitable and approved for sous vide processing. However working with our packaging supplier, we have sourced thermoform film that meets the APCO Soft Plastic Threshold (CEPLEX) [Appendix 4] and will commence trials in the early part of next year to ensure that it meets our processing and quality requirements (i.e. shelf life).

4.2.2.2 Pack size

Whilst initially the project objective was to develop retail-ready family meals (for four), before launching in June 2023 we pivoted to a pack size for 2+ for a number of reasons including:

- Keeping the RRP lower and more competitive against other offerings

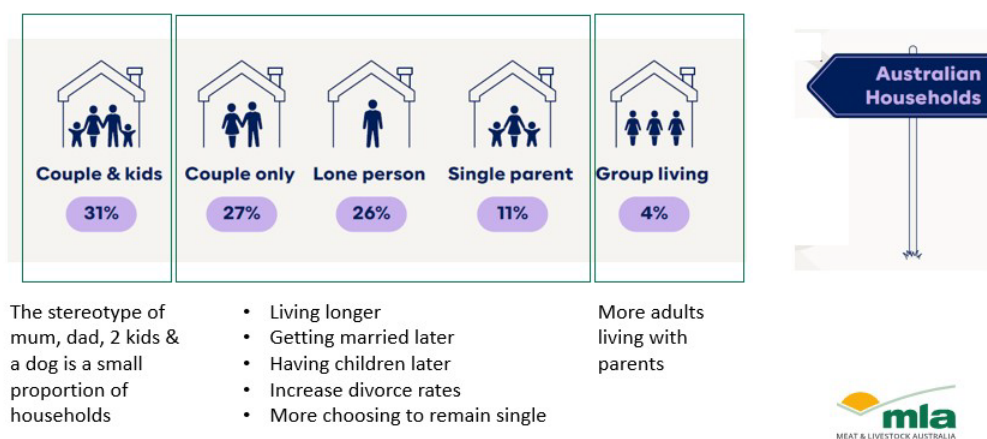
- Allowing variety and flexibility for families, where they could purchase two different packs to meet the tastes of all within the household
- To increase accessibility to other customer segments outside of families, such as retirees/empty nesters, double income no kids (DINKS) and single income no kids (SINKS) households.

Further supporting products taking a smaller serve size is data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS monthly Labour Force Survey which shows a decline in the average number of people living in each household, from around 2.9 in the mid-1980s to historical lows of a below 2.5 reported in early 2023 (Agarwal, Bishop and Day, 2023).

6. Small households represent 2/3rd of Australian population

1-2pp households are the likely target of the “universal need of everyone looking for foods that are **quick/easy to prepare**”

McCrindle Australia Street 2022



Source: *Shopper Insights: Leading Influences in Consumer Behaviour*

4.3 Ascertain quality and food safety parameters including:

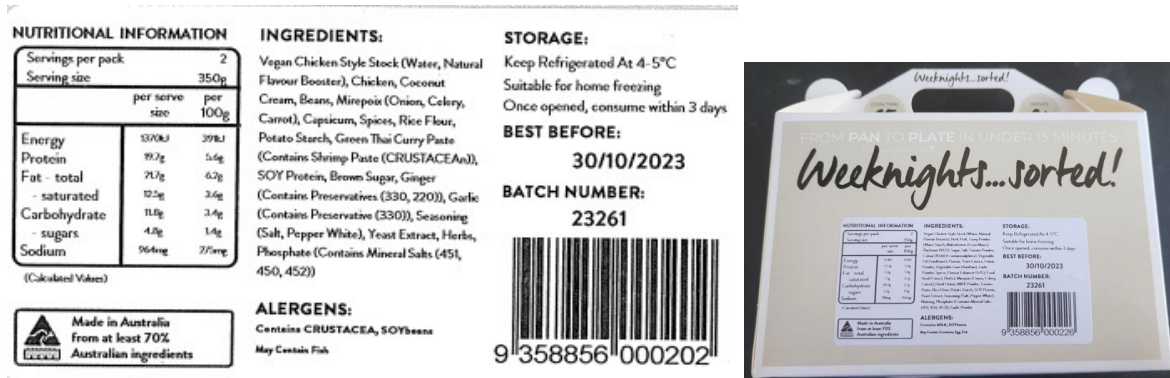
- **Shelf life**
- **Nutritional information (for panels)**

4.3.1 Shelf life

Extended shelf has been and remains part of our value proposition, helping to combat retailer shrinkage and food waste. Regular and ongoing stock monitoring and testing has enabled us to consistently provide a minimum shelf life of 6-weeks (42 days) at the time of despatch from the factory. Although shelf-life testing has consistently shown that in fact that Weeknight Cook products continue to meet safe parameters for up to as long as 17-weeks, we have continued to only offer a 6-week *Used by date*, cognisant that once it leaves the factory it is beyond our control in terms of potential exposure to conditions outside of the recommended *Keep Refrigerated at 4-5 degrees Celsius*.

4.3.2 Nutritional Information Panels (NIPs)

To minimise the risk of recall due to inaccurate or incomplete claims, such as if ingredients need to change etc; the decision was made to print and apply labels containing NIP's, batch number, Expiry dates, allergens and percentage Australian ingredients at the time of pick-and-pack. Although adding an extra step and hence time to the packing process, to date, this has been an effective decision.



4.4 Validate consumer desirability-feasibility and viability

Throughout the development of the Weeknight Cook range, ongoing formal and informal research has been undertaken to understand the consumer's needs and wants (including formats, flavours etc); validate the value propositions; and test prototypes (including product, packaging and messaging).

During the course of this project a number of formal, external consumer research studies to validate desirability for Weeknight Cook were commissioned including:

- *Weeknight Cook Concept Validation (770 consumer data set research)* completed by Focus Insights, August 2021
- *Project Dalby: Understanding concept appeal* completed by Colmar Brunton (Kantar), June 2020
- *Shopper 360* by Lumaten, for Weeknight Cook, November 2021

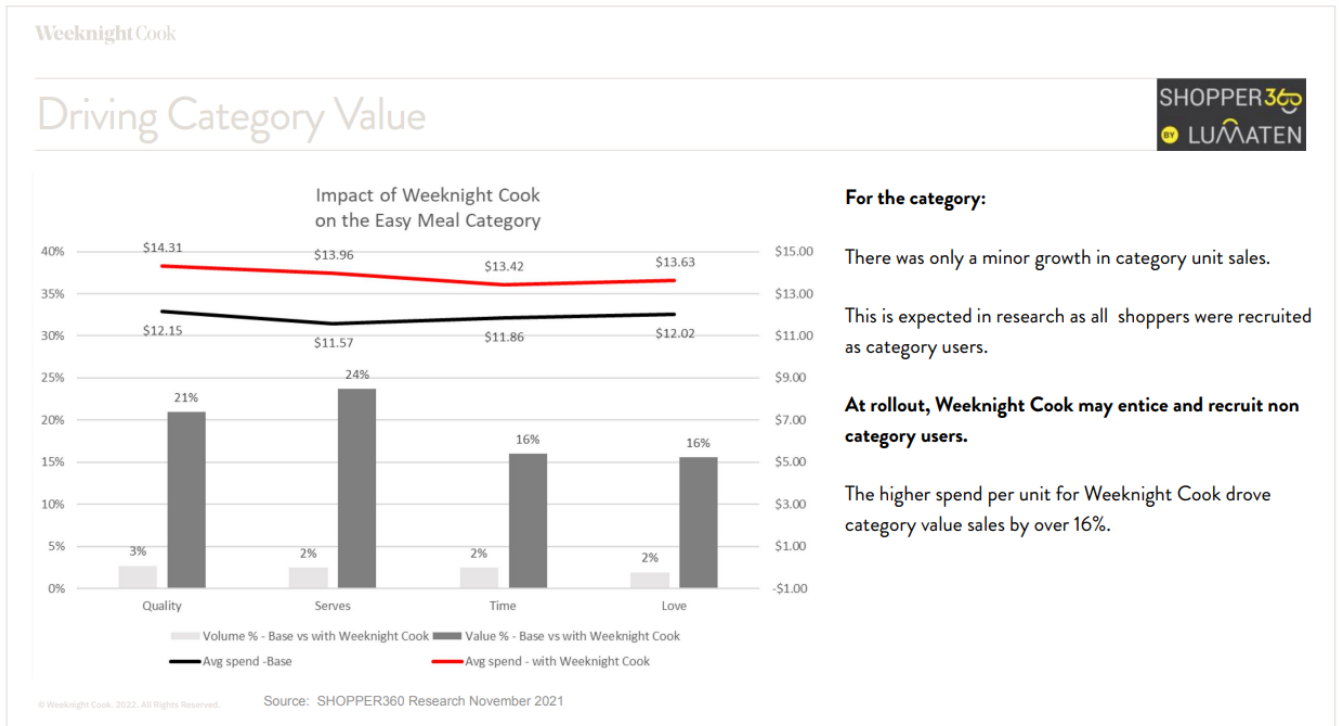
4.4.1 Shopper 360 (November 2021)

Applying the principle that 'actions speak louder than words and always speak the truth', in this study, conducted to optimise product launch, participants were presented with real store environments and then shopping behaviours were observed against allocated planograms (chilled meat/ meal section of the supermarket) and scenarios. Initially presented with a scenario to shop without the Weeknight Cook range, then with the Weeknight Cook range, before a final shop after being primed with Weeknight Cook messaging; using their computer mouse participants were able to pick up and interact with products, and then able to 'purchase' or return to the shelf.



Source: Shopper 360 by Lumaten: Report 22 November 2021

Results from this study showed strong appeal for Weeknight Cook, where 19-24 % of units purchased were Weeknight Cook, as well as evidence that not only would this drive category value, but in fact Weeknight Cook would likely entice and recruit non-category users.



Source: Shopper 360 by Lumaten: Report 22 November 2021

4.5 Complete in market validation of the product, process and packaging solution in an in-store environment

As discussed throughout this report we have conducted in-store trials across 16 stores within Queensland since June 2023. While far from smooth sailing, the learnings have been significant and the opportunities that have been presented during this part 6-months offer strong signs that *Weeknight Cook will get red meat back on the weeknight household menu*, not only within Queensland, but on a much broader national scale in the coming year.

4.6 Complete Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) and value creation including for the Australian Red Meat Industry

Unfortunately, we are currently awaiting the results of the Cost Benefit Analysis, which is being prepared by ProAnd Associates.

5. Conclusion

With a plethora of data and insights telling us (red meat industry) the necessity for 'Easy Everyday' meal options that offer variety on one hand; and years of quantitative and qualitative evidence to show that red meat is lagging in this category; there should be little surprise that year on year industry driven research is telling us that we are continuing to fall behind our protein competitors, particularly chicken, in terms of domestic retail sales.

Weeknight Cook, has successfully launched a range of premium, quick and easy meal kits that are healthy, gluten and preservative free within a number of retail stores across Queensland. On the back of this trial launch we have ignited genuine interest from a major national retailer, who see the opportunity for red meat in the 'Easy Everyday' convenience space. Working with a number of retailers, together with industry, we are confident that Weeknight Cook can turn data and insights into real action and play a key role in getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu.

5.1 Key findings

- **The need for 'Easy Everyday' red meat meal options is obvious.** Using MLA's own words we need to "*Future proof beef by being present at the family dinner table highlighting ease, variety and confidence to cook*".
- **As an industry we continue to lose out to chicken at the retail checkout**, particularly around weeknight meal occasions.
- **Australian retailers are supportive** and agree that there is a sizable opportunity for the red meat industry to meet the consumers unmet need around convenient everyday beef and lamb offerings.

- **The challenges are real!**: I often hear the very true statement from farmers “If only they knew (consumer) the money, time and effort that goes into producing their food”. We can now add to that: “If only they (producer) knew how hard it is to get this on the retail shelf!”.

Acknowledging the challenges, including a global pandemic and recessionary pressures on household budgets; not to mention record red meat pricing over much of the course of this project, the team at MLA have been patient and supportive, allowing this project to be pushed out in terms of milestone end dates.

- If we are to successfully compete for our share of the mid-week meal occasion market, we must work collaboratively:
Producer/ Processor + Manufacturer + Brand / commercial vendor + Retailer + Industry (MLA)
- **“Shoppers Don’t Engage- They Just Buy”** as quoted by Beard (2015) who reports findings based on multiple studies that the average consumer spends 13 seconds purchasing a brand in-store and online the majority spent less than 10 seconds.

Therefore, packaging and point-of-sale marketing must quickly draw the customers attention with clear and concise messaging that focuses on functional drivers of choice for the consumer.

- **Location, location, location:** position, both in terms of store demographics and in-store placement is key. Convenience is not only about preparing the product, but also about being where our consumer wants and expects to find it.
- Covid-19 Pandemic brought about many changes in customers shopping behaviours and has created opportunities including for **beef and lamb within the premium frozen category.**

5.2 Benefits to industry

The need for ‘Easy Everyday’ beef and lamb options that meet the consumer’s unmet need for *variety* and *confidence to prepare* is clear, and the time to action is now. Weeknight Cook through its pilot trial of quick and easy meal kits within a retail environment has highlighted what can be achieved when industry (MLA) and commercial vendors work together.

While this project *Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu* has been far from smooth sailing, the future is looking bright, including opportunities to work directly with a major retailer in the coming months to deliver on shelf a range of beef and lamb offerings across 2 potential category projects.

Aligned with MLA’s Strategic Plan 2025 we are committed to supporting industry by:

- Forging strategic partnerships with producers and processors to develop beef and lamb products that increase retail sales, thereby increasing demand for raw products (*Our people*)
- Focusing on ‘easy everyday’, and variety, which according to MLA’s 2024 Brand Campaign is a key driver to future proofing beef (and lamb) by offering competitive alternatives to chicken. (*Our customers*)

- Working directly with retailers to develop beef and lamb offerings that meet consumers demands and offer more variety in the convenience, every day, premium space. (*Our markets*)
- Using non primal cuts, therefore extracting better value from the 80% of the carcass which currently only delivering 20% of the value. (*Our communities*)
- Commitment to meeting Australia's 2025 National Packaging Targets (*Our environment*)

6. Future research and recommendations



As an outcome of this project a number of opportunities have presented for Weeknight Cook, including opportunities to work directly with a major national retailer to develop:

- a range of premium frozen lamb and beef offerings to be launched within greater than 650 stores nationwide 2024
- a range of meal kits with lamb and beef, to be launched over 500 stores nationwide in the first quarter of 2024.

As shown through this project the power to achieve big outcomes comes from working collaboratively. We see an opportunity for Weeknight Cook and partners (ie manufacturers/ red meat suppliers) to work collaboratively with MLA to work on product development and research around:

1. Premium frozen protein- beef and lamb
2. Lunch Occasions for red meat.

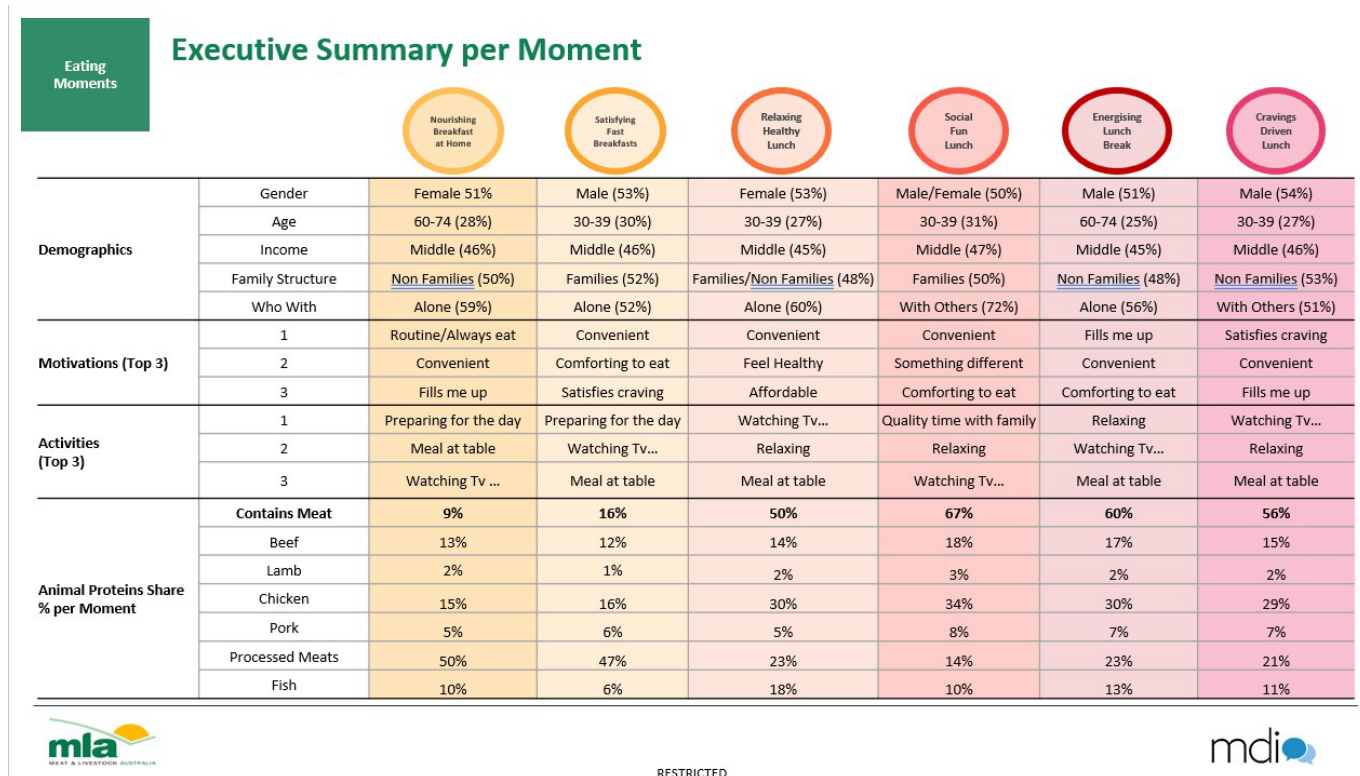
6.1 Premium frozen protein: How do we gain and retain customers in this space by ensuring we are controlling quality parameters?

Outside of meatballs and beef patties, red meat offerings in the freezer space are a relatively new concept. ***What does the consumer want from this category and what is the customer path to market?***

Moreover, where a minimum shelf life of 365 days and a Minimum Life on Receipt (MLOR) of 274 days is being asked for, to ensure that we are offering value and quality to our customers there are a number of research questions to be investigated including:

1. Will new plastics that meet the APCO Soft Plastic Threshold (CEPLEX) for Australia’s 2025 National Targets perform satisfactorily in terms of maintaining shelf life and product integrity?
2. Will the product flavour and texture integrity be maintained despite the conditions it is being exposed to and for extended periods?
3. Will the plastics maintain their integrity or will the become brittle over time?
4. Will the product retain a “freshness” over time or will ice-crystals form?

6.2 Lunch Occasion: How do we make red meat more accessible and appealing, particularly for medium to high income SINKs and DINKs?

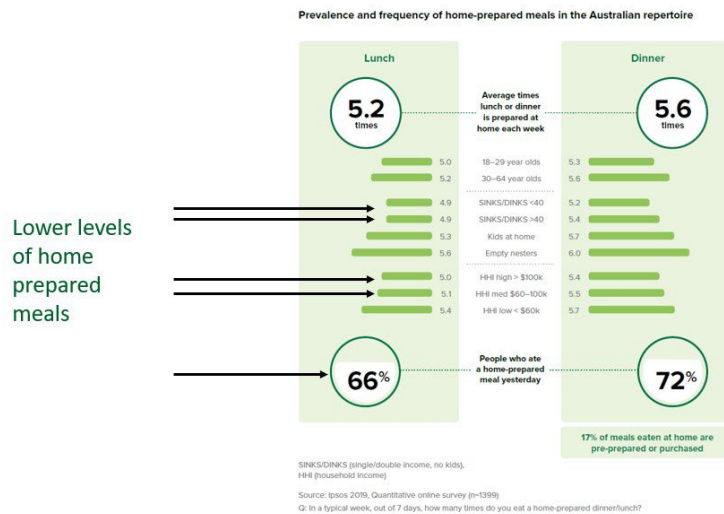


Source: Shopper Insights: Leading Influences in Consumer Behaviour

As per data and insights recently collected by MDI on behalf of MLA, researching every meal eaten by a data set of 1000 participants, over the course of a fortnight; in terms of lunch occasions, beef and lamb are lagging significantly behind chicken (nearly half in many instances), and on many occasions processed meats are also significantly outdoing red meat.

12

7. Home prepared meals continue to dominate the occasions throughout the week. Opportunities to leverage the lunch occasion targeting med - high income sinks/dinks



Source: *Shopper Insights: Leading Influences in Consumer Behaviour*

This highlights the very real opportunity to leverage the lunch occasion, targeting medium to high income SINKS and DINKS.

However, to achieve this we must first understand WHY beef and lamb are lagging?

- Is it that *cold* beef and lamb offerings are unappealing? and
- Given that for many SINKS and DINKS are in workplace settings for many of their lunch occasions; often with limited access to facilities, other than a microwave, which generally does not deliver a great outcome for red meat?
- Or does red meat simply not offer a range of products that appeal, cold or hot?

The meal kit project that Weeknight Cook has been approached to work on is a real opportunity to turn data and insights into action. Weeknight Cook, working collaboratively with MLA and the retailer has the opportunity to better understand the WHY; which would allow us to address the pain points and problems, through developing red meat solutions that we can test in market, taking up opportunities to leverage the lunch occasion for medium to high income SINKS and DINKS and challenging chicken's current dominance in this space.



As this project, *Weeknight Cook: Getting red meat back on the weeknight household menu* draws to a close, perhaps the great outcome that has been achieved is the opportunities that resulted from the journey; opportunities that will be better achieved through collaborative partnerships.

Producer/ Processor + Manufacturer + Brand / commercial vendor + Retailer + Industry

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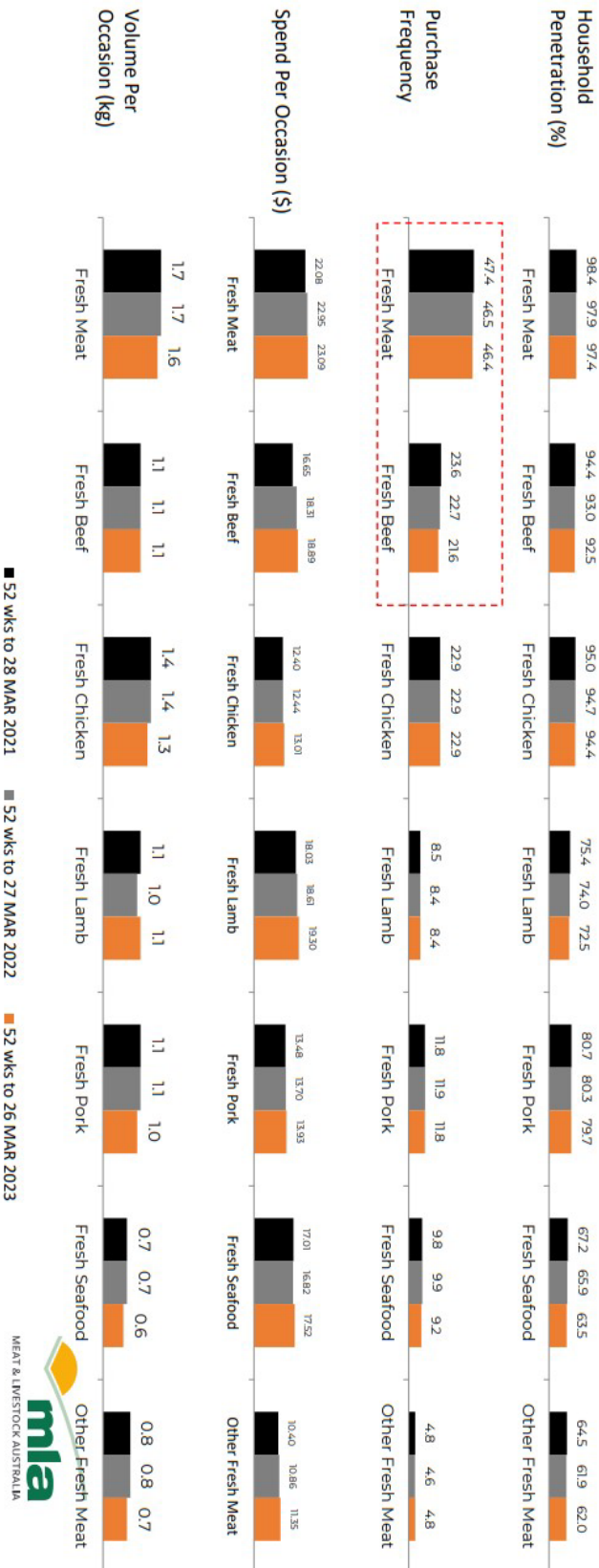
Shopper 360 by Lumaten, November 2021: Report: Weeknight Cook.

8. Appendix

Appendix 1: Frequency drop is the big driver for beef.

Frequency drop is the big loss driver for Beef – We need to get that extra meal back

Source: NielsenIQ HomeScan™
Fresh Meat by Protein | Key Purchase Indicators | 52wk to 26/03/2023

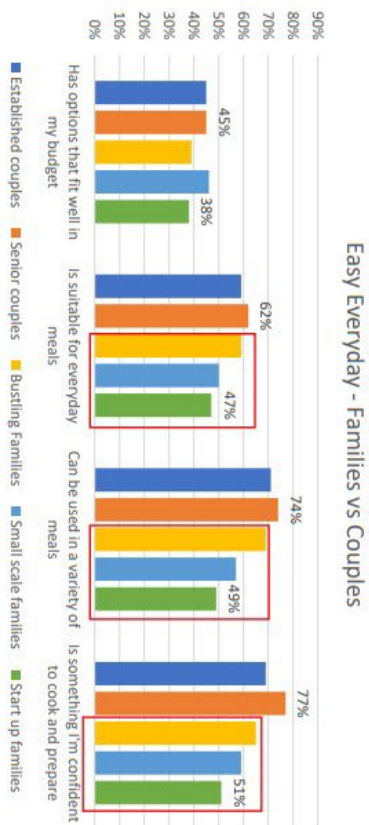


■ 52 wks to 28 MAR 2021 ■ 52 wks to 27 MAR 2022 ■ 52 wks to 26 MAR 2023



Appendix 2: Future Proofing Beef by being present at the family dinner table.

Future proof Beef by being present at the family dinner table highlighting ease, variety and confidence to cook



Appendix 3: MLA’s Strategic Plan 2025: Who our (Weeknight Cook) fits with yours.



Appendix 4: Outer packaging specifications

Technical specification sheet

Ball & Doggett
ballanddoggett.com.au

Product: Sumo Hi Bulk

Category: Folio Papers - Boards

Country of Origin: China

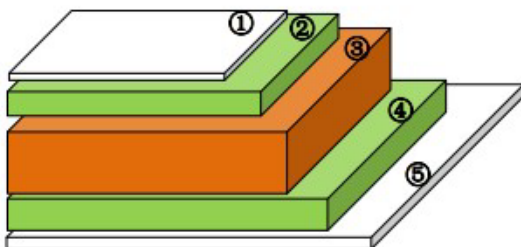
Technical specifications:

	Unit	Standard	Tolerance	Nominal								
				210	230	250	260	280	300	330	350	370
Grammage	g/m ²	ISO 536	± 3.0%	210	230	250	260	280	300	330	350	370
Caliper	µm	ISO 534	± 15%	325	355	400	410	450	500	550	585	600
Stiffness Taber 15° CD	Mn.m	ISO 2493	≥	3.5	4.1	5.1	5.2	7.3	9.3	12.3	13.8	15.3
Stiffness Taber 15° MD	Mn.m	ISO 2493	≥	6.3	7.7	9.5	9.8	13.4	17.2	22.6	25.2	27.9
Cobb value (60s)	g/m ²	ISO 535	≤	PS:45 - RS:50								
Brightness R457	%	ISO 2470	-	P 91.0±3.0(WITH OBA): RS: 90.0±3.0(WITH OBA)								
Gloss	%	ISO 8254-1	≥	85								
PPS (10kgf)	µm	ISO 8791-4	≤	13								
IGT Blister	m/s	ISO 3783	≥	1.2								
Moisture	%	ISO 287	:	6.0 ~ 9.5								
Plybond	J/m ²	TAPPI T569	≥	120								

Testing condition: (23±1) °C & (50±1)%

Structure

- Triple coating
- Bleached chemical pulp
- BCTMP
- Bleached chemical pulp
- Light coating



Applications

- General Packaging
- Graphic & general retail applications

Feature

- Food contact: Compliant to US FDA176.170 & ISEGA tested NO.42972U16
- Compliant for food contact



20/10/2023

Pakko
Tony Ong

Hi Tony

This is confirmation that Sumo Hi Bulk is recyclable
Sumo is a virgin fibre cartonboard

Regards,

Shaun Payne
Sales Manager QLD

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+61 430 217 637

7-9 French Ave,
Brendale QLD 4500