

AUTUMN 2020

ISSUE 69

Fresh

— SOURCE —

DAM
troubles

hit Bundaberg **p9**

COVID-19
UPDATE **p6**

50 **YEARS**
IN THE
MARKETS **p22**

— THE MAGAZINE OF —



BRISBANE
MARKETS
LIMITED®

*Your source of fresh information for
the fruit and vegetable industry*

Print post approved pp 100001181

Fresh

PERSPECTIVES

Central Markets are important links joining one vast horticulture supply chain.

Fresh Perspectives provides an insight into this rich and varied industry, focusing on the characters, and characteristics, of the world of horticulture.

Celebrating 50 years of fond memories

In this edition of Fresh Perspectives, we talk to five members of the markets community who have 50 years of history at Brisbane Markets®.

The Lower family has a longstanding relationship with the markets and Gary, along with his brothers Ross and Wayne, are the third generation to do business at Brisbane's central market.

Tony Joseph reflects on his journey from country boy to patriarch of a family business and shares his memories of the significant milestones he has witnessed.

Steph West has worked for many wholesalers at Brisbane Markets®, she shares her experiences as a cashier and how the nature of her work has changed.

Entrepreneur Peter Kedwell has owned a number of market

businesses over the years and fondly remembers those who made their mark on his career.

Ted Beaton has been involved in the site since it first opened in 1964 and to mark his long association with Brisbane Markets® his son Troy reflects on his father's legacy and what it means to him.

Forklifts, trains and automobiles

For those who started at Brisbane Markets® in the late 60s, memories of their early years are dominated by the physical labour required to transport produce.

Growers would drive fruit and vegetables to the markets or load them onto trains from growing regions across Queensland and northern NSW, and transport them to shunting yards in Roma Street or South Brisbane.



A young Gary Lower (left) helps his father Bob unload watermelons from a train.

“Blokes in their tabletop trucks would go up to railway, load the produce onto the trucks and bring them back to the market floor where we would unload them and put them in stacks,” Mr Joseph said.

“It was hard work and physically demanding. Everyone back then had a bad back from all the manual handling,” Mr Kedwell said.

In their early years at the markets, both Mr Kedwell and Mr Lower spent time loading produce from the trains. After trade, buyers would load the produce onto their trucks or utes to take back to their shops, or they would return to the trains to load produce for country distribution.

“You could have up to a hundred destinations so you would put the order for each town in the appropriate train wagon,” Mr Lower said.

Watermelons play a leading role in memories of the time, due to the hard work required to load and unload the heavy fruit multiple times by hand.

“The watermelons would all be loose in the train wagons. You’d put the sides up on the truck and have a crew going backwards and forwards. Then you’d bring them back to the market and do it all again,” Mr Lower said.

“We used to put straw between the stacks of watermelons and load them onto the trains for Sydney and Melbourne,” Mr Kedwell said.

In the 1970s all that changed, with the rise of the forklift and an increase in the volume of fresh produce coming to the markets.

“CHEP bins were introduced, starting with watermelons, and that was one of the biggest changes the markets has seen in my time,” Mr Kedwell said.

The first forklift in the markets was a memorable experience.

“I think it was a secondhand one that was bought in from overseas because they just weren’t available in Australia when they first came out. Then, very quickly, more and more arrived,” Mr Lower said.

Mr Kedwell was one of the first forklift operators, during his time at Brisbane Market Coolstore.

“There were about three forklifts and no one had pallet accounts like they do now. I’d drop the bins off, they would get packed and I would collect them again to go into cool storage,” Mr Kedwell said.

While there were just a couple of forklifts in 1970, after the 1974 flood these numbers rose dramatically and the palletisation of the markets quickly followed. As part of the flood recovery and, to adjust to the increased traffic and rise of palletisation, the infrastructure also changed. The roads were paved with bitumen, individual sections were increased in size and cold room design improved and grew to incorporate the new pallets.

By 1980 there were approximately 80 forklifts in the markets and by the 1990s that figure had more than doubled. Now there are almost 400 registered forklifts at Brisbane Markets®.

The Central Trading Area was very different in the 60s and 70s, filled with the hustle and bustle of utes and flat-bed trucks rather than the large semi-trailers and forklifts that are now common.

“It was just chock-a-block in the centre with all these little utes parked in the front,” Mr Lower said.



Ted Beaton

H.E. Heather and Co

“In the 1960s I was in partnership with my Dad in a small supermarket in St George. We were members of the IG Group, the largest in Australia at the time. I was holidaying in Brisbane in October 1969 and received a surprise phone call from Dad asking if I could pop out to the markets and purchase him six boxes of tomatoes.

I had no idea where the market was, but found it the next morning and ran into Jimmy Clinch, who was so helpful. He took me around to meet the wholesalers and we found some nice wooden cases of tomatoes at J.H. Leavy. We arranged for them to be transported to St George and they arrived the next day.

Dad called to compliment me on the quality of the tomatoes - the best he had ever seen. But he queried the \$10 price tag, he’d been paying \$18! He asked if I could arrange to purchase 30 boxes so he could put them on special, so I went back and got 30 boxes at \$8. Dad made a killing - and then I find I’m spending my holidays purchasing all sorts of fruits for him.

After about a week of this I was telling the IG Group manager Gordon Robertson my story and he immediately asked if I would become a buyer for him, with a 20c per case commission. He made it clear I would have to sell myself to the group.

Discussing this proposition with Dad was difficult because he expected me to take over the supermarket so he could retire. But typical Dad wished me the best and away I went to Brisbane to start a new venture. Jim introduced me to Alf Chave who gave me one none-voting share to his company which allowed me to get into the markets early. Gordon arranged for an office beside him in Albion and I started in the Brisbane Market in November 1969.

I took over the purchasing for Dad and Laurie Doyle, the manager of six of Philip Leong stores in Townsville. Soon after I received a telex from Laurie requesting 100 cases of oranges size 100. This was incredible - I had only purchased six cases at most for Dad. When the oranges arrived, Laurie was over the moon with the quality and price, ordering another 100 cases within a week.

I phoned all the IG Members every week and within two years I was buying for all 54 members and 74 stores. By 1975 I was selling to some 250 stores throughout Australia with a team of 20 staff and was the largest supplier of fruit and vegetables in Australia.”



Steph West Rising Sun Produce

"I finished Year 12 in 1966 and a girlfriend arranged for me to get a job in the markets. I started at R. Prosky Produce in 1967.

When I first started, it was very awkward getting to work because I didn't drive at that stage. I had to catch a train to Corinda and then wait for a bus to get me to Rocklea. At that time of the morning, if you missed the bus or the train you'd be stuck. But there were quite a few people that lived in the area, so once I got to know people I was able to hitch a lift.

I have always been a cashier. Everywhere I have worked, I have done the same thing: receive the stock coming in, take the cash payments, enter the sales data, check the stocktake, do the banking, and send information to Brismark. When I was younger a group of girls would go out for lunch or to the movies but they don't tend to do that sort of thing now.

When I started everything was done by hand, there were no computers or mobile phones, and we had PAX directory books for different numbers in the section. It was a nightmare learning to go from paper to computers, but now I can get a job anywhere in the markets and just slot right in.

I have worked for a lot of different businesses in the Brisbane Produce Market and since I was pretty good at cashiering I have stuck with it in every section where I have worked. I've never ever been without the job.

I was married in 1975 and travelled overseas in 1976. But when we came back to Australia I was asked to come back to the markets.

Now, I work on public entry days and sometimes I am asked to serve, which I absolutely love. I know a lot of the customers and they are all really nice.

I love the hours because you finish early and still have time to do things like the shopping or medical appointments. I don't think I could ever work somewhere else."

"Right up until the 80s, the Central Trading Area was where all the produce was unloaded and disseminated. Now 80% goes straight to individual warehouses," Mr Kedwell said.

"There weren't many buildings here when I started, just the Central Trading Area really. There were a couple of warehouses with big refrigerated cold rooms made of timber, nothing like what they have now," Mrs West said.

In 1977, the Covered Unloading Area was built in the centre of the Central Trading Area and this was gradually extended over time until the new roof that covered the entire area between Buildings B, C, and D was installed in 2015, a move that was warmly welcomed.

The changing face of work

Technology has played a huge role in the way work is conducted at Brisbane Markets®. Computers, mobile phones, increased security and Brismark's Credit Service have all changed the way markets businesses operate.

"Up until the 90s there were five office girls handling all the cashiering, invoicing and grower payments. Nowadays, there is usually only two people doing the same job. I would walk around collecting all the invoices and then we would go to the banks carrying thousands of dollars. I could have been robbed, but we thought nothing of it at the time," Mrs West said.

The introduction of Brismark's Credit Service in 1973 significantly changed Mrs West's role as a cashier and the exit of the banks from the Commercial Centre in the 80s and 90s also had an effect.

"The introduction of the Credit Service was absolutely fabulous, the system is brilliant and totally changed the way we worked. When I started, you just parked anywhere. Over time, the parking has improved and your car is now protected from the weather," Mrs West said.

Security on site has increased over time and the necessary increases in regulation has reduced the "larrikins", the transient workers who made the Brisbane Markets® their home in its early years and are now remembered fondly as a feature of a bygone era.

"I remember a real character, he would live and work in the markets. He never wore shoes, he would move from one section to another doing odd jobs and you'd have to check any waste piles to make sure he wasn't asleep before you got rid of them. There's no way someone like that could work here now," Mr Joseph said.

Larger transport carriers, mobile phones and buying habits have all played a part in reducing the number of buyers who come in person to Brisbane Markets®.

"The selling floors are probably less hectic now because of technological advancements changing the way we take orders. While the amount of buyers in the markets may have reduced, mobile phones have changed the way we do business further reducing the buyers who have to physically come to the markets," Mr Beaton said.

While there have been dramatic changes in the way people work, the people themselves haven't changed much over the years. The sense of community and camaraderie is still present. There is an ability amongst the wholesalers to maintain productive working relationships and close friendships, despite the inherent competitiveness of the job.

“The people here have always been wonderful, salt-of-the-earth, good people with a dash of intrigue,” Mr Kedwell said.

“If someone gets hurt you hear about it and everyone is concerned. It’s almost like a big family, everyone wants to know what’s going on and what everyone else is doing,” Mr Lower said.

“I love meeting the people. They have always been very nice, I’ve never met anyone who has been nasty,” Mrs West said.

Mr Beaton said that building relationships with buyers was more important than ever, to secure their follow up order.

“It actually almost trumps the quality of the products. Everyone understands that over the course of 12 months, or even within a season, you can have quality fluctuations within a brand. But a good relationship can mitigate against those ups and downs of quality. That’s been consistent over the past 50 years,” Mr Beaton said.

When you work in close quarters with your competitors and continue to do business with the same people every day, the way you deal with people makes a difference.

“You’ve got to be honest and treat people with respect, because if you don’t you won’t last long in this business,” Mr Kedwell said.

“I’ve always seen Dad be very honest in his dealings, especially in his communications with growers. He likes to be very upfront and tackle any issues head on, he doesn’t let things stew. So I have tried to emulate that in the way I work,” Mr Beaton said.

Growers remain the roots of the market, without whom wholesalers would be out of a job and Australians would be paying a lot more for imported produce. But the life of a grower has changed dramatically over the years.

“Changes in legislation and laws have resulted in growers assuming a lot more responsibility for their product,” Mr Lower said.

“Looking at our growing regions 40 years ago, you could have up to 250 growers in the region. Today, you might have up to ten growers in a region, but those ten would be growing more than the 250 did in the 70s. The volumes of produce are a lot higher than they were,” Mr Joseph said.

Additional legislation, longer growing seasons and seasonal weather changes bring increased risk for growers.

“It costs a lot of money to get the produce in the ground long before growers see their first returns – it is a big risk to take,” Mr Joseph said.

Taking control of our own destiny

The acquisition of the Brisbane Markets® site from the state government in 2002 was a pivotal change, one that was a decade in the making. During the 80s, growth at Brisbane Markets® had stagnated under the state government and wholesalers were eager for more input into the direction of the site.

“The state government wouldn’t take account of our requirements and there was no long-term plan in place to guide the management of the site. It just wasn’t a very good place to do business, it was getting run down and they were doing nothing at all to modernise it,” Mr Lower said.



Tony Joseph Alfred E. Chave

“I’m the third generation of my family involved in this industry. My grandfather migrated from Lebanon around 1916 and began growing bananas and pineapples at Taylors Arm on the Mid North Coast of NSW, where my father and his family grew up. Soon after I was born, my mum and dad moved to Orange and started a fruit and vegetable wholesale business called Country Fruit Distributors.

In February 1967, we moved to Brisbane because Country Fruit Distributors wanted to source a fruit supply from Brisbane. I started working for Alec Barker at P. Erickson and Son. I worked there for over a year, then I was called up for national service and spent two and a half years in the army.

While I was away, Country Fruit Distributors purchased two businesses in the markets: W.E. Potters and Alfred E. Chave. In 1973, I returned to Australia and returned to the markets to work as a manager and fruit salesman at Potter Chave, as the combined business was known at that time.

By that point, Country Fruit Distributors had changed its name to All States Food and had grown to become the largest publicly listed fruit and vegetable business company in the Southern Hemisphere, with a presence in the Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide central markets, and a distribution network throughout central western NSW.

By the time I had met my wife, Maree, my uncles and father were winding down their business so I asked if they would sell me the Alfred E. Chave component. In August 1975, Maree and I became engaged and I entered into a business partnership with her father, Simon George Snr.

For 19 years, we had a wonderful partnership together, I learned a lot from Simon. He was a great mentor and partner. He was tough, but always very fair.

In 1994, when Simon decided to retire, I brought my own family into the business. My two sons Anthony and Paul, two daughters Nicole and Catherine, and Maree and I have always been very close and all of them, at one stage or another, have been involved in the running of Alfred E. Chave.

Paul came into the business immediately after school, which I never wanted them to do but Paul insisted. Anthony joined the business when he was 20. Now, they are both directors of Alfred E. Chave. Maree and I have a succession plan and we began the transition two years ago. We’re not in a hurry, we just want to make sure we get it right.”



Peter Kedwell Pershouse Produce

"I started at Alfred E. Chave in December 1969 when I was 15 years old. My mum raised six kids by herself in Holland Park and it was very difficult to get to the markets in the early hours of the morning. I had to travel to Woolloongabba or Stones Corner first, then catch a train to Rocklea.

I nearly didn't last more than six months because I had a dispute with someone in the office and quit. Alf Chave was an amazing man, he wrote a letter to my mother saying he thought I had a future in the industry, I was a good worker, and would she please talk to me about staying. So I stayed. He doubled my pay and organised a lift for me every day. It was absolutely amazing to have a boss that would do that for a 15 year old.

After Alf died, I went to work for Ted Beaton for a year then I moved to the Brisbane Market Coolstore, working for Wilf Stokes. Around the time of the 1974 flood, I resigned from the Coolstore to go travelling around New Zealand. When I came back, Ted asked me to set up his frozen food distribution centre and his grocery business in Murrarie. When he sold that business I returned to the markets to work for H.E. Heather and Co, which I did until I got married and started my own business in July 1981.

All up I think I've had over 14 businesses at Brisbane Markets® and I think I've had a warehouse in most buildings on site! The key to any business you have got to be fulfilling a need, if you are not fulfilling a need then you're on the way out.

In life, you really need good role models and mentors. From the very first moment of my working career I was lucky to find them. Alf Chave for giving me the opportunity and my first manager Sid Mann - a great salesman. There was also Arch Martin, Murray Livingston and my longest serving business partner in the Brisbane Markets®, David Pershouse.

But the most important one is Ted Beaton, who has had a number of businesses and great success at the markets over the years. Ted is a very astute and lovely man, he was my hero. He is honest, hardworking and he taught me how to be tough."

Plans to buy the Brisbane Markets® site had been in consideration for at least a decade. In 1994, Landacq was formed by a majority of Brisbane Markets® wholesalers and land was purchased to provide an alternative site outside of government ownership.

"We bought a parcel of land in Yatala that we thought would make an appropriate site for a new market. In the end we had to make an ultimatum and we were very serious about it. We went to the government and told them we had land, wholesalers and money behind us," Mr Joseph said.

Mr Lower described the decision to purchase the Rocklea site as a major life event that he will never forget and a milestone for the wholesaling sector.

"I remember going home afterwards and thinking this is beyond my wildest dreams. It goes to show that if you can find the right people, they can figure out a way to do anything," Mr Lower said.

After pressure from wholesalers, the Beattie state government put the Brisbane Markets® site to tender, and in 2002 Landacq's \$73.85 million bid for the site was successful.

"It has been absolutely wonderful. It was a huge change in mentality from just maintaining the assets to what it is now, which is to look after, nurture and grow the site," Mr Kedwell said.

Industry-based ownership and strong leadership has been a key component of the success of Brisbane Markets Limited (BML), as Landacq is now known, and close constructive ties with major shareholder Brismark has led to industry-driven improvements across the site.

"BML was born from a necessity for us, as wholesalers, to control our own destiny. Brismark and BML work very well together and both Brismark and wholesaler interests are very well represented on the BML board," Mr Beaton said.

Mr Lower and Mr Beaton highlighted the importance of Brismark as a collective and effective voice for its membership, a role it has played for 79 years.

"Not only does Brismark provide services to all its members, it also provides a voice for all the wholesalers whether it's dealing with the government on Horticulture Code of Conduct issues or dealing with BML as landlords. As joint CEO of both Brismark and BML, Andrew runs each organisation at arm's length from each other and I think he wears both hats brilliantly," Mr Beaton said.

There is a sense of pride amongst the wholesalers at what has been achieved since taking over the site 18 years ago.

"The site and some of its buildings may be 50 years old, but we have been able to transition into a modern markets community," Mr Joseph said.

"BML spends millions of dollars on the site and its infrastructure. They invest a lot of money into projects that Brismark is interested in. They support the retailers and advertising campaigns. At the end of the day, BML are our landlord, but I consider them to be a relatively friendly landlord," Mr Beaton said.

Since the inception of BML, growth has increased exponentially. Often, these changes go unnoticed because potential issues are fixed before they become a problem to the markets community.

“People don’t see problems, because we’ve already fixed them before they become an issue. As a board, we are thinking ahead all the time and future-proofing the site,” Mr Joseph said.

“You can see the changes we’ve had in recent years, the undercover area in the Central Trading Area has been completed, new warehouses are going up. Brisbane Markets® was very stagnant for 30 years and now we are seeing a lot of changes, because BML as an organisation is getting stronger and they’re investing more,” Mr Beaton said.

Hope for the future

There is a palpable sense of excitement for the future of the industry, both from young blood entering the wholesaling business and consumer who continue to eat Australian fruit and vegetables.

Mr Beaton and Mr Kedwell both commented on the higher standing the markets now have in the community, driven by a thirst for knowledge in the consumer.

“In the old days the markets didn’t have a lot of prestige” Mr Kedwell said. “Now consumers love to know about their fresh produce: where it comes from, the people who have grown it, how far it has travelled.”

“In the past, the salesmen had a bad reputation – they were seen as being a bit dodgy or not looking after the best interest of the buyer. Now, there is honesty because they have to meet the buyers’ expectation to get follow up orders – building relationships with your buyers is much more important now,” Mr Beaton said.

While they may have reduced their involvement in their businesses, Mr Joseph, Ted Beaton and Mr Kedwell keep returning to the markets for the friendships they have built over the past 50 years.

“I won’t get the chance to miss anything because I’ll end up dying in here. Even though I’ve nearly completed the handover of the business to my sons, it is the people I enjoy so I will keep coming back,” Mr Joseph said.

Mrs West is semi-retired and only works two days a week, an arrangement that suits her lifestyle.

“When I finally retire, I won’t miss getting up early, but I will miss all the people and the ease of working here. You aren’t stuck in a little office chained to your keyboard. You can move around and I just love the atmosphere, it’s brilliant,” Mrs West said.

Everyone who has reached 50 years at Brisbane Markets® agrees: the future is in good hands.



Wayne, Ross and Gary Lower

Gary Lower J. Allen Pty Ltd

“As a school boy, I would come in with my father Bob Lower who had a fruit shop in Kenmore. I’d walk around with a trolley, picking up purchases, helping him load and then he would drop me off at school. I’m actually the third generation – my grandfather was an interstate merchant trader who operated out of Building H.

Working at the markets is all I know, I came straight out of high school. My family had a transport business for about 15 years and then we got the opportunity to purchase J. Allen’s in 1980. We recently had our 40 year anniversary.

It is very much a family business, the whole family has worked in it at one stage or another. My two brothers, Ross and Wayne, started at the markets about five years after I did and they are actively involved in the business to this day. It is their support that allows me to be active on the Brismark board. I enjoy the industry and have never regretted being here. My family has done very well out of it and it has provided for our kids and grandkids.

When I’m interviewing people for a job at J. Allen, I tell them if you don’t like getting out of the bed at 2am or your family can’t manage you leaving home in the early hours of the morning, then the job won’t be suitable. These are the things you have to take into consideration.

I have always gotten up in the early hours of the morning so it is just the norm for me now, but I do like that you get home fairly early in the afternoon. But it does impact your social life and you have to have an understanding family and partner, I’ve been very fortunate in that regard. There’s a hard fast pace at the markets and you have got to be able to think on your feet. Those who like it, love it, and those who don’t, leave.”

Celebrating 50 years of service

Have you, or someone you know, worked at Brisbane Markets® for over 50 years? Brisbane Markets Limited is calling people who have worked at the markets for 50 years, so they can be honoured appropriately. Please email admin@brisbanemarkets.com.au with details so that we can add them to the 50 Year Service list.



BRISBANE
**PRODUCE
MARKET**®

QUEENSLAND'S



heart

— OF —

fresh

PRODUCE