



A Family Tradition

In an environment of rationalisation where the number of Australian poultry manufacturing businesses has consistently been contracting, family-run Cordina Farms is bucking the trend and staying true to its roots after more than eight decades.

Images by David Benson

In 1930, Rosario Cordina established a small farm in Sydney, New South Wales. His teenage son Joseph quickly recognised an opportunity to provide fresh, ready-to-use chickens to the local restaurant scene and this led to the birth of Cordina Farms in 1945. It has since evolved to become a leader in the Australian market with operations still echoing the family values instilled in those early days.

Fourth-generation Louise Cordina leads the business today together with her father John Cordina, who has headed up the family firm since 1975. She remembers doing odd jobs around the office from when she was a very young child and then working in the business's factories for pocket money when she was old enough. Since joining the business full time in 1996, it's been a natural progression through the ranks until moving into the role of CEO of one of the group's entities in 2010. More recently, Louise has stepped into the leadership role across the broader group. "I think when you can say your first childhood memory is of a chicken factory then you know you have well and truly grown up in the industry," she laughs.

"We have been really lucky in our succession that we have had the right people in the family at the right time," Louise notes. "Going back to the early days when my grandfather started the company, that was the beginning of the industry in Australia. It was really all about networking and being an opportunist. That was Joseph's strong point and to this day, at 91 years young, he sees an opportunity in every situation. In my father John and his brother Daniel's era, the business and the industry had changed considerably, growing into a science of its own. It became very much about efficiency, integration, further processing, and navigating a challenging environment driven largely by value. John's an auditor and accountant by trade and was able to take the hard-earned reputation and potential of the business and hone it into a sustainable model that was systemised and scalable.

"Today, in the current generation of the family, there is myself, and my cousin Adrian Garnett in the role of continuous improvement manager. We are dealing with a different kind of consumer—one who is becoming more conscious about where their food comes

from. They take a deeper interest in the welfare of the products they are buying, how far it has travelled and what is really in it. With an evolving consumer and market, it has become more about strategic positioning, understanding who your customer is and what your need for being in the market is. That just happens to be an area that I am really passionate about.

"There have been numerous members of the family over the years who have made a great contribution to the business and that certainly extends to the broader 'family' of team members, who while they may not be connected by blood, have become as much a part of the family as I am."

While the industry has undergone dramatic consolidation over recent decades, Cordina Farms has managed to keep a stronghold thanks to its flexible, agile, and innovative approach. While the market has ultimately been good to it, Louise says it has also presented a number of challenges due to its competitive, complex, and fickle nature. "Manufacturing in Australia is not easy. We operate in an environment which is high volume and low margin, which >

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- Louise Cordina

adds another degree of complexity to any business.”

Part of Cordina Farms’ strategic plan to address the fluctuating marketplace is to have “awesome people” in the team. Louise says the business already has a “fantastic base” of loyal and long-term employees but it’s also focused on injecting new talent to complement them. A new position—Head of People and Culture—was created to address this. “That is probably the best way to convey the importance we are placing on our people. We are really serious about the value of culture in the business and the direct correlation between our people and our ability to execute our strategic plans.”

This great working culture extends to Cordina Farms’ suppliers and business partners.

“Working with Cordina has allowed us to form an innovation partnership that has delivered breakthrough category innovation as well as award-winning products. A thorough understanding of each other’s capabilities and strengths was vital to delivering great product.” - Adrian Cester, CEO, Flavour Makers

“We look for people in our suppliers’ markets who are us in their world. They don’t necessarily have to be the biggest players, but they need to be the ones who are the most passionate, flexible, and willing to go that extra mile when it comes down to it. That helps us to succeed.

“We genuinely strive to engage with our customers in a different way. We represent the best of both worlds, with the history and stability to provide our customers with confidence, but the flexibility and responsiveness that’s normally associated with a smaller company.

“Consumers today don’t want to make a choice between good value and a product that they can feel good about. The Australian consumer wants products that can tick both boxes. They are also becoming more sophisticated and adventurous about what they would like to try. TV shows like *MasterChef* and the large amount of food media that exists today

have helped create a significant shift in consumer trends.”

Cordina Farms recently opened a new multimillion-dollar facility on New South Wales’s Central Coast to allow it to better position its partners to deliver on these changing consumer trends. Cordina’s approach to business partnership clearly translates into results. It has been acknowledged by its major retail partner Coles Supermarkets and its food-service partner Nando’s, with Supplier of the Year honours. Most recently, Cordina has garnered a retail Product of the Year award for the very first range launched out of the new facility.

Over four generations, the business has built itself up to be a brand based on family traditions, hard work, and innovation. The past echoes in its vision for the future and will continue to do so under the current generation of leadership. •



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Tri Tech has been a provider of refrigeration systems, service, and maintenance to Cordina Farms for more than 20 years.

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