



Ben Schimke

General Manager – Wholesale Fresh Produce Group

While most Australians were celebrating Australia's bicentenary and the start of Expo '88 in Brisbane, a young farmer, Ben Schimke, began driving a forklift for Brisbane Produce Market's heavy produce wholesalers, Baird Produce Pty Ltd.

The Gatton based Ben had grown up on a farm and had six weeks to fill before going back to picking potatoes.

He noticed a job for a forklift driver and store man on a notice board at his local Commonwealth Employment Service. It paid well and he knew about fresh produce, so he applied, and got the job.

"It was better hours than farming, with a start and early finish time and I knew I would have money in the bank for all my effort, so I after the six weeks, I stayed on, and have been there ever since," Ben said.

Ben quickly picked up the new role but wanted to stay challenged. Over the years he took an interest in the Quality Assurance (QA) side of the business, learned about buying and selling and even put his time into study so he became a Certified Safe Quality Food Consultant.

This study was all-important for the larger role he was growing into to look after Baird's QA to meet the tough standards the supermarket chains were demanding from wholesalers.

He was on the floor selling, actively learning about sales, and over 22 years rose through the ranks. He also took on additional studies, including a Diploma in Business Management, and the industry accredited Fresh Produce Executive program.

Ben was promoted to Assistant Manager.

"Once Fresh Produce Group took over Baird's, I could see a world of opportunity's open up for anyone who was determined and persistent in this industry," Ben said.

"I may be general manager now, but from the start I learned that I could grow and make a difference in the industry and that I didn't have to come to work to simply stack produce."

Ben has sat on the Brismark Junior Executive for four years. He is also a keen participant and supporter of training run through Brismark including management, QA, first aid and Workplace Health and Safety.