

COOL COMPANIES

Founders sticking to their principles

Company Aussie Farmers Direct.

When fresh food delivery franchise Aussie Farmers Direct started six years ago, its founders wanted to build a commercially profitable business that gave back to Australia's farming communities.

It's an approach that continues to inspire its chief executive officer, Braeden Lord.

"The underlying approach of the business is practical, but it also has a very strong empathy for the Australian farming community and, more recently, Australian manufacturing," he says.

It seems to be working. The business has 140,000 customers and turned over \$134 million last year.

"We used to order [from farmers] by the half-trailer load, now it's a semi-trailer load," Lord says.

INITIATIVES

- Strict focus on 100 per cent Australian-grown product.
- No outsourcing jobs to overseas: call centre is in Melbourne.
- Twice winner of *BRW's* Fast Franchise award.
- High awareness of impact on supply chain.
- Dairy farmers are paid 8¢ a litre more than the farm gate price, to encourage a sustainable Australian dairy industry.
- Eschews use of plastic bags.
- Campaign last year helping farmers sell excess oranges increased sales for company and helped stop unsold product being ploughed back into ground.
- Lobbied government for investigation into the effects of \$1 milk sales.
- Its foundation has donated more than a quarter of a million dollars to charities supporting people in the bush.
- Career development a focus for company's 300 direct employees. Staff from depot workers to IT



Fighting back ... Braeden Lord says Aussie Farmers Direct has set up its own production plant for milk.

encouraged to move through different roles within the company.

Keeping things local has not always been easy.

"Five or six years ago, milk was 30 per cent foreign owned. Now, it's 90 per cent foreign owned or manufactured," Lord says.

To counter the business risk, Aussie Farmers Direct has set up its own production plant.

"We've invested in order to secure our supply, and have a closer bond with one of our mainstays, milk," he says.

While the focus of keeping it Australian is embedded into this company, surely it costs more to do?

"We don't get distracted by that. If we were to outsource our IT [or other parts of the business] overseas, I'm sure there would be savings, but fundamentally it wouldn't sit with our approach," Lord says. "Our franchisees are absolutely weathered to our principles."

SUE WHITE