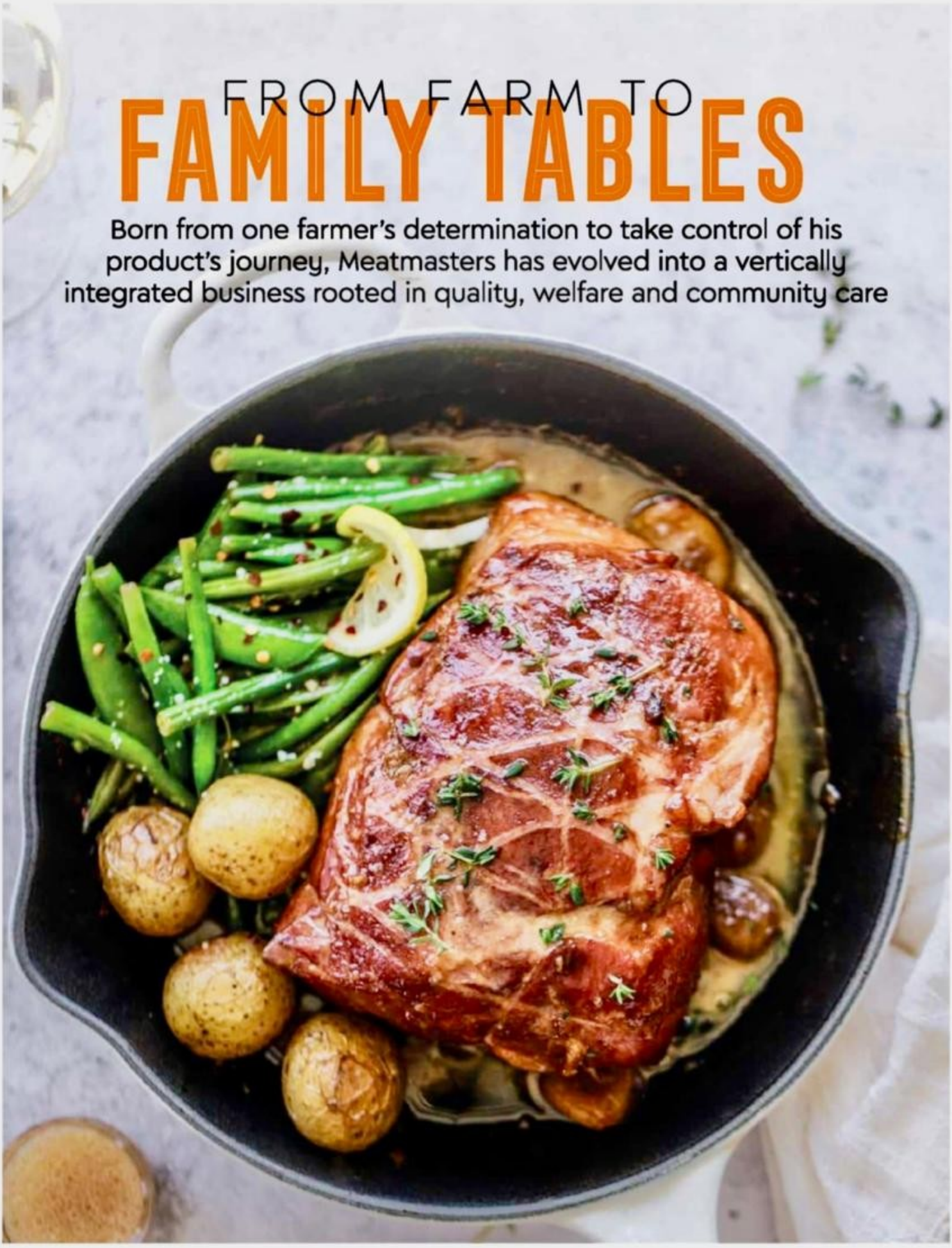
FROM FARM TO FAMILY TABLES

Born from one farmer's determination to take control of his product's journey, Meatmasters has evolved into a vertically integrated business rooted in quality, welfare and community care





If you trace the story of Meatmasters back far enough, you won't find a boardroom or a flashy launch campaign. You'll find a farm.

Back in 1995, one of the company's founders, Patrick Friend, was farming cattle in Vryheid. Like many livestock farmers at the time, he found himself at the mercy of market prices and was a price-taker at the very end of a long value chain. The work was hard, the product was good, but the margins were unpredictable. It didn't take long to realise that producing livestock alone wasn't enough to build a sustainable business.

So he made a decision that would shape the future of Meatmasters: If you want control, you need to move closer to the customer.

The first step was buying a butchery. Then another. And another. What started as a farm-based operation slowly began expanding into private slaughter, retail and, eventually, processing. The big turning point came with the purchase and conversion of a chicken processing plant into a beef processing plant. Later, pork entered the picture, opening the door to even greater vertical integration.

The opening of a new Meatmasters butchery signals continued growth in bringing premium, farm-sourced meat closer to the community.

Meatmasters' refreshed branding marks a confident new chapter.



Like any growing business, there were lessons along the way. At one point, there were seven butcheries operating in the same town. It was ambitious – perhaps too ambitious. Consolidation followed, and with it, a sharper focus. Instead of spreading themselves thin across multiple retail outlets, the team invested in strengthening their processing and manufacturing capabilities.

That decision laid the foundation for the fully integrated operation Meatmasters is today.

At its core, however, the philosophy hasn't changed: produce premium-quality meat, keep it affordable, and treat people; suppliers, staff and customers alike, with respect.

What 'Farm to Plate' Really Means

These days, 'farm to plate' is a phrase that appears on menus and packaging everywhere. For Meatmasters, it's not a marketing line. It's a structural reality.

The majority of the company's shareholders are pig producers. That means involvement and oversight start long before processing. It begins with crops grown for feed. Those crops move through feed mills into piggeries and then to market.

The recently expanded processing plant can handle well over 23 tonnes of pork per day. From primal cuts, boxed wholesale meat is produced, either destined for customers directly or for further processing into sausages, hams, bacon and smoked favourites.

On the retail side, the business operates a premium butchery under the Natalia Meatmasters name, alongside several Roots butcheries designed to serve value-focused communities. Distribution extends nationally, with a particularly strong footprint across the eastern regions of South Africa.

This level of integration isn't just about efficiency. It's about control over freshness, consistency and quality at every step. This is because when you oversee the process from feed to final cut, you can protect standards in a way that fragmented supply chains simply can't.

Quality You Can Trace

For today's consumer, quality is no longer just about taste. It's about safety, traceability and transparency.

At Meatmasters, traceability starts long before processing. Because the business is involved from the farming stage, livestock can be tracked throughout their lifecycle. Systems and software are in place at every stage to maintain compliance and documentation.

The company is fully compliant with the South African Meat Safety Act and is in the process of completing FSSC 22000 certification. But compliance, they emphasise, is the baseline not the goal.

The broader focus is on delivering high-value protein that is safe, nutritious and consistent. And importantly, accessible.

Through the Roots butcheries in particular, Meatmasters aims to make premium meat affordable for as many households as possible.

Sustainability and Welfare in Practice

Conversations around meat inevitably turn to sustainability and animal welfare, and rightly so. Consumers want to know not only what they're eating, but how it was produced.

Across the Meatmasters business, farms and piggeries are Pork360 certified, adhering to recognised welfare and environmental standards. Welfare protocols are not static; they are continuously reviewed and improved.



Following recommendations from the SPCA, the company is currently fine-tuning its processes to further enhance animal welfare. Holding facilities exceed required space standards, and animal handling practices are regularly assessed.

Beyond the farm, an internal Social and Ethics Committee meets regularly and reports directly to the board. Its mandate is broad: staff well-being, community involvement, sponsorships and responsible business practices all fall within its scope.

Meatmasters is committed to maintaining good working conditions and fair pay, with wages that are higher than the national minimum wage, reflecting its belief that people are its most important asset.

It's a recognition that sustainability isn't a single initiative, but rather an ongoing commitment.

Tradition Meets Demand in the Smokehouse

Step into the smokehouse and you'll find the comforting aroma of bacon, hams and Russians – staples in many South African kitchens.

In earlier years, Meatmasters produced a wide range of niche, premium deli products in-house. But consumer behaviour evolves, and so does product strategy. Today, demand is firmly centred on high-volume, everyday favourites.

Smokies for the braai. Russians for quick meals. Bacon and ham for lunchboxes and breakfasts.

Rather than trying to be everything to everyone, the company has refined its focus: produce good-quality, naturally



smoked products at scale. Very niche deli items are sourced from specialist producers when needed.

Tradition still plays a role in smoking methods and flavour development. But the product mix reflects how South African families are actually cooking and eating – practical, flavourful and affordable.

The Rise of Pork

If there's one area the team is particularly excited about, it's pork.

Compared to countries like Germany, where pork is a dietary staple, South Africa's per capita pork consumption remains relatively low. That gap, however, represents opportunity.

Consumers are increasingly recognising pork's versatility, value and flavour. Cuts like ribs, fresh pork portions and bacon are gaining popularity particularly when priced competitively.

For budget-conscious households, pork offers a cost-effective protein option. For premium shoppers, it provides flavour depth and variety. Meatmasters is responding by expanding its pork range across fresh cuts, deli items and everyday processed products.

With the right retail offering and consumer education, pork has the potential to compete strongly with other proteins in the local market.

Community at the Core

For all its operational scale, Meatmasters' roots remain local.

The company supports schools, sporting events, trail runs and cycling races ensuring that they invest in the communities where staff and customers live.

It's a simple belief: when employees feel respected and valued, quality follows naturally.

Looking ahead, one of the most promising growth areas lies in expanding its retail presence and strengthening partnerships with smaller businesses. Rather than competing with *shisanyamas* and spaza shops, Meatmasters aims to support them by supplying quality meat at viable prices so they can strengthen and grow their own businesses.

The company's vision is clear: to supply high-quality meat and meat products to an expanding market through full value chain ownership, ensuring true farm-to-fork integration, value creation and sustainability. A key strategic priority is to broaden its retail footprint, with the aim of selling a larger portion of its products through its own retail outlets. Guided by its core values – people, quality, service, integrity, excellence and loyalty – Meatmasters continues to build relationships with employees, customers, suppliers and industry stakeholders as it shapes its next chapter.

Nearly Three Decades On

Nearly 30 years after that first farm-based insight, Meatmasters has grown into a vertically integrated operation with national reach. Yet the driving principle remains remarkably consistent.

Control the process. Protect the quality. Keep it affordable. Treat people well.

From crops grown for feed to smoked bacon on a breakfast plate, the journey is deliberate and hands-on. And in an industry often criticised for opacity and complexity, that transparency feels refreshingly grounded.

From farm roots to family tables, the story of Meatmasters is one of steady growth and a reminder that sometimes the strongest businesses are the ones that never forget where they started.



Recently, the new Roots Butchery in Paulpietersburg was officially opened by the mayor with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Golden roast leg of pork, slow-roasted to perfection. For the full recipe, visit *sapork.co.za*.

Behind every counter, experienced butchers and passionate staff prepare each cut with skill and pride.

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