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SA artisan producers hit by Australia Post food ban

NEWS

South Australia artisan food producers are confused and frustrated by Australia Post's decision to stop delivering perishable food items from June 30, forcing them to pause interstate orders and scramble to find alternative delivery options.



One of Woodside Cheese Wrights Mother's Day hampers. Image: supplied

Australia Post recently announced it would stop sending perishable foods including meats, seafood, dairy and fruit because of food safety and regulatory requirements across different states and territories, but would continue to carry “Category 2” items such as chocolate.

It said it was working with customers and industry regulators to “determine the path forward”.

Nuriootpa-based small batch company Steiny’s Traditional Mettwurst owner Natasha Goldsmith said she was “frustrated” by the decision, which would affect about 15 per cent of the business that relied on online orders.

“Our product is a cooked, fermented product – it doesn’t need refrigeration – it can stay at ambient temperatures and it has a shelf life, so I don’t understand,” she said.

“What happens now?”

customers, so some of them will only go to business and that creates an issue.

“The other problem is the cost. They (couriers) are sometimes twice or three times the amount and we as a business can't take that on and you can't expect the consumer to take it.

“If they have to pay twice the amount they are not going to want to buy it – that in itself is a major impact.”

Cheese producer Kris Lloyd of Woodside Cheese Wrights said she also was searching for an alternative delivery option.

She had already paused interstate cheese and hamper orders, which accounted for between 15-20 per cent of her business, due to Australia Post's “unreliability”.

“I sent my son a test package ... we're talking express post to CBD Melbourne and it arrived four days later,” Lloyd said.

“The worst one that I've had was a cheese boxes that arrived eight days after we posted it ... to Sydney.

“Limp and slimy is not how you want your cheese order arriving. On another instance it arrived the next day. It's the inconsistency.

“That's my brand that's out there and ... we've had so many instances when people are incredibly disappointed.”

insulate, whether it's a bag or a box, we would insulate the bag or the box with a wool pack and that would keep it cold for at least 24 hours, longer and provides longevity," she said.

"This is a great opportunity for someone, there's a real gap in the market for perishable products to be delivered like a pair of shoes. It has to be delivered refrigerated, really in order to close that cold chain, that's what should happen.

“It just strikes me as incredible that you can land a helicopter on Mars but you can't get cheese to Toowoomba.”

The change has also created confusion for native food business owner Rebecca Sullivan, who said the brand relied on small amounts of fruit delivered via Australia Post from interstate to infuse a range of teas, oils and vinegars.

Sullivan said while the company's products themselves were not perishable she was concerned about how the new rules would

delay for us," she said.

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“It’s a pain because to use a courier rather than Australia Post makes everything more expensive and we try to use Australia Post wherever we can.”

It comes as Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman Bruce Billson urges the taxpayer-funded company to defer its “abrupt decision” to stop delivering perishable goods, saying it would be a “crushing small blow” to small business producers.

He said given Australia Post controlled 80 per cent of the total delivery market, the company’s self-imposed June deadline should be delayed to enable producers time to consider the impact on their businesses and find alternative options.

“We strongly encourage Australia Post to consider the impact this will have on their small business customers and to work

“So many small businesses moved to selling their products online as a result of the COVID crisis. They need some additional time to consider what options they have to fulfil their orders.

“Australia Post says the carriage of perishable food requirements differ state-by-state however there has been a national Food Regulation Agreement in place since 2000.

“My office has reached out to Australia Post and the state small business commissioners, who have all expressed their willingness facilitate discussions with industry regulators, to help resolve any issues Australia Post is experiencing across the delivery network.”

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