

# Massive net gain for problem-solving firm

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Ennio International managing director Ennio Mercuri with sister Julie Ardill, left, and wife Mary Mercuri at the Holden Hill manufacturing facility. Picture: Supplied

SOUTH Australian business Ennio International is expanding its manufacturing facility at Holden Hill to boost production by another 30 per cent on growing demand.

The family-run business employs 85 staff at the current site, and will build an extension within months to boost production of its core netting used to encase meat and smallgoods, and the elastic loops it supplies for PPE face masks made by another SA manufacturer, Detmold Group.

Ennio International, primarily a textile manufacturer founded by Gervasio and Giovanna Mercuri, has received accolades for its design and craft through its long history, first as the owner of fashion brand Mercuri Knitwear from 1957 to 1987, and then through its subsequent move to nettings and casings since 1983 for the global meat and poultry industry.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit last year, Ennio is also making the elastic loops for masks.

"We're seeing growth across our whole product range with exports up 50 per cent this year and domestic sales up about 10 per cent," said managing director Ennio Mercuri, a trained architect who joined his parents in the business in the 1990s.

"The main reason is we problem-solve for customers overseas.

"So, they've moved their purchasing from competitors to us because we've provided further advantages to them with our designs and ideas."

One American customer was facing a peculiar issue of a competitor's turkey product being substituted in the delicatessen because it looked the same.

"They came to us and we created a new netting design and presentation," Mr Mercuri said.

"What we also did was we took out a 'shape trademark' in the US and a design patent so it is now exclusive to them.

"A few years ago, I had the idea to shape trademark the newly designed Ennio netted meat product in the same way the Coke bottle is shape trademarked.

"It's that same concept and it has been very successful with our customer seeing increased sales as a result of changing across from the old design to the new one"

The growth of Ennio is supporting not-for-profit organisation Barkuma, which provides jobs for people with disabilities.

Barkuma's Holden Hill facility undertakes specific sewing and other work for Ennio on six US export products.

Ennio also exports to Canada, New Zealand and Thailand.

"Internally, we have also hired close to 20 new staff since January in SA," Mr Mercuri said.

"Besides Barkuma, we also give out work to other subcontractors for various jobs, including one that works exclusively for us and employs about five staff.

"We're doing medical stuff now, so that's another growing business that we started in about August last year.

"At the moment we are working with Detmold, but we're talking to other people about expanding.

"It's a smaller part of our overall business, but the core competencies are the same.

"What we want to do is support those mass manufacturers with high quality, locally manufactured elastic loops rather than importing it from overseas," he said.

"Overseas suppliers are still the main suppliers in Australia, which is disappointing.

"And I would ask that, I would hope that, governmentowned hospitals and users of PPE would support local manufacturing and jobs, producing high quality products, rather than only look at

the bottom line, or price.

"We have local manufacturers here who've set up and should be supported."

Mr Mercuri said Ennio's strength had been producing "non-standard" products.

"Because of our history in knitting, which is now over 60 years, we can come up with many new ideas and many new patterns and features," he said.

"Yes, there are numerous competitors on a global scale, but very few have the kinds of products that we produce."

Constant learning has also supported the business with Mr Mercuri's wife Mary, who works as export/quality manager for Ennio International, last year completing a Harvard Business School course on aligning strategy and sales with funding support from the Industry Leaders Fund.

Now in its 12th year, ILF's annual program has given \$2.4 million to SA business leaders for professional education.

Mr Mercuri's sister, Julie Ardill, and son James also work in the business.