

Outback Stores upholds food security as a priority

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Outback Stores says food security remains strong in its 40 remote community stores across Australia, as it balances an increase with some supply challenges with a growing lift in sales due to the impact of the global coronavirus pandemic.

The company's chief executive officer Michael Borg says it's maintaining reasonable stock levels across most stores due to forward planning, an increase in deliveries to some stores and its purchase of two additional stock builds.

"The delivery of the first stock build of \$800,000 at cost, the equivalent of four weeks supply per store, is being completed this week," Mr Borg said.

"We've also just spent an additional \$1.1 million to purchase a second stock build of about 19,000 cartons and this will go out over the next fortnight."

"In this last month, all businesses across the supply chain have been asked to step up and go the extra mile.

"We're particularly grateful for the work of major supply partner Metcash who operate the Independent Grocery distribution centres in Alice Springs and Darwin.

"They've done an excellent job supporting remote communities in this moment of need."

The praise comes as Outback Stores reports a notable increase in sales across its stores in the past seven days.

"We believe the rise in sales are due to a number of factors, including an increase in government payments, more people returning to their communities and more people shopping in community stores rather than regional hubs," Mr Borg said.

"It's a sign people are listening to the call from community leaders to avoid travel and "stay on country" to prevent the infectious virus from entering remote communities.

"We want to assure people in communities that while some items may sell out, there is enough food, supplies and goods for everyone - there is no cause for alarm.

"Our message is simple: Only buy what you need - there is enough for everyone."

Outback Stores is experiencing some supply issues with fresh produce and is facing increases in the cost of these goods, but Mr Borg says it has adopted measures to help shoulder the financial burden.

"There has been an increase in the cost price of fresh produce, but we have held the sell prices for key items and where possible have been trying to keep pricing close to that of major supermarkets.

"For example we're still selling loose onions at \$1.99 per kilo, oranges at \$4.99 per kilo, loose washed potatoes at \$3.99 per kilo and carrots at \$2.59 per kilo.

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“In relation to grocery products, we’ve dropped staple line pricing for 60 products across all stores and are working hard at adding additional promotional activity to provide improved value for customers.”

Mr Borg also commended the Outback Stores team and the collective effort of stakeholder groups and authorities across remote Australia.

“Our store managers continue to do an amazing job as they face multiple challenges of additional stock being sent to stores, an uplift in sales of some goods, all the while adjusting to the ever-changing coronavirus situation and important guidelines of staying on country and limiting travel,” Mr Borg said.

“It’s also great to see governments, businesses and communities coming together to keep remote communities safe across Australia.

“The land councils and local authorities have done a huge amount of work in recent days to secure access and communicate clear messages to community leaders and members.

“Outback Stores prides itself on its collaboration with all community stakeholders and will continue to assist where required.

“We anticipate further challenges as this global health emergency evolves, but we’re committed to providing an essential service and leading strong food security in the weeks ahead.”

Outback Stores will continue to post information and regular updates on our social media channels and website: www.outbackstores.com.au

*Photo – Papunya store employee Selwyn Nelson has shelves fully stocked and ready for customers Rosieanna Jugadai and Mikalya MacDonald

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