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City growth feeds off kebabs and sausage

Next time you buy a Lebanese sausage, a kebab or baklava don't just think about what they are doing for your stomach — think about what they are doing for the local economy. **Melanie Kembrey** reports.

TONY Francis doesn't burst out of his skin when you tell him Arabic businesses are the key to growth in the region.

Mr Francis, the owner of a Lebanese butchery in Granville, is not at all surprised.

"I would think that would be the case," he says nonchalantly.

But Arabic businesses are often overlooked as drivers of the local economy,

said Doctor Felicity Wray, of the University of Western Sydney's urban research centre.

A new study conducted by the university has revealed that with the right support Arabic Australian businesses could provide a far greater share of the 61,000 new jobs needed in the region by 2031.

"Arabic businesses in the survey clearly demonstrate they're an indispensable motor for continued growth and development of the region," said Dr Wray, the principal researcher on the project. "The 30 businesses surveyed directly employed almost 600 staff and have strong connections to suppliers, many of them local as well."

Parramatta Chamber of Commerce president Trevor Oldfield said the number of Arabic businesses opening in the area had increased during the past three years.

"They have a strong influence in the area. It's a really good thing," Mr Oldfield said. "They add value to the

economy and a diversity of products as well as employment."

Mr Francis has owned Tony Francis Meats on Good Street for 26

years. He said at least half of the businesses in the area were Arabic and the competition between them had become "very tough".

The study made several recommendations including the need for greater support for start-up businesses and more business networks and the need to increase the visibility of existing support programs.

Doctor Wray said many Arabic business owners and managers reported an "innate entrepreneurial spirit" that motivated them to start their own business: "The owner-managers in the survey consistently demonstrate a tenacity to achieve business success. It's a remarkable business trait which should be fully exploited to help the wider western Sydney community."

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Sausage support: Tony Francis has owned Tony Francis Meats in Granville for 26 years. **Picture: Wesley Lonergan**