



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Grower Case Study

6 September 2018

Growers take the box seat with Hort Masterclass



With more than 143,000 people moving to Victoria every year, and a booming property and construction market demanding more trees and plants, there's never been a better time to be in the greening business.

That's the view of Nursery Manager Ben Scoble at Speciality Trees, a production nursery located near Narre Warren East, on the edge of the Yarra Ranges that supplies landscapers, developers, councils and high-end gardens with quality tree stock.

Beginning his career as an apprentice in 2007, Ben has seen the nursery increase staff from seven to 28 and its production site grow to a total of 110 hectares, including the recent acquisition of a 75 acre site near Benalla, located in the state's north-east.

Helping facilitate the nursery's growth and anticipating where the industry was headed next has meant Ben's now in the box seat to tackle the exponential increase of interest in green life, particularly from councils and developers.

"There's been a huge push from local councils to green their municipalities and the nursery industry is perfectly placed to help supply this demand, however businesses just need to be able to capitalise on the growth," Ben said.

"As a production manager, I'm really focussed on planning ahead to meet the increased demand, particularly for larger orders, as well as managing the overall performance of the business.

"As an industry, we're constantly increasing the size of the pie, which is a great thing for our business and for our peers, but keeping your percentage of the pie as the market share increases, is absolutely critical."

It was this increased focus on business acumen and financial literacy that led him to apply for the 2018 Masterclass in Horticultural Business.

Described as a mini-MBA, the Hort Masterclass is led by the University of Tasmania and is available to 30 horticultural participants every year, with funding provided by the Hort Frontiers Fund as well as industry grower levies.

The Masterclass equips Australian growers and managers with high level leadership and business management skills specific to the horticultural industry.



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Grower Case Study

“Like other industries in food and fibre production, we’re experiencing considerable growth and there’s an expectation that nursery managers can oversee both the technical and strategic side of the business,” said Ben.

“The Masterclass covers a range of areas, from contractual law right through to financial literacy, so it’s about choosing what’s relevant to your business. For me, it was firming up those five to ten-year business plans and putting in place steps to achieve those goals.”

Masterclass Leader and Associate Professor of the University of Tasmania, Dr Alistair Gracie said the course had received strong support from industry for the second year running.

“The Masterclass in Horticultural Business is designed to support the future growth and prosperity of Australia’s horticulture industry,” said Dr Gracie.

“The focus is on practical business skills that can immediately be put into practice, including business strategy, marketing, financial management and innovation, and entrepreneurship.

“One of the most valuable components of the Masterclass is the opportunity to hear from industry leaders around Australia and gain insights into other business models. It provides an opportunity for participants to network and learn with others within the horticulture industry.”

Ben is halfway through the course and has started to implement new processes to bolster the business including a new gross margin analysis tool, to track how much it’s costing to produce tree crops.

“After learning the theory, I sat down with each staff member and looked at how much time and effort it was taking us to grow our stock, which gave us a deep insight into our level of turnover and the overall performance of the business.

“I’ve developed a spreadsheet which now analyses our tree crops including input costs and selling price, so that we can improve our strategic decision-making process. It provides a good analysis on the costs going out and the profits coming in.

“My advice to other growers is to put your business under the microscope and to see how much time and labour its taking to produce your plants, trees or ornamentals, to help inform business decisions.

“The Hort Masterclass opens up a web of opportunity to share ideas and meet with other people from across a wide range of horticultural commodities. In my opinion, there is nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

The program will be held for the next three years, accepting 30 participants annually across Australia’s horticultural industries. Expressions of interest for the 2019 program are now being taken through UTAS with three scholarships offered to the nursery industry each year.



Nursery & Garden Industry
Australia

Grower Case Study

To express your interest, or for more information, please email hort.bus@utas.edu.au or visit <http://www.utas.edu.au/tia/study/masterclass-in-horticultural-business>.

The Hort Masterclass is part of the Hort Frontiers Leadership Fund, a Hort Innovation strategic partnership initiative that uses a combination of government and partner funding to address major issues facing the future of Australian horticulture for the benefit of the entire industry.

For further information please contact Sophie Keatinge | Cox Inall Communications | 0430 938 515 or sophie.keatinge@coxinall.com.au

**Hort
Innovation**
Strategic levy investment

**NURSERY
FUND**

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation using the nursery research and development levy and funds from the Australian Government. For more information on the fund and strategic levy investment visit horticulture.com.au