**Be the difference – Maarten’s story**

**Maarten:** I’m Maarten Blocker and I’m here at our freesia farm at Wesley Vale near Devonport. We started here about seventeen years ago, just some minimal equipment and one container full of bulbs and we built it up from there.

**Hugh:** My name is Hugh Robertson. I studied a Bachelor of Agricultural Science and a Bachelor of Business, double degree, at La Trobe University in Bundoora, and I graduated in 2009.

I’m an agribusiness manager. I have always had a passion for agriculture, having grown up on a farm. Maarten came to me with a plan to double the size of his business. That involved putting in a new, one-hectare glasshouse.

The greenhouse has given Maarten and his business a whole new level of opportunity. He’s increased production by 45 to 50 per cent. He’s more than doubled his turnover. All things being equal, he probably should be generating double if not triple the profit he’d been generating historically.

**Maarten:** This new greenhouse has also enabled us to employ another 10 to 15 full-time equivalents, and it’s increased our production by at least 40 per cent.

**Marianne:** To employ 20 to 30 people in such a small community as this, it makes such an impact. I think we’d all like to see it bigger and I won’t say better, because we feel that we’re pretty spoilt as we are.

I think the community is actually quite proud to see something like this in their community.

**Maarten:** We’ve had staff here, local staff, that have been with us for seventeen years – ever since we started, basically.

**Hugh:** He’s an incredibly smart, incredibly capable person who likes a laugh at the same time, and it’s meant that it’s been a very strong working relationship.

**Maarten:** I find it very easy to get along with Hugh. Also, we share the same sense of humour. We usually can stir each other up pretty well. I guess the best part of Hugh is that he’s got a fair bit of experience. He fully understands our business.

**Hugh:** I chose to study at La Trobe because it gave me the best of both worlds. It gave me the ability to undertake my passion in agriculture and study agricultural science.

The business degree gives you endless possibilities. It gives you a really good base; it doesn’t limit you in any way because it gives you so many different career possibilities. Bringing the two together has given me the best opportunities I could imagine.

I would recommend people study at La Trobe, and I have recommended people study at La Trobe.