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Masterclass provides skills for strategic business growth

The University of Tasmania's Graduate Diploma in Agribusiness: Masterclass in Horticultural Business offers participants immersive study that will ultimately make them a better businessperson.

The Masterclass in Horticultural Business equips current and future farm managers, owners and employers with the agribusiness skills and capabilities required to run profitable and sustainable farm businesses.

Offered through the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) and developed in partnership with some of the world's leading names in horticulture, including New Zealand's Lincoln University, the Wageningen Research Academy in the Netherlands, and Hort Innovation, the course is delivered online, with face-to-face learning and networking opportunities.

NSW businesswoman Sonja Cameron took the Masterclass in 2017. And, as a member of the Masterclass's steering committee, Sonja is more than happy to champion the diploma that has been embraced by industry participants.

Sonja and her husband Andy have overseen Cameron's Nursery, in Arcadia, in NSW's Hills District region since they "bootstrapped" the fledgling business with a \$5000 investment in 1992.

However, a damaging hailstorm in mid-October 2020 saw Sonja summon management skills gleaned from the Masterclass that could have otherwise seen a major crisis.

"We had 12 hours to decide what our plan of attack was going to be, minimise wasted time and money and how we were going to save the jobs of 30 staff," Sonja said. "We had to be strong leaders to decide what our plan of action was and how we would best manage this disaster."

Sonja's strategy saw her marshal her staff into teams and prioritise what could be saved.

"We had the nursery back up and running within three weeks and selling plants again because we had a plan.

"It is tough to get up the next day and see your entire livelihood shredded, but it is what it is, and you can't change it. I always say to my staff 'you need tools in your toolbelt, resilience and a plan'.

"And it all goes back to the Masterclass idea of having plans. Whether that is a business plan, or a strategy for an overall plan, or a plan for that project, or a plan for an employee, it's all the same."

The course is designed for people who are working in the horticultural industry to increase their agribusiness skills and gain a formal qualification.

The Horticulture Masterclass has helped professionals from across the country turn their business ideas into actionable business plans so that they are ready to overcome challenges and reach their full potential as one of the many success stories of the Australian horticulture industry.

"Ultimately, what came out of that year of studying was a brilliant business plan," Sonja said.

The nursery is soon to take delivery of a \$300,000 potting machine and equipment – an outcome of the business plan devised in the Masterclass, that was funded through a bank loan that also owed much to her newly developed skills.

“I presented my bank manager with a 31-page document on our strategy on why the bank should fund the potting machine and the infrastructure to go around it. When asking a bank for half a million dollars, you will need to give solid financials and the return on investment.”

The Masterclass presents an opportunity to formalise qualifications and encourages business owners and managers to work on the business, not only in the business.

Sonja said that what eventuated from her studies was a significant paper that enabled planned business improvements and targets, focusing energy which sees her and her husband in the final six months to completion.

“The business plan enabled us to have strategies in place and projects allowing everyone to work toward the same goal,” Sonja said.

“The Masterclass offers a large range of various units in the course, and all the studying is relevant to your business which gives it great real-life meaning.”

The Graduate Diploma in Agribusiness: Masterclass in Horticultural Business is designed to equip current and future farm managers, owners and employers with the agribusiness skills and capabilities required to run profitable and sustainable farm business, the course is delivered through a mix of flexible online and face-to-face learning.

The units are typically delivered over an 18-month period with individual flexible study plans allowing participants to study during periods of seasonal workload and around personal circumstances.

Two Information Sessions are available via Zoom for employers and students on October 26. Go to the link to register

<https://www.utas.edu.au/tia/events/items/horticultural-business-masterclass-information-sessions>

TIA is a joint venture of the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government.

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