



Haley is enjoying a career change to the red meat sector

Having switched careers from the wine industry to the red meat sector, Haley La Franco was eager to undertake further relevant studies. An MIA Post Graduate Scholarship is helping her to do that.

“The MIA sponsorship is very helpful,” says Haley, who joined Fresh Meats in Napier as compliance manager in 2019 and is in the first year of studying a Master of Food Safety and Quality through Massey University.

“I’m not sure I could have done the Masters otherwise. I’m mum to a six-year-old daughter and I have already paid off one student loan and it would be hard to take on another alongside a mortgage.”

The MIA awards six undergraduate scholarships providing \$5,000 a year for each year of study and four post-graduate scholarships of \$10,000 for each year of study annually. They are aimed at students considering a future in New Zealand’s red meat sector. The MIA also runs a mentoring programme for its scholars, including a networking and educational event each year in Wellington.

Haley grew up with a family farming background in Hawke’s Bay and gained a Bachelor of Wine Science degree from the Eastern Institute of Technology, cross credited to Charles Sturt University in Australia.

She worked for Villa Maria in Auckland before moving to work for the d’Arenberg wine company in South Australia. Returning to New Zealand in 2009, she joined Lion Nathan, then spent five years in the South Island as compliance manager for a wine bottling company.

After having her daughter, she returned north to work for the Hawke’s Bay Wine Company and then back to Villa Maria before joining Fresh Meats.

“It’s been a vertical learning curve,” says Haley. “I’m very solutions and task oriented and I came into this role with a framework of compliance but I’ve had to learn about a totally new industry, and it is a fascinating one. Wine is all about good microbiology but food safety is very different, any errors can really harm people, and the industry is much more highly regulated.

“I’ve had huge support from MIA, the Ministry for Primary Industries and Fresh Meat colleagues with long experience in the red meat sector. I’m very grateful they saw something in me and felt it was worth investing in me. The people in this industry are amazing and so willing to help.

“I see my long-term career in the sector and wanted to go forward into that based on better knowledge and education around the subject. I talked with Massey and they suggested this Masters programme. A number of the tutors and lecturers have come from the meat industry.

Haley is thoroughly enjoying the first year of the course.

“There is still so much for me to learn. The wine industry is very innovative and Fresh Meats has a very innovative ethos and philosophy. It also has a lot of young employees so it is going to be very exciting to see their careers and the company grow.

“I’m also really looking forward to the networking opportunities the scholarship provides. I didn’t know anyone in the red meat sector when I came into this industry. It is full of great people and I’m looking forward to meeting more like-minded people and building my network.”