At first glance, it may not be immediately obvious that 16-year-old Josh Murray is an agricultural entrepreneur, and according to the *Diversity in decision-making in rural industries* report, his is one of the six percent of small businesses where the decision maker is aged under 30.

Yet from the start of his budding career, ethics overlaid all his business decisions. Josh began his egg business at age nine when he was looking for ways to make extra pocket money. The business name was inspired by the variations in the colours of the eggs from the different hen.

Initially, Josh was solely responsible for every aspect of caring for the 40 hens on his family’s farm in Victoria’s Macedon Ranges, including collecting the eggs and selling them to neighbours. When he increased his flock size, Josh realised he also needed to increase his customer base.
Decision-making

His decision-making process is simple. “I haven’t had to make any really tough decisions because most have been: Do you want to improve the chickens’ life, yes or no? Do you want to make life easy for yourself, yes or no?”

“And it’s easy to just say yes. I’ve had a couple of situations where they seemed a pretty easy no.”

In the past couple of years, Josh has increasingly relied on help from his family and paid workers. Now in Year 11, this has allowed him to concentrate on his schooling and teenage sport pursuits. In this close-knit family of six, support is key to reaching any business, sporting or personal goal, and Josh’s mother, Dr Tamsyn Murray, has taken over the day-to-day, with Josh mainly working in the business on weekends. Solar-powered automation, including automatic egg belts and feed restrictors, has greatly reduced the time the family needs to spend in the sheds. Caring for 9,500 hens now takes less time than it used to take to look after far fewer birds. Josh says, “In hindsight, it seems like a ridiculous amount of work, so automating was a good decision!”

Although his daily role has been scaled back, as Director of Sales and Marketing, Josh is still the main decision-maker. While Josh listens to his parents’ opinions — “they are pretty vocal and I know what they want” — he’ll often talk to his brother if he needs to make a decision.

Opportunity in difference

“Of course there are challenges; the thing is, I think that everyone’s worth talking to.” This comment reflects Josh’s opinion on dealing with people in general: He sees opportunities, not challenges, in diversity.

Josh also enjoys meeting his customers at farmers’ markets and supermarkets. “It’s really cool meeting new people, no matter what age or gender. New people provide new opportunities.”

Josh’s eggs are now stocked in several local stores, including La Manna, Coles and IGA. Tamsyn physically delivers eggs to each outlet and Josh often accompanies her.

Tamsyn says, “When we’re at the egg section, actually putting the eggs on the shelves, it’s really good, because most customers have never met the person that actually collected their eggs, and a connection with how your food is grown is really important now.

“In terms of his age, he brings something to the table. In many ways it’s been easier for him because he wasn’t afraid to ask, and very few people said no. He’s also learnt, through literally thousands of conversations, how to interact with many people — grumpy customers, those that ask questions they think are funny... It’s been great for him to learn.”

Looking to the future

Along with his ethics, Josh is also guided by his passions and belief — with self-belief at the core.

“If your own happiness is at stake, you’ve really got to take a chance. If there’s an opportunity for you to do what you want, do it, just try — because the thing is, you can still fail taking the safe route.”

He sees one part of the future of agribusiness in something he loves: niche; the other being large farms with automation.

Away from talking to people at farmers’ markets and in supermarkets, Josh finds happiness in the simple tasks in his business. He is also grounded in gratitude.

“I like it when my chickens are happy. I like it when I go out there, sort them out and they’re all happy. I collect all the eggs and see them in the back of the ute on the pallet. I can see that’s what I’ve done. That’s satisfying.”