

Profile: Rainberry Farm, Tasmania

Mark Salter, Berry Industry Development Officer, Fruit Growers Tasmania

Located in Forcett in southern Tasmania, Rainberry is a collaboration between Ken Rainsford, Lauren Meredith and Andrew Bell from Mountain Blue.

The Rainberry team

Ken leads the production operations within the business, having moved back to Tasmania a few years ago to rekindle his love of farming after seeing the potential for berry production in south-eastern Tasmania. Before this, Ken built telecommunications infrastructure and managed teams for the NBN network, and played football in several states – not your usual farming background!

Lauren leads much of the coordination and end-to-end administration of the business, including people, planning and logistics. With lots of previous experience in procurement and logistics for retail, packaging and safety businesses, Lauren has enjoyed stepping out of the corporate environment and into commercial berry production.

Complementing Ken and Lauren is Andrew Bell from Mountain Blue, who brings valuable knowledge about the genetics, agronomy and marketing of Rubus berries. Andrew and the Mountain Blue team provide a rounded suite of experience and support, which has helped Rainberry to grow and flourish.

Production

The farm grows varieties with genetics sourced from overseas via Mountain Blue. All the plants are grown in coir in pots under poly tunnels. The water comes from the south-eastern Tasmanian irrigation scheme, pumped directly into large storage tanks on the farm before being distributed to the plants via a Priva irrigation and nutrition management system.

Ken explains that Tasmania's favourable climatic conditions and freedom from pests like fruit fly provide great growing conditions for big high-quality berries, and that the main variety in production at Rainberry is the *Enrosadira* (PBR 2017050) raspberry variety.

The raspberries harvested this year travelled as far as supermarkets in Adelaide and Sydney with positive retailer feedback and customer demand. As newer entrants in the berry industry, Lauren notes that it is a sophisticated industry with lots to learn, and that having production and marketing partners in Mountain Blue has been essential to support the development of agronomy, outbound sales processes and industry knowledge.



Poly tunnel system in use at Rainberry Farm. Photo credit: Mark Salter



Poly tunnel system in use at Rainberry Farm. Photo credit: Mark Salter



Ken Rainsford (Farm Manager) and Tetsuya (agronomist) inspecting raspberry plants. Photo credit: Mark Salter



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Pushing back against inflation

Lauren sees some of the major challenges for growers being how to manage production input costs with growing inflation and the challenging labour market. Not only have materials like packaging, fuel, fertiliser, agrichemicals and labour all increased in cost dramatically, but growers in Tasmania are also facing rising prices for Bass Strait shipping and road freight, which further squeezes profitability each time they bring in materials or send fruit to the mainland.

For Rainberry, labour is sourced from a combination of local and seasonal workers. Ken sees lots of nationalities onsite throughout season, making for a really diverse team. The workforce also includes semi-professional local pickers and students most of whom live full-time in Tasmania. Rainberry also recently welcomed their first cohorts of seasonal workers from Vanuatu through the PALM Scheme, complementing the locally available workforce and helping to take the edge off a very strong summer peak this year.

In this challenging environment, Lauren sees opportunities for businesses and industry sectors to work together to grow and support each other, whether through using group buying to reduce input and freight costs, sharing of seasonal labour pools, or working together to help cope with unexpected equipment breakdowns. In working together in this way, growers can strengthen our Tasmanian brand and reduce the cost of trade together.

Looking to the future

With the challenging conditions facing the industry, Lauren and Ken say they are currently focusing on further optimising their production systems before considering further expansion.



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