

Laughter is the best medicine for Queensland strawberry growers

Bron Ford, Berry Industry Development Officer

Queensland strawberry growers have been forced to deal with a great deal in recent years; the storms at planting time, the tampering crisis that brought the industry to its knees and the severe drought on the Granite Belt have all tested the personal resilience of growers.

To help alleviate some of the feelings of isolation often felt by people when they are stressed, the Queensland Strawberry Growers Association (QSGA) hosted an end-of-season celebration with a “Lunch ‘n Laughs” event at the Beerwah Hideaway.

More than 55 people enjoyed a relaxing meal with fellow growers and friends, discussed the season and enjoyed some informative relief from special guest Mark McConville.

Mark is a professional comedian often seen on cruise boats around the Pacific Ocean or at Brisbane’s Sit-Down Comedy Club. Interestingly, Mark also holds a Graduate Certificate in Suicide Prevention Studies, a Masters in Suicidology and is an Adjunct Lecturer at the Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention at Griffith University.

Mark’s unique act of intertwining comedy with mental health themes is a winning formula for reducing stress, lifting depression and preventing suicide and was a big hit with Queensland strawberry growers.

Mark’s highly interactive presentation and comedy act highlighted the benefits of sharing laughter with family and friends, and that the impact of laughter can significantly help people overcome stress, depression and anxiety.



Lunch ‘n Laughs was a great opportunity to get off the farm, enjoy a relaxed meal with farming friends and learn some simple actions about managing stress...oh and Mark was an absolute hoot!

Laura Wells from TSL Family Farms at Bellmere commented.

The event was made possible by the **#berryloved fund**, established with all the generous donations from the community following the 2018 tampering crisis, and it is hoped that a similar spirit-lifting activity can be run on an annual basis.

When things do become overwhelming it is well known that support from other people can really help. It might be difficult to ask for help or you might not even realise that you need help but getting help when you need it doesn’t have to be difficult. Don’t be afraid to try different types of support until you find what works best for you.



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Mark McConville and Lifeline recommend the following:

1. Recognise when things are getting too much -

Sometimes we're so busy we don't even realise we need a break. Look out for any changes in your behaviour, thoughts or physical health that might indicate you need some help.

Listen to the concerns of your friends and family and talk to them, rather than brushing them off. If you have thoughts about suicide or harming yourself, call Lifeline immediately on 13 11 14.

2. Visit your doctor -

Your GP can help you understand your situation and point you in the right direction to find more support. If you don't feel comfortable going to the doctor alone why not take a family member or friend with you? Be honest about all the symptoms you are experiencing, including how you've been feeling and understand that seeking help when you need it is truly a sign of strength, not weakness.

3. Look online -

There are a range of resources, information and support available online to anyone who does not have access to services close by. Try seeking out resources that have been referred by a website or service you trust.

4. Talk about it -

It can be hard to talk about your problems but having the support of family and friends can really help you cope with difficult situations. If you don't want to talk to family or friends, you can try a counsellor, health professional, community worker, minister or call a helpline like Lifeline.

5. Be positive and proactive -

It can be helpful to focus on what you can do, rather than what's out of your control. A good way to get started is to write down your issues, brainstorm possible solutions and identify small steps on how to achieve them.

You can also make a list of where to go for different types of help and advice (e.g. emotional support, financial advice) and keep it in a handy place. This makes it easier to seek help when you need it.

6. Get professional help if you need it -

Your GP can refer you to a counsellor or psychologist.

Where to go for help

- Your **GP**
- Call **Lifeline (13 11 14)** or use the **online crisis support chat service**
- Contact **www.beyondblue.org.au**
- **www.conversationsmatter.com.au**
- Visit your local **Community Centre** for referrals to other services in your local area

Another great opportunity for Strawberry growers and industry partners to get together is the upcoming Annual Industry Dinner & Awards Night. This year's event is being held on Friday 17th April at the Novotel Sunshine Coast Resort at Twin Waters on the Sunshine Coast.

The evening is a chance for growers to catch up socially with their industry friends and is an important opportunity for growers to build connections with each other. And it is this connectivity that can really help when times get tough.



Tickets are just \$90 per person and can be purchased online at www.qldstrawberries.com.au

If you would like to be a sponsor or supporter of the dinner, please contact Bron Ford | 0438 752 177