

# Profile: Richard Winspear, Berried in Tas

Mark Salter, Berry Industry Development Officer, Fruit Growers Tasmania

I recently travelled to Carrick in Northern Tasmania to speak with Richard Winspear, Managing Director with Berried in Tas. Richard was born in Tasmania but left as a teenager to complete his schooling in Queensland. He then went on to gain a Bachelor of Business and Finance and from there he moved to Hong Kong where he spent 15 years working in Investment banking. After a long period away from Tasmania

Richard decided to return. Captivated by Tasmania's pristine environment and reputation for premium fruit, he was keen to look at the potential for berry production.

## Building a business

Richard explains climate and access to water were the main reasons for establishing a berry business in the Carrick area. Richard purchased a property in Carrick in 2016 along with 4 other investors and began to develop the property into berries. Today the property has 80 ML of on-farm dam storage, as well as access to 80 ML from the Whitemore irrigation scheme and a further 200 ML from the Liffey River. So far, berry production on the site currently uses 80 ML, leaving plenty of water available at the site to support future expansion plans.

Richard has also put a lot of effort into building a great team which can support the business as it continues to grow. I was fortunate to be introduced to some of these team members during my visit, including Sumit Bhandari, who is the Senior Agronomist. Sumit manages farm activities including pest and disease management and irrigation management and has a Bachelor of Biotech Engineering and a Masters in Agricultural Science.

## Production

Early on, Berried in Tas partnered with Perfection Fresh, who market the fruit under the 'Perfection' brand in Tasmania and on the mainland. Perfection also supports their growers with access to the latest berry varieties. The 'Arabella' strawberry variety was chosen because of its high brix, solid sweet fruit and high yields of around 1kg of packed fruit per plant.

Berried in Tas currently produce 600 tonnes of strawberries from 8.5 hectares of tunnels. Berried in Tas have a further 6 hectares of field-grown strawberries which were originally put in as a trial block, and Richard says he will be gradually phasing this block out with the aim to grow all the fruit in tunnels. Berried in Tas also has 9 hectares of the raspberry variety 'Kwanza' chosen because it is a high yielding variety with large, sweet fruit. As a primocane type, this variety produces fruit initially from March through to June and then again in December through to January the following season, which enables the season to be spread over many months. The raspberries are grown in tunnels using pots with a coir substrate, with trials currently being conducted to ascertain ideal cane densities for optimum production and fruit quality. There are also plans to grow 'Kwanza' as a long cane raspberry to extend the season even further.

Initially Richard relied on locals and backpackers to harvest this fruit, but with the COVID outbreak and labour shortages across the board he began utilising a labour-hire company to provide his seasonal work force. This year Berried in Tas became an Approved Employer with the Seasonal Worker Program and now employs directly with the program making it easier to manage labour during the season. One of the major benefits of being part of the program is that most of his picking staff are now returning each year. They bring with them the experience from the previous year and so they are already trained and therefore more productive.



Raspberries growing in tunnels at Berried in Tas. Photo credit: Berried in Tas.



'Kwanza' raspberry variety is the one selected by Richard for its large, sweet fruit. Photo credit: Berried in Tas.



Sumit Bhandari, Senior Agronomist and farm owner, Richard Winspear. Photo credit: Berried in Tas.



**Berried in Tas site at Carrick in northern Tasmania seen from the air.** Photo credit: Berried in Tas.

## Pest and disease management

Speaking on pest and disease management, Sumit notes that the main pests in both strawberries and raspberries are Two spotted mite, Mirids and Green stink bugs. Two spotted mite populations start building early in the season, and to manage the population he releases *Persimilis* beneficial mites.

In contrast, Mirids, Green stink bugs and other sucking insects occur later, and typically become a problem mid-season as the weather warms up.

Controlling these two pests at the same time can be challenging, as the preferred time to achieve early control of the Mirids and Green stink bugs occurs when *Persimilis* is still actively controlling the Two spotted mite.

Sumit explains that they wait until the Two spotted mite population starts to decline before using agrichemicals to manage Mirids and stink bug populations so that it doesn't impact too greatly on his beneficial insects.

## Challenges and the future

Richard is very positive for the future, in particular about the berry category, and is expanding his strawberry production operation with another 9 hectares of tunnels currently under construction. He says the Tasmanian berry industry has a lot going for it with its long growing season, fantastic genetics, and great reputation for quality food.

Richard explains this year has already been very challenging with the recent COVID outbreak. It has not only affected his harvest schedule with many of his casual staff absent from time to time, but has also caused logistic and transport issues. He has experienced delays in receiving supplies of packaging and other inputs plus delays in transporting fruit to markets on the mainland.

Richard also cites other challenges including the continuing increase in the costs of production, driven by rising packaging, coir, fertiliser, wages and other farm input costs.

## BERRIED IN TAS

OAKS TASMANIA - EST. 2016

