

Grow your career in horticulture: AUSVEG highlights diverse range of jobs in the sector

Sophie Burge, AUSVEG Communications Officer

AUSVEG, the peak industry body for vegetable and potato growers, has launched the **Grow Your Career in Horticulture video series**, which highlights the diverse range of careers in the Australian horticulture industry.

The series includes video interviews with employees from nut, fruit and vegetable businesses across Australia to gain an understanding of those vital ‘behind-the-scenes’ roles in the industry. These videos show the daily tasks, responsibilities, and pathways of current employees on Australian farms.

AUSVEG National Public Affairs Manager Tyson Cattle said that the series is designed to highlight the technical and skilled opportunities that are available on fruit and vegetable farms across Australia.

“The horticulture sector is a large, developed and diverse industry that employs a wide range of skilled people. While much of the media attention is focused on harvest labour within the sector, it is often forgotten that the industry requires a range of skillsets to manage and operate their farm business,” Mr Cattle said.

“

The horticulture industry has many opportunities for workers to upskill and access on the job training to further their career in horticulture. While there are many harvesting opportunities, there is also a range of other essential roles to be found on the farm and production line.

Many of the roles highlighted in the video series are in the highest demand in businesses across the horticulture sector and align with the approved 31 occupations under the Horticulture Industry Labour Agreement – supporting growers to sponsor skilled and semi-skilled workers from overseas to fill these critical occupations.

“Growers’ preference is always to employ locals first where possible, when they have the right skills and attitude,” Mr Cattle said.

“These videos aim to showcase the many varied career opportunities for local workers in the exciting \$15 billion Australian horticulture industry to entice people to give the industry a go. “Many people we interviewed for these videos did not intend on a career in horticulture, but discovered a passion for it after working on the farm. They have each come from various backgrounds and landed in horticulture through different avenues by transferring key skills from seemingly unrelated courses and past careers to start successful careers in horticulture.

“A job in horticulture can be the start of a lifelong, satisfying career with plenty of opportunities for upward growth. Putting food on the table for millions of families in Australia and abroad makes it a worthwhile and fulfilling career.”

To find out more about the Grow Your Career in Horticulture series, visit www.ausveg.com.au/grow-your-career. Or scan this QR code.



Name: Arman Berkett-Saleh

Age: 34

Job: Irrigationist at Stothart Family Farms

Location: Bellmere, Queensland

Without water, nothing grows – that’s why irrigationists are vital to the success of most horticultural crops. As an irrigationist at Stothart Family Farms in Bellmere, Queensland, Arman Berkett-Saleh helps produce strawberries each year by supervising and maintaining the crop’s irrigation systems.

Arman monitors the strawberry plants to determine the crop’s water and nutritional needs, making sure each plant is not underwatered or overwatered and getting fed correctly.

Arman and the team are always looking for ways to grow the crop more efficiently and adopt new irrigation technologies – such as Priva systems – to ensure they can produce the best strawberries possible.

In recent years, Stothart Family Farms have converted three-quarters of strawberry growing area to tabletop production, instead of growing them in the ground. This method of growing strawberries, reduces disease, uses less water, and improves quality – and is a lot kinder on workers.

What is your role & what does your job entail?

My main role in irrigation and nutrition is looking after all the strawberry plants to make sure they produce the best strawberries we can. To produce great strawberries, we want to make sure the plants are not stressed out, underwatered or overwatered, and are getting fed correctly.

To do this, we take the time to look at the plants and ask questions relating to how the plants are growing and what they are doing. We look at what the plants have done to date, and at how the plants are going to react in coming weeks. Essentially, we ask ourselves how can we grow them better to produce a better fruit for the consumer?

What improvements have been made to Stothart's irrigation infrastructure?

You can't be the best without continuous improvement. We are always looking to improve and lead the way with new technology, innovation and production within the strawberry growing region in south-east Queensland.

We’ve looked at the production value of growing strawberries on tables compared to ground. Since converting three-quarters of our growing area to tabletop production, we have seen more production, better water use efficiency, less disease and better pest management.

This method of growing also means we have better control over the quality and grow better fruit overall. We can grow more in less area, which adds to our intended direction of providing more fruit to consumers.

What are some misconceptions about working in horticulture?

It’s not as hard as you think it would be – there are plenty of job opportunities and lots of fruit and vegetables out there that need to be grown. I think people need to look away from that stigma that working in horticulture is just hard, back-breaking work. We have the technology now, and we are continuously trying to improve to make it easier for everybody to work. We are trying to get better so we can attract the next generation into the industry.

What was your journey into horticulture?

I started my career in mining after completing a degree in Geology. I transitioned into horticulture because it gave me the opportunity not to just sit behind a desk and come home to my family at the end of each day. I get to be outside and get to grow something. Being able to see the results of the hard work that you put in and then to enter the back end of the season knowing that I contributed to the performance of this farm is rewarding.

Regarding my lifestyle, I'm just like any other person – I'm happy, I go home at the end of each day and do all the things that I enjoy doing outside of work. If you work well and work hard, there is no reason why you can't have a good work-life balance in this industry.

What advice do you have for a young person thinking about starting a career in horticulture?

For any young people who would like to start a career in horticulture, there's probably two pathways one can take.

The first one is getting out and applying for a job and learning as you go, and then eventually going on to do further studies. If there's an area within the industry that a person really wants to do, there are plenty of opportunities and pathways through TAFE and universities to develop your skillset to get these jobs.

Secondly, there's no harm in starting work directly on a farm, especially if you're young. You can gain some understanding of what work is necessary to run a farm and what needs to be done to produce fruit. It's important to get the experience to know what you're looking for. You could be looking after plants as well as planting and growing. Or if you like running warehouses and doing stocktake and inventory, you could be learning that side of the business and how that runs, or becoming an expert in irrigation and growing plants.

Although these are two very different pathways, both provide the same opportunities.

Why do you do what you do?

It’s amazing to see how a strawberry can progress from a little plant at the start of the season to producing berries. We take heart in the response from people who have eaten our fruit saying how fantastic it is. It's what we strive for – keeping the consumer happy by providing a great strawberry for them to eat.



Figure 1. Strawberries grown on the tabletop system. Figure 2. Arman regularly monitors the irrigation system and plants.
Photo credit : AUSVEG.

3.



4.



Figure 3. Arman Berkett-Saleh. Figure 4. The tabletop system reduces bending for picking staff.

Photo credit : AUSVEG.

This series has been produced by AUSVEG as part of the Harvest Trail Industry Services Collaboration Trial.

The **Grow Your Career in Horticulture series** is funded by the Federal Department of Education, Skills and Employment through the Harvest Trail Services Industry Collaboration Trial.

AUSVEG is the national prescribed peak industry body (PIB) for the Australian vegetable and potato industries.

For more information on the **Grow Your Career** video series, please contact:

Sophie Burge
AUSVEG Communications Officer
E: sophie.burge@ausveg.com.au



Australian Government
**Department of Education,
Skills and Employment**



Harvest Trail

AN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INITIATIVE

AUSVEG

Get Primed



for a new way to control botrytis

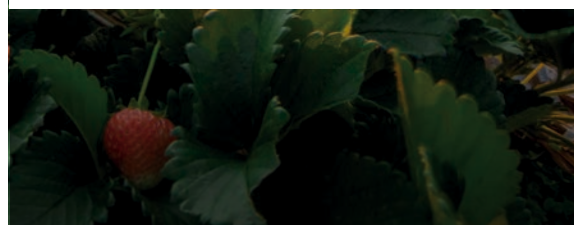


It's coming. It's powered by Miravis®. Call your Syngenta representative today.

www.syngenta.com.au/miravis-prime

 **Miravis® Prime**

syngenta.



MIRAVIS PRIME is not registered. An application has been submitted to the APVMA.