

Queensland berry producers learn from desert experts

Bron Ford, Qld Berry Industry Development Officer, Queensland Strawberry Growers Association (QSGA)

This project was funded by the Council for Australian-Arab Relations (CAAR) and delivered by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries with support from the Granite Belt Growers Association and the Lockyer Valley Growers Inc.



Tim Sweet from Sweet's Strawberry Runners (L) with Thomas Rizzato from Corefresh Produce (R) conducting a berry analysis at Union Coop Hypermarket

A delegation of horticultural producers including berry growers from Queensland's Granite Belt have recently returned from a study tour of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The practical "classroom", focussed on learning about farming techniques in a harsh and arid environment. Despite wide open desert plains, the UAE region produces significant amounts of local fresh produce including high-quality tomatoes, capsicums, leafy vegetables such as lettuce and berries.

The tour of the UAE including Dubai and Abu Dhabi was coordinated as part of the project requirements for the project "Collaborating to learn from the arid environments." The tour group included Peter Burnell (Spring Creek Seedlings and strawberry plug producer), Tim Sweet (Sweet's Strawberry Runners), Thomas Rizzato (Corefresh produce which incorporates blueberry production) and Bron Ford (Qld Berries Industry Development Officer). A further five horticulturalists and industry representatives were also part of the delegation.

The group discovered how innovative techniques and technology can enable horticultural productivity in extreme environments and produce high quality fresh produce that meets the demands of consumers.

Key challenges addressed by local farming systems included poor water quality due to salinity, climatic extremes including temperatures exceeding 50°C for weeks on end and limited or no rainfall for more than eight months of the year. "We are experiencing one of the worst droughts in history in our region, so the trip was a fantastic opportunity to learn from those that farm successfully with these conditions all of the time" said Thomas Rizzato – blueberry producer from the Granite Belt. "It has shown us that nothing is impossible and that despite the climate forecasts the problems we face shouldn't be impossible to overcome".

The group visited commercial fruit and vegetable businesses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. The delegation also visited the Al Aweer Fruit and Vegetable Markets, an importers facility and numerous retail outlets to gain insight into the key international competitors and retail price points for fresh produce in the region. Tim Sweet from Sweet's Strawberry Runners said "it was incredible to see revolutionary technology in action at the International Centre for Biosaline Agriculture. Everyone on the delegation picked up at least one idea that they will now try and apply to their own business operations". Overall, 100% of participants indicated that they would probably take action as a result of this in-market learning activity.

For further information contact:

Bron Ford, Queensland Berry Industry Development Officer
0438 752 177 | office@qldstrawberries.com.au

Clinton McGrath, Qld Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
on 13 25 23 | Clinton.McGrath@daf.qld.gov.au



Australian Government

