

# Tasmania: Pre-Season Berry Field Day

Mark Salter, Berry Industry Development Officer, Fruit Growers Tasmania

Fruit Growers Tasmania and Berries Australia held a berry field day at “Berried in Tas” at Carrick on Friday 2 September. Pest and disease management was the theme for the day with presentations including pest and disease control in berries, crop protection chemicals, IPM and pollination.

Opening the field day, berry IDO Mark Salter welcomed around 40 attendees and outlined some of the recent activities undertaken by Fruit Growers Tasmania, including a project aimed at improving activities in coir and plastic recycling, and ongoing access to bumble bees for pollination, and the work Berries Australia has been doing in relation to the Varroa mite incursion.

Stuart Doyle from AgVista spoke next on the major diseases in berries including grey mould/botrytis and powdery mildew. He also outlined ways to manage the environment – particularly in tunnels – to try to avoid these diseases. Stuart also discussed various spray programs and chemicals for disease control with an emphasis on proper rotation to prevent the overuse of chemical groups and avoid resistance issues.

Brenden Green from Nufarm updated growers on the latest chemicals for berries including Intervene®, a Group 9 fungicide registered for grey mould and powdery mildew in strawberries and Rubus with two major benefits: a nil withholding period and IPM-compatible. Brenden also covered some of the other products Nufarm have for berries, again reinforcing the message about the importance of rotation between modes of action (different groups) within a fungicide program. Also, many thanks to Brenden and Nufarm for sponsoring the day.

Stephen Quarrell from the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture (TIA) presented about the benefits of having a diverse group of flowering plants (predominantly native species) in and around berry production sites to help provide a better environment for pollinators

and beneficial insects. Focusing on alternative pest management techniques and Conservative Bio Control (CBC), the research is aimed at reducing input costs and improving pack-outs through natural pest control. Stephen outlined the different forms of CBC including planting tree lines and ground covers of natives and exotics that attract both pollinators and beneficial insects. He also explained how it is important to consider flowering times when choosing plants. He also emphasised that these techniques require some investment, particularly in time to get established. Growers will need to consider putting aside some land area to establish beneficial plantings although he stressed this doesn't need to be valuable cropping space.

Jon Finch from TIA continued the pollination theme with a talk on alternative pollinators, including Hover flies, Blow flies and many of the Native bee species. He also explained Blow flies are now available to purchase as a commercial pollinator.

Michele Buntain from TIA delivered a very enlightening and entertaining PowerPoint presentation on identifying some of the good and bad insects that occur in berries. The audience were asked to identify each of the bugs with prizes handed out for correct answers. It was interesting to note a few of the insects were not correctly identified. Michele also provided a great display of the bad bugs which could be viewed through a microscope and hand lens for closer inspection and identification.

Michele also asked growers to fill out a survey on the most important pest in their berry crops, with some interesting results.

## Raspberries and Blackberries

1. Two spotted mites
2. Mirids
3. Green vegetable or shield bugs

Others that made the list included aphids, Raspberry leaf and bud mite, black vine weevil, Rutherglen bug, caterpillars and soldier beetles.

## Strawberries

1. Two spotted mite & Mirids
2. Thrips
3. Green vegetable bug

So quite a similar story for strawberries, but with thrips in the mix. This is helpful - as even as the research is concentrating on Rubus IPM strategies, the findings should flow on to strawberries as well. And considering most growers produce both crops, this is extra useful. Other strawberry pests included aphid, light brown apple moth, earwigs and Portuguese millipedes.

## Blueberries

It was a bit of a mixed bag for blueberries with nothing really standing out:

1. Whitefly
2. Mealybug, elephant weevil
3. Black vine weevil

Others included two spotted mite, scary spiders (for pickers), light brown apple moth and aphids. The whitefly top billing probably reflects a number of growers producing blueberries in tunnels in Tasmania. The day finished off with Fraser Harris from Bugs for Bugs giving a presentation on IPM and showcasing the various beneficial insects they supply to growers. Fraser also talked about timing and how to establish beneficials in the crop, in particular the need to take into consideration temperature and humidity when distributing beneficial insects.

Feedback received from growers indicated the day was a great success.



**Field Day attendees at “Berried in Tas”**

Photo credit: Mark Salter, FGT



**Fraser Harris has worked as an IPM consultant for the past 6½ years helping to educate farmers about biological control options for managing pests in berries.**

Photo credit: Fraser Harris, Bugs for Bugs

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