

# Costa taps into local demand for berries

Tapping into the increasing demand for locally grown fresh fruit, Costa Berries is one of a small number of growers producing blueberries in Western Australia. Costa operates a 40-hectare farm near Gingin, about 90km north of the Perth CBD.

Costa is a leading grower, packer and marketer of fresh fruit and vegetables, with 4500 planted hectares of farmland, 30 hectares of glasshouse and three mushroom growing facilities across Australia.

The Berry Category operates farms in four states including Western Australia, Queensland, New South Wales and Tasmania, enabling not only access to local markets but providing a 52-week supply of blueberries and raspberries.

Established in 2014, the first stage of the Gingin farm included 15.5 hectares of berries. In the second stage of development in 2015 an additional 12.5 hectares of blueberries were added. Since then the farm has nearly doubled in size to 40 ha.

**The farm predominantly supplies the Western Australian market, with some produce also sold in South Australia during peak harvest periods.**

**Rather than shipping fruit from the East Coast, which was taking up to 5 days, the company made the decision to invest in growing the fruit locally to deliver improved quality berries to our Western Australian customers.**

Areas to the north and south of Perth were investigated, with southern regions identified as potential future sites for late season production.

A test plot was established in conjunction with the Western Australian Department of Agriculture in Manjimup, which continues to examine the seasonal timing across different varieties. To the north of Perth, the challenge was identifying a site with access to good quality water and good climatic conditions.

George Jessett, the International Horticulture Manager for Costa's Berry International, was involved in selecting the location. "We were looking to avoid frost, without being too hot," George said. "When we first started growing in Western Australia, there were just a few growers scattered around Perth but it was very much a developing industry."

The Gingin site proved ideal, with access to water and with a coastal orientation. Spencer Clark, the Regional Manager for the WA site, said ensuring good water quality was one of the main challenges to address.

"The water is higher in salt and iron, but we have found ways to overcome that through filtering systems and settling tanks. We've certainly had to learn new ways of doing things and ways to utilise the extreme conditions. A huge positive for this site is we have much lower pest and disease pressure here than on the East Coast," Spencer said.

The expertise provided through the Costa Berries International team has also proved invaluable in dealing with the extreme summer temperatures, which can exceed 40 degrees.



Spencer Clark — Costa Group.



Blueberry bushes.

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**Costa blueberries.** Photo credit: Costa Group

“There are a lot of similarities with Morocco, where we grow blueberries. We have the track record in dealing with those conditions and could apply that to this site,” George said.

**The dry climate in summer has reduced disease pressure, ensuring a consistent and high-quality crop.**

**The varieties grown on the farm include a mix of Snowchaser, Kirra and Arana, a premium variety developed by Costa as part of its blueberry selection and breeding program.**

Costa varieties are also in high demand around the world and are licensed to third-party growers in a number of regions including the Americas, Morocco, China and South Africa.

