



Reflections on 13 years of the International Blueberry Organisation (IBO) and the 2023 IBO summit



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As some of you may be aware, as well as being Chair of Berries Australia up until last year, I have also been the ABGA representative since the inception of the IBO and honoured to be Chair since 2016, and will step down later this year. I thought it was important before I moved on, to remind Australian growers about the International Blueberry Organisation and encourage greater participation from blueberry industry players.

The IBO is a global organisation bringing together leaders from the blueberry world in all segments of the industry, including blueberry producers and marketers, affiliated business, social groups, and governmental organisations worldwide.

Why would a relatively small blueberry growing country with limited blueberry exports and imports even need to be part of this global organisation and why would someone like me give up time and energy to support the organisation? The answer is that fundamentally we are part of a global economy and cannot ignore what is happening overseas. More importantly, we can learn from the experiences of others to build our industry here and as we increase our export footprint.

The IBO's main mission is to collect and share blueberry information, fostering a common goal of increased worldwide blueberry consumption in all forms. This involves promoting a better understanding of the common interests shared by blueberry growers and marketers, as well as affiliated business, social groups and governmental organisations throughout the world.

One of the primary deliverables of the IBO is the annual report on the **State of the Global Blueberry Industry**. A stand-out from the 2023 report is that since 2010 the blueberry industry has quadrupled in volume whereas the physical growing footprint has only tripled.

What this says is that our efficiency has increased significantly over that short period. It is also clear that there are a lot of blueberries coming online around the world and we all have to work together to increase global consumption.

One of the other major activities of the IBO is the bi-annual conference which was held in Poland in July. This was the first face-to-face conference since Covid and I would like to commend the Polish Blueberry Promotion Foundation for their efforts in pulling this event together.

There were numerous excellent speakers, and the overall sense was one of optimism. I was extremely impressed by the coherent and strategic approach of the Polish blueberry industry which is now the largest in Europe. Similar to Australia, they have significant domestic consumption but they also have to compete domestically with other European producers. The three pillars to their success are quality, promotion and co-operation. Whilst I certainly think our quality here in Australia is outstanding, I was really inspired by how their promotions focus on promoting the industry as well as the fruit. The gains they have made since working more closely together are significant and it is contingent on all ABGA members to ensure they keep supporting their association here in Australia.

It was very pleasing that Rachel Mackenzie was able to attend and present at the IBO summit and I strongly urge all blueberry growing businesses to consider attending the next summit in South Africa in 2025.

I can also say that despite Australia being a very minor player from a global volume perspective, we are highly regarded by the global blueberry family, be that for our quality reputation, success of private genetics programs or innovation, this is something we as an industry should be proud of. We cannot rest on our laurels as the future and the success thereof is in our hands so I cannot emphasise enough that supporting both ABGA and Berries Australia is a must, as is our membership of and participation in the IBO.