

Australian Strawberry Breeding Program Field Day

BS22000 Australian Strawberry Breeding Program
Wendy Morris, Berry Industry Development Officer, Queensland

On Wednesday 26 July, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Queensland hosted a field day for subtropical growers and industry stakeholders at the Maroochy Research Facility in Nambour.

The field day provided an opportunity for growers to meet with researchers and better understand the processes behind the Australian Strawberry Breeding Program (ASBP) project. The breeding program develops varieties for temperate, subtropical and Mediterranean growing regions. The day provided the opportunity for growers and stakeholders to examine and provide feedback on advanced subtropical accessions.

Dr Jodi Neal, Principal Plant Breeder and her colleague Dr Katie O'Connor, Plant Breeder walked the group through the trial fields. Dr Neal explained that while thousands of seedlings are assessed each year, only a fraction of these are selected to be trialed again as early-stage accessions, and fewer still make it to advanced-stage accessions and eventually to on-farm trials.

Seedling trial plants are assessed at intervals and marked with coloured flags to indicate favourable characteristics throughout the growing, flowering and fruiting period. Before being sent out to on farm trials, in-house virus testing via Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests and grafting onto indicator plants takes place.

The program also uses a heritage variety, *Phenomenal*, as a source of disease resistance genes. *Phenomenal* was developed over a century ago in Gympie by the Flay family and shows incredible disease resistance and fruits prolifically. The downside as growers quickly noticed, is that the small, soft fruit is tasty but would prove time consuming to harvest and be ill-equipped to deal with the length of modern supply chains.

Growers were invited to assess plants based on a number of factors including yield, fruit size, fruit taste and plant characteristics. Fruit had been picked the day before and kept in an uninsulated shed overnight before being placed near the plants they came from in plastic containers. This allowed growers to gain an indication of shelf life.

Over 35 farmers attended the field day, from a diverse range of backgrounds including organic and traditional farmers, plus growers who farm across Queensland regions enabling year-round harvest. It was fabulous to see a number of younger and next-gen growers also in attendance. The data produced by growers will be invaluable in assisting DAF with their trials.

After the field walk component, we enjoyed a BBQ lunch sponsored by FMC and Nutrien Ag Solutions based in Yandina. Karl and Millie from Nutrien did a fabulous job on the barbeque and nobody left hungry.

For everyone who missed the event, these field days will now be an annual event.

Thank-you to all the growers who attended, our sponsors and DAF staff members Jodi Neal, Katie O'Connor, Louella Woolcock, Joanna Gillespie, Michelle Paynter and Damian Muller.

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1. Attendees at the ASBP Field Day. Photo credit: Katie O'Connor
2. Lachlan Hammond (Hammond Farm). Photo credit: Wendy Morris
3. (L) Arman Berkett-Saleh and Tim Harris (Stothart Family Farms). Photo credit: Wendy Morris



Greenhouse Solutions



4. (L) Emily Harrison
(R) Ashlee Harrison (Harrison's Harvest)
5. David Beattie (Coochin Hills Organics)
Photo credit: Wendy Morris



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