

Profile: Andrew & Steph Terry, Tasmanian Berries

Claire McCrory, Berry Industry Development Officer, Rubus & Tasmania, Fruit Growers Tasmania

Andrew and his wife Stephanie are the pioneering couple behind "Tasmanian Berries" in the State's North. Andrew Terry, Managing Director of Tasmanian Berries, grew up on a mixed farming operation in Tasmania's north. Andrew graduated with a Bachelor of Business from the University of Tasmania and initially spent some time in the Tasmanian mining industry, before following his passion for horticulture.

He started his horticultural journey as a pruner in a vineyard where he worked his way up to become the Vineyard Manager, all whilst studying for and completing a Bachelor of Viticulture.

Andrew's wife Steph grew up in Hobart and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Law from the University of Tasmania. Since graduating, Steph has worked primarily in private practice and currently works part-time as well as raising the couple's two young daughters, who help with determining the optimum ripeness of raspberries and blackberries.

Steph assists in the long-term planning for the business's growth and future projects, as well as dealing with legal issues and requirements for the business.

Getting started with berries

In 2013, after much debate and consideration, Andrew and Steph made the decision to start a berry business and become independent growers for Driscoll's Australia.

At around the same time, the opportunity to purchase an existing berry business (also producing for Driscoll's), presented itself and the Terrys leapt into the industry with 10 hectares of strawberries, raspberries and blackberries over two sites in Central Northern Tasmania.

As a part of the decision-making process, Andrew recalls it was in experiencing one of Driscoll's Amesti strawberries that he was ultimately convinced to become a grower for Driscoll's.

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The berry in question didn't look anything special; if anything it looked a little under-ripe. It was only when I bit into it that I was shocked at the fantastic sweetness and texture, and knew I was looking at something special. I remember thinking if this is what their superior genetics can do, this is going to be a good investment.

Tasmanian Berries was established in 2014, however, their first year wasn't easy, and after months of farm use conversion, construction of poly tunnel infrastructure and installation of new irrigation equipment, the weather made things an even bigger challenge.

“We had about 80% of our strawberries (in ground) planted before a huge windstorm hit, devastating nearly three-quarters of our 10 hectares of tunnels. That was an expensive start to farming berries.”



Andrew Terry, Managing Director of Tasmanian Berries, inspecting early season raspberries. Photo credit: Tasmanian Berries

Growing the business

Today, the 10 hectare site at Christmas Hills exclusively planted out to raspberries is now at full capacity; the Exton site is now 28 hectares and produces table-top strawberries and hydroponic blackberries.

Having the two sites has been advantageous with staggering harvests and labour requirements; however, it is not always favourable when having to locate and move equipment between sites.

Andrew as Managing Director, oversees the general management of the business, including the general operations and harvest, future expansions and business planning, research and development projects and employment matters including acquiring and managing accommodation facilities and maintaining accreditations under the Seasonal Worker Programme.

Andrew has a particular passion for the Rubus component of his business. Since being involved in berries, the demand for raspberries and blackberries has increased exponentially. Rubus berries now make up over half the Tasmanian berry production area, consisting of Maravilla raspberries and Elvira and Victoria blackberry varieties.

The business manages its blackberry fruiting window with an early season schedule of staggered long-cane removal from cold storage, following with late season primocane blackberries fruiting in the autumn window. Traditionally, raspberries are produced on a double cropping system, whereby both a primocane crop in the autumn and a florican crop in the summer are produced over a one-year period.



As the raspberry market matures, we need to find new ways to be able to spread the production curve over Tasmania's long season. The business is shifting its focus from the traditional methods of growing raspberries into utilising raspberry long canes to be able to focus on the best fruiting cycle of the plant when we want it to happen.



It's exciting to be part of the momentum of the Rubus industry and contribute to understanding and perfecting how to grow each variety in Tasmania.

Growers around the world are still figuring out how to best manage the crop and I love being part of this and sharing our knowledge.

Being part of the Driscoll's group is making available two seasons of knowledge per year, not just our own learnings from the farm.

Keeping consumer focused

Tasmanian Berries produce is sold under the Driscoll's label in most Australian supermarkets, but Andrew says this is not the customer that he is focused on satisfying.

"There's a perception that Driscoll's is the customer and the business we grow the fruit for, but really, it is the people who buy the fruit who are the ones to convince."

"My focus is on premium, quality fruit that will catch the eye of the shopper pushing a trolley down the aisle to pick up a punnet of my fruit and decide to make a purchase."

When asked if he had any advice for those wanting to start growing berries commercially, Andrew's suggestion was: "Don't do it by halves and don't take any shortcuts, because growing good quality produce in a sustainable way is how the industry has come this far. If all growers continue to do this, it will further increase category demand and grow the industry for everyone."

Looking beyond the farm

Andrew sees the biggest challenge this year being access to labour. Tasmanian Berries source much of their seasonal labour through the Australian Government's Seasonal Worker Programme, which has faced significant challenges this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

These issues have prompted Andrew to become a representative on the RABA Board, and mark his initial entry into the agri-political space.

"I've previously avoided the agri-politics, thinking that people won't necessarily want to hear what I say or know what I do. I guess as I've gotten more into producing berries and the business has expanded, maybe if I have a bit more of a say by advocating grower needs and on how levies are spent, I hope to influence industry for the better."

