

# Queensland strawberry industry celebrates in style

Bron Ford, Queensland Berry Industry Development Officer

The Novotel Twin Waters on the Sunshine Coast was painted red and gold for the annual Queensland strawberry industry dinner and awards night held on Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October.

Just under 200 growers and industry supporters got dressed up and attended the event which was challenged by a number of restrictions associated with COVID-19 including border closures, no dancing allowed, adhering to social distance and traceability requirements.

The dinner kicked off with pre-dinner drinks and canapes sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in the alfresco area of the resort. An array of Kubota tractors supplied by AllClass Machinery also provided an impressive backdrop and certainly allowed the night to get off to a great start.

RDA West Moreton provided sponsorship of the MC for the event which was skilfully conducted by Ian Skippen, former radio host from B105 and Triple M. Rivulus were also major sponsors supporting the entertainment for the evening provided by the duo "Heidi & Scott". The beverages flowed throughout the night thanks to TriCal. As always, the awards part of the night was inspiring, and it was a fabulous opportunity to recognise a variety of people putting their heart and soul into the strawberry industry.



**Industry Young Gun — Rookie of the Year Award was presented by The Pump House to Ashlee Harrison from Harrisons Harvest.**



**Award accepted by Michael Bevege from The Pump House on behalf of Ashlee Harrison who was unable to attend the evening.**

*Ashlee is a third-generation farmer from the Elimbah area and was involved in all farming activities from a very young age. She has always displayed a keen interest in all aspects of the farm including plant health, soil management, machinery, harvesting, packing and distribution.*

*After leaving school, she moved away from the district and pivoted from agriculture to the mining industry. She was based in central Queensland in various mining operations for a number of years before returning to the family farm in 2019.*

*She provides critical assistance and managerial support in all aspects of the business including administration, farming operations, pack shed management, distribution and marketing. The family have always been amongst the quiet achievers in the industry with a focus on producing high quality strawberries.*

*As the next generation coming through the ranks, it is a pleasure to see the positive attitude towards the industry and the farm shining through with a real thirst to learn and adapt to change.*

## Industry Employee Engagement Award presented by FMC to Hamish Payne from Ashbern Farms



**Award accepted by Hamish Payne (centre), with QSGA President Adrian Schultz (left) and Kevin Melmeth from FMC (right)**

Hamish has been involved in all areas of the farming operation for over 14 years, starting out in the fields as a picker, then a supervisor and more recently as a Pack Shed Supervisor.

Coming from New Zealand and having grown up on a farm, he is no stranger to the demands of farm life and the principles of farming. He has a wealth of knowledge of strawberries from years in the fields and shed and is always happy to share this to ensure the company packs the best punnets possible, as efficiently as they can.

He is highly respected by everyone he works with and motivates people to strive to work to their fullest potential. He maintains a positive environment with all staff where they feel valued, part of a team and working together towards a common goal. He will go out of his way to help anyone.

Through all the crazy times in recent years, Hamish has been a calm and steadfast support as Ashbern Farms navigated through the various crises and adapted to accommodate any changes needed.



**Ashbern Farms' site at Beerwah.** Photo credit: Fran Flynn

## Strawberry Industry Services Award for Excellence in Service Delivery through COVID-19 presented by Bundaberg Fruit & Vegetable Growers to Lisa James from IComply



**Award accepted by Lisa James from IComply (centre), with QSGA President Adrian Schultz (left) and Bree Grima from BFGV (right)**

IComply was established in 2018 to meet the growing requirements on horticultural producers to address increased compliance requirements. Compliance is necessary in the modern changing markets with most marketing companies and retailers requiring third party food safety certification and traceability. This company supports strawberry businesses to make certain that the necessary policies and procedures are in place to ensure continued business growth and strengthened business relationships.

In early March this year, the company hosted a very informative and detailed workshop to highlight the risks and challenges that could potentially impact the strawberry industry due to a new virus called COVID-19 that was starting to impact the world and Australia. The workshop that attracted more than 55 strawberry growers heard about the potential issues that might come to play throughout the winter production season. The workshop was almost a "Nostradamus" type of activity in that everything that was highlighted during that workshop which was held quite early on in what we now refer to as "the pandemic" has all occurred.

Throughout the strawberry season this company has also been instrumental in supporting many growers develop and implement Health Management Plans that were a mandatory requirement of the state Government for anyone employing a seasonal workforce. Behind the scenes of this company is a pocket rocket that has 20 years' experience within High risk food industries. Lisa James has significant experience and is now considered a professional quality food safety specialist. This amazing person has in depth knowledge of food safety systems, effective quality control procedures which has led to HACCP, Food safety and 3rd party accreditations at the highest level. Lisa has been instrumental behind the scenes of this company providing significant awareness, support and assistance to strawberries growers to address the complexities brought on by COVID-19.

## Outstanding Contribution to the Industry Award presented by Opal to Luigi Coco



### Luigi Coco accepting his award

Luigi was elected in a voluntary capacity onto the management committee of QSGA more than 15 years ago.

In this time, he has been very active providing input, driving research and development, developing overseas market projects and organising field days and award nights.

He has represented Queensland strawberry growers on the Strawberries Australia board for many years and his input has been invaluable to the whole of Australia.

Luigi is renowned for helping his fellow Australian strawberry growers wherever he can. His advice and support are cherished in the industry.

Through persistent political negotiations and a “never give up” attitude, he was able to achieve the granting of a second working holiday maker visas in the Caboolture area. This change in federal legislation has helped the industry and the Moreton Bay region immensely.

A further major activity that has been driven by Luigi has been the highly successful commercialisation of the DAF bred strawberry varieties.

This program has been fundamental to the long-term financial viability of QSGA and has created a commercial business arm to the organisation that has grown significantly to now include the commercialisation of macadamia varieties.

He guided the industry through its darkest days during the tampering crisis and provided ongoing emotional support to many growers throughout this period.

We are very grateful for the commitment and passionate work ethic Luigi has demonstrated and we are also extremely aware of the sacrifices his family members have made over the years in on-farm operations and also the impact on family time during the evenings.

## Exceptional Women in Industry Award presented by Bugs for Bugs to Tina McPherson



### Award accepted by Tina McPherson (left), with QSGA President Adrian Schultz (right) and Paul Jones from Bugs for Bugs (centre)

Tina has travelled the world holding meaningful roles in both tourism and farming businesses until finding a special spot in Queensland to grow strawberries. This first-generation strawberry farmer has a passion for supplying high quality produce which has generated a strong customer following in high-end retail outlets in NSW and Victoria.

Tina is a fantastic advocate for the industry and is the “go to” person for local media to highlight the start of the strawberry season, generate consumer interest in strawberries, encourage community support for the industry and inspire increased consumption. The locally famous farm gate store that is open all year round, incorporating a highly successful “pick your own” feature during winter and spring has helped to elevate the business to being one of the top tourism ventures in the area. One visitor on Trip Advisor described the farm as a “Wonderful, authentic farm experience which is truly ‘Paddock to Plate’ with welcoming, friendly owners and staff” and a growing reputation for producing ice cream described by many as “the best they have ever eaten”.



### Fabulous strawberries at Tinaberries in Bundaberg

Photo credit: Tinaberries



**Strawberry fire pit**

Photo credit: TriCal



**Pims Mens on her farm at Glass House Mountains**

Photo credit: Jane Richter

A further highlight for the evening was the auction of a custom-made fire pit that weighed in at 250kg, designed for the event and kindly donated by TriCal.

The fire pit was built by recycling a cylinder that soil fumigants are imported in and the detail included strawberry shapes on the edge and on each leg.

After some fierce bidding, Pim Mens from Pims Organic Strawberries triumphed and her winning bid of \$1,600 will be donated to “The Common Good – an initiative of the Prince Charles Hospital”.

The Queensland strawberry industry has had a long association with The Common Good and this donation will contribute to their research priorities that focus on heart and lung disease, arthritis, dementia and hospital care.



**THE COMMON GOOD**  
PEOPLE POWERING MEDICAL DISCOVERIES



**QUEENSLAND  
STRAWBERRIES**

*All other images provided with thanks to Ashley Walmsley from Good Fruit & Vegetables*