

# ASPAA Strawberry Plant Standards and regulation of quality of both bare-rooted runners & plug plants

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Queensland strawberry fruit producers anonymously participated in a survey in Autumn 2020 with roughly 50% of growers responding. This was a great result and QSGA thanks everyone for their response at a busy time of the year.

The survey asked 19 questions and there was also a general comments section at the end of the survey, where producers could provide further information if they so wished. From the collated results, it was noted that there were some gaps in strawberry grower understanding.

Firstly, approximately 27% of growers did not know the current standards for bare-rooted plants, and a further 13% indicated they were not sure. When asked about current standards for plug plants, a greater number (53%) said they did not know what the standards were and a further 20% were unsure.

In terms of which entity is responsible for enforcing bare-rooted runner and plug plant standards, only 40% of strawberry growers were able to provide the correct answer, leaving 60% giving an incorrect answer or just not knowing.

## Who enforces bare-rooted runner and plug plant standards?

There are two bodies which oversee the accreditation of licensed plant propagators and the production of certified plants. A propagator must be accredited with either VSICA (the Victorian Strawberry Industry Certification Authority) or ASPAA (Australian Strawberry Propagators Accreditation Authority).

The purpose of these two schemes is to facilitate the production of true-to-type, disease-free, healthy bare-rooted runners, plug plants or tips, which when planted in accordance with good practices and managed properly, will produce timely and economic quantities of marketable fruit.

Each scheme outlines the procedures, standards and practices at all levels of nursery production to achieve the supply of certified quality plants for the strawberry industry, while balancing the interests of all stakeholders.

Toolangi Cooperative strawberry propagators are accredited by VSICA and other QSGA licensed propagators must be accredited by ASPAA. Being accredited by either VSICA or ASPAA is a very important part of obtaining and maintaining a licence to propagate PBR varieties managed by QSGA, and it is written into the licence contract. This condition is aimed at maintaining the highest possible plant health standards for production of either bare-rooted runners and/or plug plants for sale.

Under ASPAA rules, plant propagators are audited each year by an independent auditor approved by ASPAA to ensure that they are doing the best they can to produce consistent, high-quality plants. If they pass the audit, plants (whether bare-rooted runners or plug plants) can be sold as certified plants.

If the audit is not passed, some corrective action may be required. This may be a minor or major corrective action. If the corrective action is not successful, plants may be sold as non-certified plants but under ASPAA guidelines, the plant propagator doing this must obtain from the grower-purchaser a statement in writing that they are aware that the plants are uncertified and that they are willing to purchase them. The whole system of ASPAA accreditation and plant certification is written in 26-page document which is a living document revised and updated regularly.

### Who administers the schemes?

ASPAA is administered by a Board, which consists of an Independent Chair (John Chapman), two licensed propagators (currently Wally Sweet of Sweets SR and Jack Beattie of JCLM Farming) and two QSGA fruit grower nominees (currently Adrian Schultz and Brendon Hoyle). Composition of the Board may change from time

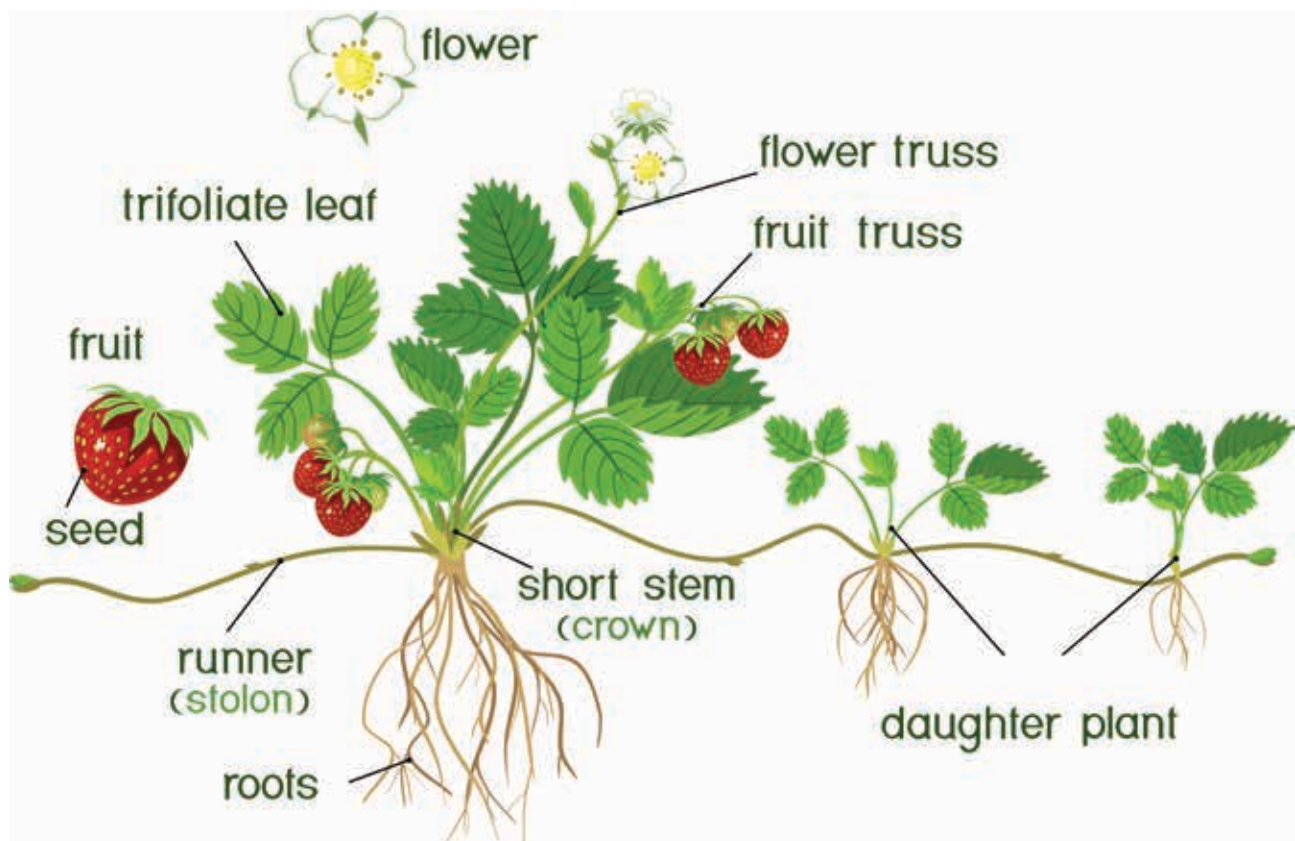
to time, but there should always be equal numbers of licensed propagators and fruit growers, with the objective of developing a consensus on all issues.

VSICA is also administered by a Board, with an Independent Chair. More detailed information on the operation of VSICA can be found in the Autumn 2020 edition of the Australian Berry Journal. They have internal plant quality standards.

### What are the ASPAA standards for strawberry plants generally?

For bare-rooted, leaf-on runners, those complying with ASPAA standards may be labelled Certified Strawberry Runners or Certified Strawberry Plants.

They must be apparently free of pests, fungi, virus, weeds and parasitic nematodes. A tolerance of 5% not meeting the plug and plant standards described overleaf is permitted.



**Stylised strawberry mother plant and daughter plant. Flowers are regularly removed from mother plants so fruit do not develop and seeds germinate.** Image credit: Kazakova Maryia

## What are ASPAA standards for bare-rooted, leaf-on runners?

### Plants sold as leaf-on must have:

- a minimum of three expanded functional leaves
- the leaf stalk length must be less than 300 mm (12 inches)
- a developed root system with a minimum of seven primary roots and also have secondary roots visible
- roots that are free of excessive soil and undamaged
- sufficient moisture on the roots to prevent plants dehydrating
- a crown that is 6mm or more in diameter at its widest point and visually clean
- dead leaves, runner stolons and debris removed before packing

## What are ASPAA standards for bare-rooted leaf-off runners?

### Plants sold as leaf-off runners may be mowed immediately prior to digging and processing, and must have:

- a crown that is 8mm or more in diameter at its widest part, with stems a minimum of 70 mm and 125 mm maximum in length, and visually clean
- a developed root system with a minimum of nine primary roots and also have secondary roots visible
- primary roots must be at least 100mm (4 inches) in length
- roots that are free of excessive soil and undamaged
- sufficient moisture on the roots to prevent plants dehydrating
- dead leaves, runner stolons and debris removed before packing

## What are ASPAA standards for plants?

### Plants sold as plug plants must meet all other plant standards as for certified bare-rooted runners and must have:

- good growth and have well developed root systems visible throughout the growing media cell
- well-established green tops with 2-3 healthy leaves
- roots which are not clearly dead or discoloured
- 90% of plants coming freely from their cells
- 95% of cells containing a plant

## Uncertified plants

Uncertified plants can only be sold after the purchaser agrees in writing to purchase such plants from the licensed propagator. Plant standards must be negotiated between the parties involved.

## What do I do if I believe I have a problem with plant quality?

Preferably before planting in the field has occurred and whilst keeping plants in cold rooms, the first step is to contact your plant supplier, and discuss any problem you have.

Some suppliers have field representatives who can visit your farm and make an assessment of the plant quality issue. Photographic records can be taken and supplied to the plant propagator. The best solution at this stage, due to timeliness of planting requirements, is to constructively discuss the problem with your propagator.

The second step is to record shipment details, including date, variety etc. and pass these details onto QSGA. Photographs are very helpful. If several growers have similar problems with the same variety at the same time, it could provide evidence that the problem might be related to a particular plant consignment.

For example, a transport company may not have kept plants at the required temperature during long-distance transport due to a cooling system malfunction, so it is possible that a whole consignment might be affected.

The third step, if the problem cannot be satisfactorily resolved with direct negotiations with your propagator, is to contact ASPAA (John Chapman, Chair, 0408 986 751) for assistance with the matter. ASPAA will appoint an independent third party to act as an arbitrator, but can also seek separate technical advice to make an objective decision. This must be done quickly and preferably before plants are planted.



*Acknowledgement: A number of people and organisations have contributed to this article, including all of the strawberry fruit producers who responded to the Autumn 2020 survey, ASPAA Chair John Chapman and ASPAA licensed propagators. We thank them all for their time and advice.*