

The Beerenberg Family Farm, Hahndorf, South Australia

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The Beerenberg Family Farm in Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills is a family owned and run business, nearly 200 years in the making. In 1839, Johann and Anna Paech left Prussia with their five children, with a dream of building a happy and prosperous life in Australia. Along with other Lutheran families, they settled in the Adelaide Hills to farm the productive, rich land, and establish the village of Hahndorf. The Paech family were mainly dairy farmers, until in the 1970s, five generations later, Grant and Carol Paech began planting strawberries.

Strawberries were initially sold from the farm, then later the market in Adelaide. As the family concentrated on growing strawberries, and expanded their plantings, they also began to make and sell strawberry jam, the beginning of the Beerenberg brand.

Beerenberg is German for 'berry hill', reflecting the produce grown, the family's heritage, and the farm's location in the hills. The farm is now run by Grant and Carol's children, the sixth generation of the Paech family to manage Beerenberg, with son Robert managing the farm's strawberry production. Robert's children, the seventh generation, also have roles within the business.

Not long after transitioning to growing strawberries, Robert's father introduced the idea of 'pick your own strawberries', with the farm soon becoming a tourist destination in the Hahndorf village. The range of products produced was also expanded to include other jams, sauces and chutneys, requiring the construction of a purpose-built factory on the farm.

The 'pick your own strawberries' patch is a big drawcard for visitors to Beerenberg Family Farm, as is the well-stocked retail shop.

In the 1980s, Beerenberg won the contract to supply jams to Qantas for their first-class passengers, replacing the imported jams previously supplied. This required the installation of an automated filling machine in the factory for the mini jars used.



Beerenberg's 'Pick Your Own' strawberries patch. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson.



The warehouse and factory complex, viewed from the observation area. The vats where the products are made can be seen through the windows on the left. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson.



Beerenberg Family Farm shop and strawberry products. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson.



Robert Paech (Beerenberg farm manager) and Rachel Mackenzie (Berries Australia) in the 'Pick Your Own' strawberries patch & Beerenberg Family Farm jam range. Photo credit: Angela Atkinson.

Beerenberg Pty Ltd launched the Beerenberg Foundation in 2010 which supports philanthropic activities to conserve and celebrate the Hahndorf region's unique heritage.

The foundation has supported projects as varied as concerts, sculpture exhibitions, signage for heritage buildings in the village, and revegetation programs in the district.

The company underwent a major rebranding in 2013, to improve the products' visibility in their retail outlets. In some independent retailers there are dedicated displays of all Beerenberg products.

The business also focusses on the provenance of the products, sourcing all produce used to make the huge range of jams and condiments from Australian growers, locally where possible, including Beerenberg's own strawberries.

The provenance of Beerenberg's products can be checked on their website using the Provenance Pathway™, which provides information about the ingredients, nutritional information and where the product is made.

In 2018, a new state of the art factory was built on the farm site, including offices and a large warehouse. The business now employs more than 80 people, mostly local residents, and has an extensive retail outlet as well, situated in the original factory building. There are plans to extend the retail shop to utilise the whole former factory site. Beerenberg products are also available nationally in Coles, Woolworths, independent supermarkets and providores, with the original strawberry jam still the best-selling product.

Rachel Mackenzie, Berries Australia Executive Director, and I visited Robert at the Beerenberg farm in April this year. We were shown the pick your own strawberries patch, where Albion is the predominant variety grown, and were lucky to visit the new factory and watch the warehouse in action from the observation area. We also had ample opportunity to peruse the extensive range of berry products in the farm store and may have done some shopping - yum!

Thanks to Robert for showing us around and giving us an insight into how his family has built a successful, value-adding enterprise from their original farming business.