

WA Heavenly Strawberries Guaranteed Sweet

Damon Watling, Director, Quality Produce International

With its fourteenth season in sight, and around 450,000 punnets sold each year, Perth grown Heavenly Guaranteed Sweet Strawberries aren't far away from hitting local retailer shelves for the upcoming 2021 season.

We take a look at what makes these strawberries uniquely different and talk to Quality Produce International (QPI) in Western Australia, who founded the Heavenly brand over a decade ago.

Scott Williams QPI's Berry Category Manager tells us why Heavenly Strawberries are a WA local success story, and why it's not just the flavour, presentation or aroma that make it one of WA's most anticipated locally grown premium fruits. It's also the careful handling and science the grower uses to ensure its guaranteed sweet taste.

Tell us about the variety used for the Heavenly brand

"The strawberry selected for the Heavenly brand is Albion, it has a classic conical shape, deep red glassy appearance and a lovely strawberry aroma; you can really smell the fruit and most importantly the flavour is awesome!"

Your fruit goes through a rigorous selection process, tell us about that

"Our berries are handpicked and hand packed but careful attention to detail is critical. Firstly, they must visually meet the Heavenly standard, full colour, size and shape. Secondly a sample of fruit is selected for sugar testing (Brix test). After this process, any fruit that has not met the Heavenly guaranteed sweet standard is packed under another brand. In most cases this fruit is usually lighter in colour and could have size or shape variations but is still a very good strawberry."

Your fruit is Brix tested — what does this involve?

"A sample of the fruit is crushed and it's the juice that's applied to the surface of our scientific testing equipment (Brix refractometer) which gives us a sugar reading. We do this to meet the Heavenly brand standard and I don't think there is anyone else out there sugar testing their berries like this."

"To get the Brix levels right and the best fruit for Heavenly, it's the riper fruit we want. To achieve this, farm management becomes very important, it can be a fine line between achieving what we consider the perfect fruit or becoming over ripe and losing large volumes of fruit no longer suitable for marketing."

What role has your grower and your marketing played in the success of the brand?

Our growers Chi and Anthony Lieu, supported by the Lieu family, already had the expertise to grow this particular variety, and we identified their fruit was something special. Their respect of the brand and the consistency of high-quality fruit has as much to do with the success of the brand as the marketing of the brand itself.

Chi and Anthony recognise the importance of post-harvest refrigeration and the need for well trained staff to make the Heavenly brand successful, all care is taken not to damage or bruise fruit through the selection and packing process.



Harvest 2020, Carabooda, WA. Photo credit: Annabelle Watling Photography





Hand selection of Heavenly Strawberries. Photo credit: Annabelle Watling Photography



Albion Variety, Heavenly Strawberries.

Photo credit: Annabelle Watling Photography

Heavenly's are now really recognisable, supported by an online social media profile, and people come to recognise and trust the brand and know it for the quality product it is.

It's exciting and rewarding to see consumers prepared to pay a premium for a high-quality product, for the sensory and eating experience Heavenly strawberries deliver. Customers see them as value for money.

To maintain the reputation of the brand and the confidence of our customers, there is a cost! Attention to detail, hard work and dedication is required to uphold the brand.

We are looking forward to the season ahead, reuniting with our customers and continuing to strengthen our place in the market.

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