

# It's a family affair growing strawberries in SEQ

Bron Ford, Berry Industry Development Officer, Queensland Strawberry Growers Association

Laura and Pieter Hendriksen started growing strawberries in 1985 along with an assortment of vegetables including cherry tomatoes, zucchini and button squash. It all began at Richlands, south-west of Brisbane, on land belonging to Laura's Grandmother. After a while, they moved slightly further south to Park Ridge and their focus has evolved to producing fresh strawberries all year round across three locations - Park Ridge, Chambers Flat and Applethorpe on the Granite Belt.

Laura, Pieter, Rick, Josh and daughters Carla and Nicole are all involved in various aspects of the business including farming operations, payroll, staff management, pack-shed management and quality assurance. And of course, as small business owners they share out the various administrative and compliance tasks that underpin any horticultural business today.

Rick Hendriksen manages the Applethorpe farm and is currently producing fruit under the "Berry Blush" label. The Hendriksen's normally grow about 650,000 plants over summer from October to May, however because of the severe drought on the Granite Belt they reduced their plant numbers to 300,000 this season. The climate on the Granite Belt is unpredictable over summer and the area is prone to significant weather events.

"Unfortunately, our farm was hit by a severe hailstorm in December and we lost about 70% of our crop. We are back picking good quality strawberries now which should continue until May," said Rick.

For those that know their strawberry varieties, the Applethorpe farm produces Albion and San Andreas which are both known to produce large, uniformed shaped, sweet tasting berries.

Preparation is also currently underway for the winter strawberry production season at the Park Ridge and Chambers Flat farms. Plastic and fertiliser have been laid in readiness for planting strawberry varieties which have been specifically bred for the winter production season - Red Rhapsody and Petaluma.

"We will be planting in the order of 650,000 plants in March to supply the Brisbane Markets with fruit from June until October. Our "Sunrise Strawberries" brand is available from a number of agents at the Brisbane Markets and a variety of fruit and vegetable retail outlets in Queensland," said Laura Hendriksen.

The Hendriksen family also operate a direct sale business from the Chambers Flat farm. From June until November the farm has a retail shop selling farm fresh strawberries and strawberry ice cream direct to visitors. Once the fruit is in high supply, the farm opens up for pick your own (PYO), normally from August to October.

Opening your farm to the public brings a whole new set of challenges, but a well set up PYO arrangement can lift your per kilo price at a point where the broader market becomes quite depressed due to high supply.

Despite the climatic challenges the business faces with production on the Granite Belt, the Hendriksen family still believe it is important to supply good quality, sweet tasting strawberries all year round to the Brisbane Markets for Queensland consumers to enjoy.



**We love working as a family and producing wonderful strawberries for Aussies to enjoy every day of the year.**



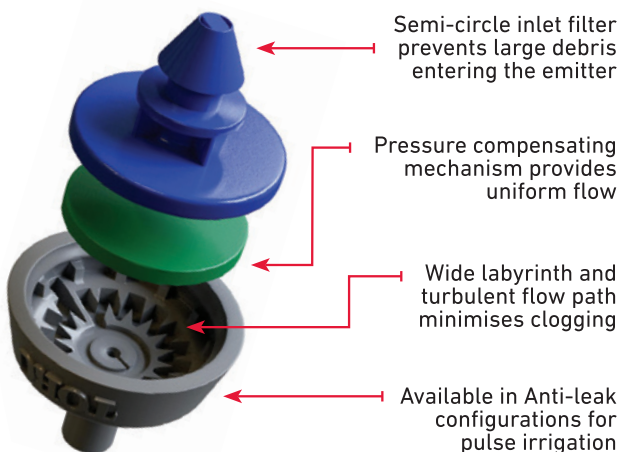
**Laura, Pieter & Rick Hendriksen with some of their freshly picked berries**  
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