

# Grower profile: Perfection Fresh

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Established in 1978 by Antonio Simonetta, Perfection Fresh is a family-run business that stands out as a leader in Australia's berry industry, and in the Horticulture sector more broadly. They have grown to become a vertically integrated operation, which encompasses all aspects of the horticultural supply chain, including variety evaluation, production, distribution and marketing through to the end consumer.

Perfection Fresh expanded into berries in 2016, establishing berry propagation and production facilities at Caboolture and Bundaberg. These operations harvested their first crops in 2016 and 2017 respectively and established a strong network of growers across the country to enable year-round supply.

The company has also invested in a third berry production site in North West Tasmania to enable supply to increase during the summer and autumn months. They produce and market a number of high-profile berry varieties including raspberries, strawberries and blueberries which stand out from competitors.

One of the employees is Roger Turner, who joined the company in 2018 and now leads Perfection Fresh's berry production sites. Originally from the United Kingdom, Roger brings experience gained from growing berries and vegetables in Queensland and Victoria. In this role, Roger shared some insights on current trends within the industry.

## Quality comes first

Perfection Fresh has developed a trusted reputation for product freshness, flavour and quality.

"Perfection Fresh began as a fresh produce wholesale business, where reliability, freshness and flavour is paramount, and this philosophy carries through into everything we do."

"Quality starts at the farm and continues through the supply chain. As producers, we have to be constantly focused on the needs and expectations of the end consumer, because they are the ones who choose to buy your product."

## Automation

Roger thinks the ability to automate key parts of the production system is one of the biggest advances for berry producers looking to manage quality.

"As a grower, investing in automation gives you much better control of your growing environment, and ultimately over your product. It makes your growing environment more uniform, and easier to manage effectively."

"As a grower, investing in automation for systems like fertigation and irrigation was an easy decision as it allowed us to better target our water and fertiliser which has translated to an improvement in the overall berry quality. It also means we can track and make sure these activities occur when they need to, regardless of what else might be happening on the farm at that time."

"Harvesting is one big opportunity for this, giving us finer control over finished product quality and helping us manage our labour force more efficiently."

Despite the benefits of automation, Roger thinks the human element will still be a big part of horticulture for years to come.



**Perfection Fresh berry site at Caboolture, Qld.**

Photo credit: Perfection Fresh

**Raspberries ripening**

Photo credit: Perfection Fresh



**Raspberries grown in tunnels at the Caboolture farm site**

Photo credit: Perfection Fresh

“Harvesting is still a major area where humans are critical. I think effective robotics is getting closer for our sector, but it is still some time away and is unlikely to completely replace human labour.

Being able to work both day and night has its advantages in terms of time and labour savings, but for extremely delicate crops like raspberries it is unlikely that early robots will have the speed and delicacy to replace skilled human hands.”

## The importance of genetics

The use of proprietary superior genetic material suited to Australia’s climate and growing conditions is an area that Perfection Fresh is passionate about.

“Using good genetics gives us a consistent high-quality product that looks good and eats well. This is critical for making sure the consumer enjoys the eating experience and keeps choosing our product when they are looking for berries.”

Perfection Fresh has been proactive in linking with breeding programs in Australia and overseas to ensure they have access to the best varieties available. Through these linkages, Perfection Fresh acquired exclusive Australian rights to a number of raspberry varieties, which was essential to Perfection Fresh’s decision to produce and supply berries. This acquisition was followed by subsequent purchases of proprietary blueberry, strawberry and blackberry varieties.

## Labour

Harvest workers are becoming more and more important to the industry as the berry sector continues to grow and competition between businesses intensifies. To help manage this, Perfection Fresh have turned to the Commonwealth Government’s Seasonal Worker Program to provide them with an alternative source of workers to assist with seasonal harvest activities.

“As a business we recognised a number of years ago that we were too reliant on transient backpacker labour. Drawing upon the Seasonal Worker Program has been great for our business; it means we reliably have access to harvest workers on the farm who want to come to Australia and are keen to work for us.

Roger also says that the human element is important, as they get to know their workers over multiple seasons.

“The individual workers we bring in from the Pacific are able to come back year after year; this means we get to know them, their families, and get to see the huge impact that working for us makes to them, their families and their communities.”

## Opportunities abound for new growers

As Perfection Fresh’s berry footprint continues to grow, the business is continuing to attract new growers across the country to join its network of berry growers and suppliers and is eager to expand on what they offer and add new growers to their networks.



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