

# Queensland Strawberries Annual Dinner & Awards '21

Suzette Argent, Berry Industry Development Officer, Queensland

The Events Centre in Caloundra was where it was all happening on Saturday 30 October for the 2021 Queensland Strawberry Growers' Association (QSGA) Dinner and Awards night.

It was a more intimate affair this year with 120 guests attending the evening. Spirits were high and the crowd enjoyed a night off to celebrate in style.

The night started with pre-dinner drinks and canapes sponsored by MADEC. Formalities commenced with MC Mark McConville – an accomplished Stand-Up Comedian also known for his mental health work using his laughter clinic for suicide prevention – opening the evening. A speech from Adrian Schultz, QSGA President, highlighted the challenges the industry faced this year; extreme labour shortages, unexpected early season price drops, dramatically reduced demand from the two largest markets stuck in extended lockdowns due to COVID-19 and the continued lack of domestic or international people movement. The innovation and resourcefulness of growers was celebrated having survived another unprecedented season.

When people took their seats for the formalities of the evening, wines were available on the table thanks to irrigation business Rivulis. Back for the second-year running were acoustic duo Heidi & Scott kindly sponsored by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Tables were sponsored by Elders, Fullyarn and E.E. Muir & Sons and VIP tables supported by Multisteps and Perfection Fresh allowed more growers to attend and celebrate the 2021 winter strawberry season.

The award ceremony saw seven awards handed out and the night closed with a lucky door prize kindly donated by Multisteps.



Entertainment duo Heidi & Scott.

## Exceptional Employee Awards presented by Fernland and Nufarm

Two exceptional employee awards were given to reflect and celebrate the valuable employees that support our growers through the season.

This was especially important this year with the available labour supply being limited adding pressure for both employees and employers.

## Excellence in Service Delivery to the Strawberry Industry presented by Taste 'n'See

Errol Graham has been providing service to the industry for many years within different roles primarily selling fertiliser and other products.

Since 2015, Errol has worked for E.E. Muir & Sons as the manager in the Caboolture region and in October this year, he announced his retirement.

Errol was a good friend and became a key member of the farming family for many growers he serviced. Customer service was his speciality, always going the extra mile and being personable with everyone.

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“He is just a legend” everyone would agree

It seems like it is always about the dollar but customer service is the key, going the extra mile & being personable is he

When you needed product by the Monday & Friday you gave the call, you can guarantee a YES because he doesn't know 'NO' at all.

More warmly kindness was his way, a request for something unusual he'd still answer OK

No problem this superhero couldn't solve, he made things happen, so I'm told

He would go out of this way to give you a ring, you could rely on his deliveries for countless & endless things.

He became part of the family for many I hear, someone to be thanked for many trusted years.

A real gentleman he is, a reliable part of the extended family that will be dearly missed.

Thank you, Errol Graham for your excellent service delivery to the industry.



Exceptional Employee Award winner Annie with Anthony Challenger from award sponsor Fernland and Adrian Schultz, QSGA President.



Errol Graham & his wife



L-R: Jane Stohart and Tahlia Stohart



Representatives from four of the generous farms receiving their awards

## Exceptional Women in the Strawberry Industry presented by Opal

Tahlia Stothart came back to the family farm about 10 years ago and trained in wages and auditing. As the family business has grown, so too has she. She continues to adapt and improve systems that hold the business and the people within it together.

110% effort and passion has always been shown. Her talents in graphic design have also been showcased on the businesses websites.

Tahlia is known as a friend, kind, quiet, thoughtful, selfless and humble. She is meticulous, patient and a perfectionist at everything she does. She always has time for people. The calmness and kindness she brings to work makes it a stressless and joyful environment for all.

## Generous Giver awards presented by MADEC

The Queensland Strawberry Industry has a long history of supporting good causes and this year has been no different. With COVID-19 again affecting the ability of charities to run events, we were able to support The Common Good and Chevallum Strawbfest.

“The Common Good is about all of us working together to give precious time to medical researchers, so they can help people, and those they love, live happier, healthier, longer lives. Using the power of us all, we can sustainably fund innovative medical discoveries that will profoundly improve and save lives,” explains Michael Hornby, CEO of The Common Good.

“All of the research that is carried out at Caboolture Hospital – saving the lives of locals across this major growing area – is funded by The Common Good. A dollar raised for them is a dollar that goes towards life-saving research that may one day benefit you or someone you love.”

Chevallum State School has been fundraising for its school community for 34 years and for the first 31 of those, they were supported by the strawberry farm that surrounded the school – Twist Brothers. With the closure of that strawberry business, QSGA has stepped forward to continue the support by facilitating connections to other farms to help with the provision of jam berries & strawberries for sale by the school at its events.

All photos provided by QSGA.

As Strawbfest was cancelled due to COVID-19 for the second year running, QSGA invited the Chevallum team to be a part of the Strawberry & Dessert Festival held at the Sandstone Point Hotel in September where they were able to raise vital funds for the school and its community on the Sunshine Coast.

Seven farms stepped forward this year to provide fresh fruit – completely free of charge – to assist these two really worthwhile causes. All seven farms were acknowledged and thanked for their generosity.

Pinata Farms, TSL Family Farms, A E Coco & Sons, Stothart Family Farms, GG Group, Hermes Strawberries and Ashbern Farms.

## Outstanding grower contribution to the strawberry industry presented by Sunsuper

The outstanding grower’s contribution to the strawberry industry award this year went to Adrian Schultz. He not only coped with the responsibilities for their own business, Luvaberry, but has held the weight of the whole industry on his shoulders. He has done countless interviews on radio, TV and for print media and been available on the phone 24/7 this year to make sure that Queensland strawberries received every possible piece of positive media attention to help recruit the workforce needed by everyone.

When the winter strawberry growers were blind-sided by the lack of demand just as peak production hit, he stepped up again and was relentless in his efforts to help the SOS message get out.

*Thank you, Adrian, and thank you Mandy for supporting Adrian so brilliantly whilst being so busy with the business of your own family and farm activities.*



**Mandy & Adrian Schultz, Luvaberry**