

Queensland Strawberries' winter season-saving gamble pays off

Jane Richter, Marketing Manager, Queensland Strawberry Growers' Association

As the dust settled on the end of this year's winter strawberry season, Queensland Strawberry Growers' Association (QSGA) President, Adrian Schultz reflected on the success of the innovative labour attraction program – PickPackWin.

"There was a great feeling of concern in the industry back in March this year when it became clear that borders were not going to open, and our usual peak workforce of working holiday makers were continuing to leave the country in droves. We knew we needed to do something radical and that's where the PickPackWin idea came from," said Adrian.

Using a promotional technique usually only found in the world of consumer products or services, a 'chance to play to win up to \$100,000' promotion was developed and launched to attract workers.

The promotional registration portal opened in early April and almost immediately had hundreds of people registering their details, with the system automatically sending job applications directly to the participating farms that the worker had selected.

By the end of the promotion in early October, over 5,500 people had registered to take part and over 2,500 had gone on to work on the 31 participating farms across the Queensland winter strawberry growing regions. Every week that they worked at one of the farms earned them entry points into the draw.

Surprisingly, over 40% of all people registering were Aussies, many from interstate who were attracted by the idea of spending a winter working in the Queensland sun with the added benefit of the chance to play to win up to \$100,000 tax free.

The promotion was structured to give bonus entry points to reward worker behaviour that would assist the growers with planning and managing their workforce across the season. People who registered and applied for work before the end of May received early sign-on bonuses, but the biggest bonus points were applied to encourage loyalty to a single farm.

"The largest concern for growers after attracting workers was how to retain them across the season," says Jane Richter, Marketing Manager for QSGA. "So, we included really large bonus entry points for staying with a single farm – in fact, of the 9,950 total entry points that could be earned, 8,150 of them came from bonuses!"

"People may think that picking and packing strawberries is super simple, but actually there is a considerable amount of skill involved in picking only the berries that are ripe and ready that day and packing the right weight of berries into each punnet without damaging the delicate fruit. We think it takes about 7-10 working days for someone to build up the skills and required speed to make a great picker or packer. So having invested that time in skilling up your workers, each farm was understandably keen to retain them for the length of the season," says Adrian.

Feedback from many of the farms that took part indicated that they were able to manage their labour this season in a way that no one thought possible back in March. Several farms have also reported that the promotion has attracted some really talented local people to give farm work a go that would never have considered it in the past.

"This promotion will leave a lasting impact for some of our growers with new team members coming forward because the promotion grabbed their attention and enabled them to think 'why don't I just give this a go?' said Adrian.



Strawberry patch created for The Game. Photo credit: Tim Pasquelone, AONE Media.



The 10 Contestants represented the full cross section of workers in the Queensland Strawberry industry. Photo credit: Tim Pasquelone, AONE Media.

At the end of the promotional period in early October, all the points earned were converted into draw entries and a computer randomiser performed the unenviable task of selecting 10 lucky contestants from the huge pool of entries.

With so many workers staying at their chosen farm all season and earning big loyalty bonuses, the total draw entries from 2,500 people was 8,294,300!

The finale for the promotion was 'the Games' held on 21 October 2021 at the Sandstone Point Hotel in southeast Queensland. As an 'Insured Prize Promotion', an official from the Insurance Underwriter brought the sets of 100 envelopes for each game with the whereabouts of the \$100,000 prize in each game a closely guarded secret.

Each contestant got the chance to select their number from 1 to 100, either by picking a favourite number or by wandering the strawberry patch that had been created for the games and selecting a numbered flag at random. The envelope corresponding to their chosen number was then opened for all to see. When the envelope contained the second prize of \$1,000 (found in 99 of the 100 envelopes) the official then opened the envelope containing the \$100,000 to ensure complete fairness.

The 10 contestants each had very different stories. Two were here in Australia as part of the Seasonal Worker Program from Tonga and Timor-Leste. Three were permanent workers who have been part of the industry for several years. Four were working holiday makers that were back doing their second or third strawberry season. And one was an Aussie from NSW who came to Queensland and worked in strawberries as a direct result of the promotion.

At the Games, every contestant walked away a winner with \$1,000 in their pocket, but it is the wider Queensland strawberry industry that has truly won this year.

If we hadn't taken the leap of faith and invested in this activity, we absolutely would have experienced a very different outcome,' confirms Adrian.

"Of course, the promotion didn't solve everything – we still all experienced the issue of some workers not making it past the first week, but at least we attracted a pipeline of interested people that would not have occurred otherwise."

For more information, please contact:

Jane Richter | jane@teres.com.au | 0431 700 258

Watch the season wrap-up video:

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youtube.com/watch?v=x0wRfQqX6EQ

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