

Profile: Bloobs Blueberries, Tasmania

Mark Salter, Berry Industry Development Officer, Fruit Growers Tasmania

Situated at Gardners Bay, near Cygnet in southern Tasmania, 'Bloobs' is a 2.5ha blueberry farm run by Tim and Jo Muir. Tim is a teacher with 25 years' experience, whilst Jo is a scientist and professional working for the University of Tasmania. After planting their first blueberry plants 10 years ago, the couple have continued to grow the business while also bringing up a family and juggling demanding jobs.

Bloobs' story began in 2009 when Tim and Jo purchased the 22-acre site of grassy paddocks at Gardners Bay. The area is ideal for supporting blueberry production. The long, cool growing season is protected from temperature extremes and allows the production of slow-grown, excellent quality fruit with great flavour.

Today, Bloobs have five varieties of blueberries in production, with their harvest starting off in mid-December and running through until late February. With many bushes still coming into full production, Tim estimates that this year's harvest will be approximately 16 tonnes but is expected to grow to around 20 tonnes once all plants are in full production.



Jo and Tim Muir from Bloobs Blueberries Photo credit: Mark Salter, FGT



Blueberry bushes grown in ground at Bloobs Blueberries

Photo credit: Mark Salter, FGT

Production

The Muir's have a strong focus on environmental sustainability, and this is evident in the way the fruit is produced.

Tim and Jo are passionate about growing a product that is genuinely healthy, high quality and certified organic.

The plants are all grown in the ground under organic principles, meaning there is a heavy emphasis on biological practices such as mulching and the use of compost teas to help build microbial activity in the soil.

Water is sourced from a series of creek fed dams, with a drip irrigation system used to water the plants. The site also features overhead irrigation sprinklers, which are used for cooling and frost protection.

Tim uses an agronomist with organic experience to guide his nutrition program while pests and diseases are managed using organic techniques.

Tim is also experimenting with trellising some of the varieties to hold the lower limbs higher keeping them from touching the ground, which will make the harvest process more efficient and hopefully result in more first grade fruit.

Focusing on local

A large portion of Bloobs' blueberries are sold locally in packaging sourced from recycled materials, with excess fruit sold into interstate markets in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Fruit is stored in new coolstore facilities, before being hand sorted and packed using a recently purchased blueberry punnetiser. To harvest their crop, Bloobs employ around 15 pickers during the busy harvest period in addition to Tim, Jo, and their three sons who work during their summer holidays. Many of the pickers live locally, with some returning every year. Tim says an additional advantage of employing locals is they are available for other tasks such as pruning and mulching throughout the year. The farm is open most days during the season for farm gate sales, and, on Sundays the farm is open for 'pick your own' where people can come along and enjoy picking fruit. Jo prefers to use Facebook and Instagram as their main marketing tools for promotion, but also notes the important role that word of mouth can play in building new customer relationships.

Future focus

Looking to the future, Tim says some of their goals include identifying new opportunities to add value to their lower grade fruit, and as the business grows, spending more time on the farm.