

IDO & Communications Project Update: Year 1 Achievements

Jen Rowling, Project Manager, Berries Australia

They say time flies when you're having fun...well our Industry Development and Communications project team must be having lots of fun because the first year of the new project has absolutely flown by!

The new project – Facilitating the development of the Australian Berry Industry (MT22010) – which kicked off in July 2023 is in full swing and the team got together recently in Melbourne to review the first year of the project and put plans in place for year 2.

This project has been funded by Hort Innovation, using the Blueberry, Strawberry, Raspberry and Blackberry research and development levies and contributions from the Australian Government.

Industry Development

A key aspect of the new project is the flexibility around delivery of information-sharing activities, which allows the Industry Development Officers (IDOs) to coordinate events and resources to suit the grower demographics in each of their regions. There are noticeable differences in how growers like to receive information from state to state and also by commodity and business type, and the flexibility of the project provides the IDOs with the ability to effectively reach a broader cross-section of growers. To date, a range of in-person and online activities have been delivered and have been well attended by growers and industry associates.

The team will continue to focus on the key priority areas that were highlighted from a survey carried out early last year, but again, the project provides the flexibility to address important issues as they arise. The four key areas of priority are:

- Irrigation & nutrient management
- Pest & disease management
- Business & labour management
- New technologies & robotics

Each of the IDOs has a berry specialty and this matrix approach means the team has expertise across the berry categories and can work together to ensure that growers also have access to relevant technical knowledge and experience.

In April, Gaius Leong (blueberry specialist) travelled to Tasmania to visit blueberry growers and participate in a field day coordinated by Mark Salter, presenting on nutrition for blueberries. Attendees also heard from other industry experts covering pest and disease management, blueberry rust and blueberry export for Tasmania and the event attracted over 30 growers and industry associates.

As our Rubus specialist, Mark also travelled to Queensland in April to meet with Rubus growers in both the South East Queensland and Stanthorpe growing regions. The tour was coordinated by Queensland IDO Wendy Morris and gave Rubus growers in the state an opportunity to tap into Mark's knowledge and experience on Rubus production.

Our Victorian IDO, Angela Atkinson, is the team's biosecurity specialist and as such has been heavily involved in the national Varroa mite response. Her representation of the berry industry at the countless meetings held since the incursion has helped to ensure that the industry is considered in the response, and provides our team with a thorough understanding of how and why the response has progressed as it has, which can then be communicated with growers and industry.

In WA, Helen Newman has developed a range of translated resources such as fact sheets and articles for the Australian Berry Journal and delivered events with translation for the local Vietnamese strawberry growing community. This has significantly expanded the scope of growers in the state receiving important news and information through the project.

The project team have also worked together on nationally coordinated activities such as a webinar held in February on strawberry nursery plug plant quality and establishment with international expert Klaas Plas as guest speaker. This important topic for the strawberry industry attracted over 150 growers, propagators and industry associates and is a perfect example of how the team were able to respond to a particular issue based on grower feedback. The webinar was recorded and is available to view from our website Resource Library.

With BerryQuest International on the near horizon, a significant part of the IDO workplans for the coming

year will be focussed on development of the program and farm tours. The end goal is a highly informative, relevant and inspiring suite of speakers and topics for the biannual conference of the Australian Berry Industry taking place in February 2025 in Tasmania.

The first year of the project has seen the IDO team work exceptionally well together but there are changes ahead, with Mark (Tas) heading into retirement and Angela Atkinson (Vic) moving into the newly created role of R&D Manager with Berries Australia. Whilst we will miss having them as part of the IDO team, we look forward to welcoming two new IDOs into the fold. Stay tuned for further developments!

Communications

Our Communications Manager, Jane Richter, has continued to compile and produce both print and digital resources for the industry. The first year of the project has delivered:

4 editions of the Australian Berry Journal (Spring 23, Summer 23, Autumn 24 and this edition Winter 24) with a printed copy of each edition distributed to over 850 recipients

12 editions of The Burst e-Newsletter, with 1,775 subscribers and an above average open rate compared to industry average (Agriculture and Food Services)

9 additional news alerts delivered via email to e-News subscribers containing time-sensitive information

A significant increase in the amount of information shared on our social media channels. This is an additional method being utilised to reach growers and stakeholders

with timely messaging and can be quantified with the following stats for the period 1 Jan to 30 Apr 2024:

@berriesaus

948 followers | 83 posts | 3,654 post reach
Follow us: facebook.com/berriesaus

berries-australia

1,613 page followers with +727 this year
60 posts | 37,560 impressions
2,903 link clicks | 8.4% Engagement Rate
(Note: A 2% LinkedIn engagement rate is considered good, and an above 2% engagement rate means you are doing great!)
Follow us: linkedin.com/company/berries-australia

Jane has also worked tirelessly on the development of the new **Resource Library which is housed within the Berries Australia website**. The library now contains almost 600 documents and resources including factsheets, posters, case studies, research reports, videos and links to resources hosted on other websites. All journal articles since the very first edition of the Australian Berry Journal (2019) are now included in the Library in downloadable PDF format, providing our industry with access to a plethora of information and resources. You can filter by Category, Author or simply type a search term into the 'Search' box. This Resource Library will continue to be expanded on an ongoing basis.

Seventeen news articles have also been published to the News section of the website, and industry events are regularly added with the ability to register for events where this is a requirement.

The Project Team

Position (Expertise)	Name	Organisation	Location
IDO – NSW (Blueberries/Pollination/Chemical/Next Gen)	Gaius Leong	NSW DPI	Coffs Harbour, NSW
IDO – VIC & SA (Strawberries)	Vacant	VSIDC	TBC
IDO – QLD (Strawberries)	Wendy Morris	Berries Australia	Brisbane, Qld
IDO – TAS (Rubus)	Ella Roper*	Fruit Growers Tasmania Inc (FGT)	Hobart, Tas
IDO – WA (Strawberries)	Helen Newman	APC	Perth, WA
Communications Manager	Jane Richter	Teres Communication	Sunshine Coast, Qld
R&D and Biosecurity Manager	Angela Atkinson	Berries Australia	Wandin, Vic
Project Leader	Rachel Mackenzie	Berries Australia	Brisbane, Qld
Project Manager	Jennifer Rowling	Berries Australia	Brisbane, Qld
Project Coordinator	Claire McCrory	Berries Australia	Hobart, Tas

*Ella starts her role on 24 June.