

# IDO's visit Queensland for Agtech and Team Building

Jen Rowling, Project Manager, Berries Australia

*The Industry Development Officers (IDOs) are funded as part of the strategic levy investment project 'Facilitating the development of the Australian berry industries (MT22010)' under the Hort Innovation Strawberry, Blueberry and Raspberry and Blackberry Funds.*

With our busy Berry Industry Development Officers dispersed across the country, it's not often that the project team are able to get together in person. But an invitation to join a bus trip to an AgTech Field Day in October provided us with the ideal opportunity to spend some quality time together as a team. It was also a great chance to meet and get to know our newest IDO, Simon Neil who took over the reins in Tasmania in September.

To make the most of the visit to Queensland, we added some farm visits, joined a factory tour and bus trip to Gatton, and held a team building workshop across three very busy days.

## Day 1: Farm Visits

First stop for the day was Queensland Berries at Ningi. Richard and Melissa McGruddy have invested heavily over the last few years in infrastructure development and expansion into blueberry production, adding to their existing crops of strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. It was fantastic to see just how much progress has been made and the IDOs were suitably impressed with the scale of development and the on-farm tech employed by the team. Jared Maloney, General Manager and Lucy McGruddy were happy to provide the IDOs with a guided tour.



**10ha of new blueberries have joined strawberries and Rubus at the 115ha site. General Manager Jared Maloney getting a few pointers for the new blueberry planting from NSW IDO Gaius Leong** Photos credit: Jane Richter

The Bugs for Bugs insectary at Donnybrook was the next stop on the day's itinerary. Paul Jones, Director and James Hill, Farm Manager for the insectary provided the team with an overview of the business and the site. Bugs for Bugs has been supporting Australian growers since 1981, and as of May 2025, it's entering an exciting new chapter, now wholly owned by the Biobest Group. It will continue to operate proudly under the Bugs for Bugs name, delivering the same trusted expertise in biological pest management, now backed by a global leader in sustainable crop protection.

The IDOs were given a tour of the many climate-controlled glasshouse structures where the team work to maintain continuous insect production of each beneficial species including Persimilis predatory mites and Hayati wasps. It's a challenging task which requires constant monitoring of the rearing systems and attention to detail.



**The rearing process involves three key stages: first, growing a healthy crop of host plants; next, introducing the target pest and allowing its population to build up to a critical level; and finally, releasing the predatory insects so their numbers can rapidly multiply as they feed on the pest. Once the populations of predator are at a significant level, they are harvested for distribution to growers** Photos credit: Jane Richter and Simon Neil

After lunch at the insectary, the IDOs visited Perfection Fresh to meet the team there and hear more about the production side of the business in Queensland. They then headed over to Piñata Farms with just enough time to get a quick tour of the raspberries.



**Raspberries are grown in tunnels at Piñata Farms Wamuran site** Photo credit: Berries Australia



## Day 2: Multisteps and Gatton AgTech Showcase

The IDO Project Team joined a group of local growers for a full day bus tour organised by Qld IDO Wendy Morris, starting the day off right with a delicious breakfast at Gather and Feast in Caboolture. With full bellies, we headed off to the first stop of the day, the new Multisteps packaging manufacturing facility in Narangba.

Multisteps is a global leader in food packaging with manufacturing facilities across three continents. The state-of-the-art Narangba facility combines cutting-edge technology, sustainability-driven production processes, and strict quality controls to ensure shorter lead times, reduced environmental impact, and premium-quality products for customers.

The 7,200m<sup>2</sup> facility operates four advanced PET RP production lines with state-of-the-art thermoforming technology. An on-site extruder allows 100% of trim waste to be recycled back into production, effectively eliminating waste and ensuring consistent material quality.

It's fantastic to see a facility of this calibre right on our doorstep and the Multisteps team provided a comprehensive and informative tour which was enjoyed by all. They were also keen to give the group a sneak peek at some new cutting-edge packaging technology coming through. It is hoped that this will be available in 2026 but is under wraps until then. Stay tuned!

Then it was off to Gatton! A couple of hours to relax on the bus before arriving at the Gatton AgTech Showcase. This biannual event offers industry an exciting opportunity to inspect emerging AgTech and innovations designed to grow and boost profitability and productivity.

This year's focus was **'Protected Cropping'** and we were pleased to see Queensland Berries support the event by providing Australian Strawberry Breeding Program variety 'Red Rhapsody-ASBP' in coir bags as part of the on-site demonstrations. As the team observed during the previous day's farm visit, Queensland Berries is



**Hi-vis is never even remotely flattering for anyone but safety first!** Photo credit: Wendy Morris



**Angela Atkinson visiting Biological Services, Adrian Schultz with new Tasmanian IDO Simon Neil and an autonomous tractor on show** Photo credit: Wendy Morris

no stranger to cutting edge technology. They did not build their business by doing things 'the way it's always been done' and instead placed innovation at the core of their business model. It was great to see their fabulous berries in the protected greenhouse, and to see several of their staff supporting the event and continuing to expand their knowledge.

The showcase also featured live demos and a full speaking program. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn more about autonomous sprayers and machinery, drone imaging and data analysis, compostable mulch, and new greenhouse technologies. There was also a strong attendance from industry stalwarts, who could advise growers on beneficial bugs, growing media and irrigation.

The showcase is held every two years and even if you're not sure it's entirely for you, it's an excellent opportunity to catch up with colleagues and make new connections.

### Day 3: Team Professional Development workshop

A professional development team workshop rounded out the three days together, facilitated by the wonderful Jo Eady of RuralScope. With Jo's warm, supportive and entertaining guidance, we spent the morning learning more about each other and our individual working styles, and identifying ways that we can continue to improve collaboration and team development.

These sessions are a great way to remind ourselves that we are all unique and although we may operate somewhat differently to each other at an individual level, we each have a place in the team and provide a valuable contribution to the project and the delivery of industry development and communications to the Australian berry industry.

