

Meet Dumi Mhlanga: Senior Industry Service Manager

Jane Richter, Communications Manager, Berries Australia

With more than 30 years' experience across a wide mix of crops and countries, Hort Innovation's new Senior Industry Services Manager Dumi Mhlanga is bringing energy, fresh ideas, and a grower-first approach to the berry industry.

Dumi's horticulture story began in 1994, after graduating in Production Horticulture and later completing a Masters in Agribusiness at the University of Melbourne. In his career to date, he has worked across Australia, South Africa and Zimbabwe, getting hands-on with everything from stone fruit, apples, pears and cherries through to walnuts, open-field cut flowers, native Australian flowers, organic herbs, and protected cropping in tomatoes and herbs.

These experiences have given him not only technical know-how, but a real passion for supporting growers and helping industries find new ways to thrive. That passion was seeded early in his childhood growing up in a farming family in Zimbabwe, so Dumi is certainly no stranger to long hours. He was often up at 5am to help with the cattle before school, then back out on the farm again afterwards. Those formative years gave him a deep respect for farming life and a strong connection to the land.

While the berry industry is new ground for him, Dumi sees plenty of crossover with his past work. "The lessons I've learned managing such a wide range of crops are very transferrable," he says. "Whether it's problem-solving, building industry capability, or finding opportunities for research and innovation, the core principles remain the same."

In his role, he sees himself as a bridge between growers and Hort Innovation. That means keeping communication open and transparent, making sure grower needs are front and centre, and helping to guide levy-funded research and development that delivers real results.



“I will be looking for levy investment opportunities that can benefit multiple industries, encourage collaboration across sectors, and help steer strategic investments. A big part of my role is working closely with growers and industry bodies to pinpoint R&D priorities, using targeted investment and collective problem-solving to drive innovation and lift productivity across horticulture. My first priority is building relationships with berry growers and really understanding the challenges and opportunities faced in this booming sector of Australian horticulture, he explains.

Looking ahead, he believes the berry industry has strong opportunities to keep growing both by boosting domestic demand and creating more export markets. At the same time, he recognises the hurdles growers are facing, from agrichemical access and profitability to building capability and industry capacity.

“There’s no set list of projects yet – it’s about working with the industry to set priorities together,” he says.

If there’s one thing growers can expect from Dumi, it’s accessibility. Whether through regional visits, working with Berries Australia and state bodies, or picking up the phone for a one-on-one chat, his approach is all about listening and staying connected.

“

I’m always available for a chat - growers can call me anytime, even after hours. I want to make sure your perspectives are heard and help champion them wherever decisions are being made. I believe strong relationships and open conversations lead to real change. That’s what will help make horticulture more resilient in the long run.

Berry growers are encouraged to get in touch with Dumi:

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