

AWARD WINNER: LIFETIME CONTRIBUTION

APOLLO GOMEZ

QLD based strawberry disease expert Apollo Gomez was recognised for his Lifetime Contribution at BerryQuest International 2025.

Winning a lifetime contribution award is normally reserved for professionals nearing the end of their professional lives, but not Apollo Gomez. Having recently left the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in Queensland to become an independent consultant, Apollo is still in the prime of his career, assisting growers with disease and fungicide related issues.

If you need solutions on how to manage disease on your farm, or avoid chemical resistance then Apollo is your man. When he's not busy in the kitchen whipping up a storm, he's busy researching new disease management technologies, and liaising with growers.

Apollo's career began under modest circumstances. As a first year Bachelor of Science Student in the Northern Territory, he obtained a casual position with the CSIRO. His role? Roasting cashew nuts and recording kernel sizes. From there, he secured a full-time position as a scientific assistant working on cashew and mango irrigation projects.

A move to far north Queensland led him to transition from plant physiology to entomology working on the quarantine fruit fly species, Papaya Fruit Fly. When a cyclone forced the destruction of all fly colonies, he took the opportunity to move south in 2000 joining the macadamia pathology program before later turning his full attention to the region's largest fruit crop, strawberries.

Apollo's keenest areas of interest are disease epidemiology, fungal pathogens, chemical and non-chemical treatments, resistance and advocating for the responsible use of fungicides. He reminds growers that several factors can increase the risk of pathogens developing resistance to fungicides. With so many products on the market - including generics - it's easy to think you're rotating chemicals when, in fact, they share the same mode of action. That's why it's vital to know exactly which group each product belongs to.



He also stresses the importance of getting spray coverage right. Fungicides only work when they reach their target, so equipment needs to be calibrated to deliver product to the undersides of leaves and deep within the canopy where the pathogens like to hide.

And finally, timing matters. Growers should understand what to apply and when to apply it to get the best protection and keep resistance at bay.

It's not just Apollo's knowledge that sets him apart, it's his genuine commitment and enthusiasm for helping growers. From countless articles in the *Australian Berry Journal* to interstate tours, speaking engagements, and active involvement in industry forums, Apollo has worked tirelessly to support the berry sector in both paid and voluntary roles.

For many growers, though, it's more than his technical expertise that stands out. It's his warm, positive nature and his knack for connecting with people from all walks of life that truly make him one of the industry's most respected and well-liked figures.