

BerryWorld: Flavour, Genetics and the Long Game of Berry Category Growth

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When I visited BerryWorld's joint venture breeding partner Edward Vinson Ltd at their Faversham, Kent site in June this year while travelling in the UK, the timing could hardly have been better. The British berry season was well underway, the tunnels were full, and the rows of strawberries and raspberries offered a practical view of how one of the world's best-known berry businesses has built its reputation: not through one single breakthrough, but through a deliberate combination of breeding, protected cropping, grower partnerships, retail insight and consumer-led marketing. I was lucky enough to spend the morning touring the facility with Samuel Rowe, Chief Genetics Officer and Charlotte (Charlie) Knowles, Group Marketing & Communications Director.

For Australian berry growers, the BerryWorld story is particularly relevant. Through its relationship with Piñata Farms, BerryWorld genetics are already part of our local Australian industry. But the UK visit offered a broader lesson: the strongest berry categories are built when growers, breeders, marketers and retailers work from the same brief. It's all about producing fruit that performs in the field, survives the supply chain, and brings consumers back for more. Again, and again. Makes it sound so simple, doesn't it?

BerryWorld was founded in the UK in 1994 and has grown into one of the world's major berry suppliers, with a global footprint and year-round supply across the four major berry categories. BerryWorld supplies across 37 countries, supported by breeding, growing, marketing and prepared-fruit operations. It was acquired in 2024 by the AgroBerries Group, which

collectively now represents one of the world's largest vertically integrated berry businesses. Across the AgroBerries Group, the business operates some of its own variety programmes through joint ventures with key partners. These are built around a simple but ambitious proposition: breed 'flavour packed' berries that taste better while also increasing yields for growers.

That concept of balance - flavour and grower return - came through repeatedly during my visit and discussions with Sam and Charlie.

"You breed for something you're going to sell," Sam told me during the walk through the crop. "If you're going to breed something that's not going to sell, then it's irrelevant how quickly it picks. You can't sell it, so it's not viable."



'Eves Delight 2' strawberries ready for harvest. 'Eves Delight 2' was bred by Edward Vinson Ltd and is grown by select BerryWorld growers in the UK Photo credit: Jane Richter

It is a deceptively simple statement, but it captures the commercial discipline behind BerryWorld's success. Eating quality matters, but not in isolation. A variety also needs yield, plant architecture, shelf life, pick speed, disease tolerance, and a clear place in the market.

A Kent heritage with global reach

The Faversham visit was to Edward Vinson Ltd., a Kent-based fruit business with more than 150 years of berry-growing heritage in South East England. Edward Vinson Ltd. launched its own strawberry breeding program in 1986 and has developed a range of varieties that BerryWorld packs exclusively.

Sam describes Edward Vinson Ltd. (EV®) as a standalone family-owned business with 'a very long history in soft fruit production', explaining that Peter Vinson began strawberry breeding 40 years ago, at first, just as a hobby. Today, EV® is a modern, industry-leading breeding business that has moved to science lead practices, grounded by its grower and market roots.

When BerryWorld started in 1994, Adam Olins, founder, was looking for a strong production partner, and Edward Vinson Ltd. was the biggest soft fruit producer in England at the time.

That relationship became one of BerryWorld's defining strengths. Sam explained that BerryWorld and Edward Vinson Ltd. still work together across multiple pillars: BerryWorld holds exclusivity on the Edward Vinson Ltd. strawberry breeding program, the businesses breed together through BerryWorld Plus, Edward Vinson Ltd. produces fruit for BerryWorld, provides winter packing for imported fruit, and propagates strawberry plants for growers. So their fortunes are thoroughly intertwined.

At the site I visited, Sam estimated fruit production at about 94 hectares, all under polytunnel, with strawberries and raspberries the major crops along with more hectares for strawberry plant propagation. He also explained that the strawberries were 100% proprietary EV genetics, while the raspberries were 100% BerryWorld Plus genetics.

BerryWorld Plus: the breeding engine

BerryWorld Plus was established in 2002 as a joint venture between Edward Vinson Ltd, Hall Hunter Partnership and BerryWorld. Its purpose is to breed raspberry, blackberry and blueberry varieties that combine outstanding taste with sustainable yields for growers. BerryWorld Plus genetics are now grown across four continents, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Scandinavia, Spain, South Africa, the UK and the US.

Nothing happens rapidly in plant breeding. The joint venture was established in 2002; breeding trials were established in Spain in 2005; 'BerryWorld Gem[®]' and 'BerryWorld Jewel[®]' were selected for more extensive trials in 2009; 'BerryWorld Gem[®]' (also known as 'Diamond Jubilee') was released in 2013; and 'BerryWorld Jewel[®]' (also known as Sapphire) followed in 2014.

On-farm, Sam put the timeframes even more plainly: approximately seven years to market for strawberries, around nine years for raspberries, nine to 12 years for southern-hemisphere blueberries, and 15 to 20 years for northern-hemisphere blueberries.

For growers, that timeframe matters. It means breeding is not simply a response to today's market conditions. It is a long-term bet on what consumers, retailers, labour markets, climate and production systems will require in a decade's time.

'Sapphire', 'Diamond Jubilee' and the power of a point of difference

A major part of the BerryWorld story is the development of raspberry varieties that gave retailers and consumers a reason to trade up.

During the visit, Sam described the older raspberry market as centred on classic varieties such as 'Tulameen' and 'Ample', before Driscoll's 'Maravilla' bred some consistency into the product and helped consumers gain confidence in raspberries. BerryWorld Plus then released 'Diamond Jubilee', which competed in the standard offer, followed by 'Sapphire', which became a top-tier raspberry. "Diamond Jubilee is what Gavin's growing in Australia at Piñata Farms," Sam explained.

For Charlie, it is clear why 'Sapphire' has worked so well commercially. It's a variety that had a clear point of difference, which meant retailers could get behind it. Major Northern European retailers have promoted it through high-profile PR activity, variety name call-outs on packs, pack redesigns and a stronger emphasis on the breeding story. The result, Charlie said, was that purchase frequency increased because consumers had a better reason to return to buy time and again.

For Australian growers, this is one of the most important lessons in the BerryWorld model. Differentiation only works if the product is genuinely different from the other products in the category and consistently delivers.

Charlie captured the challenge neatly:

"The hard thing with berries, a lot of the time they don't look too different from the next berry. You're buying with your eyes... so how do you know that one raspberry is going to taste different to the next?"

That is where variety, branding and retail storytelling intersect. In apples, for example, the visual difference between varieties is mostly obvious. In berries, it often needs to be created through consistent eating quality, strong visual packaging cues, variety naming and building trust from one season to another.

From one pack to a pack for every shopper

One of the clearest market insights from the visit was the evolution of the UK berry category from a single pack format into a tiered and segmented offer.

Charlie described the development of UK berry retailing as a gradual shift from a simple, standardised offer to a more sophisticated category structure. In the early stages, berries were largely sold through a single core pack format. That evolved into a year-round version of the same basic offer, before retailers began introducing larger pack sizes, premium tiers and more clearly differentiated formats. You could argue that we are in the early stages of the same journey here in Australia.

The result in the UK is a category that now caters to different shopping occasions and budgets. A small punnet can suit a single-person household or price-conscious shopper, while larger formats appeal to families and frequent berry buyers. At the same time, premium packs give consumers a reason to trade up when the eating quality, variety or brand story supports the higher price.

As Charlie put it, there is now “almost a pack for every shopper” from small value-oriented punnets through to large-format top-tier packs. This evolution has helped the UK berry category grow not just by selling more fruit, but by giving more consumers more reasons to buy berries more often.

For Australian berry growers, this UK experience is highly relevant. The Australian retail offer has traditionally been more strongly driven by price and standard pack size, with less emphasis on differentiated tiers, variety call-outs or clearly defined shopper occasions.

Charlie's point was not that every berry needs to become a premium product. Rather, the opportunity lies in building a category with more entry points. Some shoppers will always look for value, while others may be willing to pay more for larger packs, better flavour, stronger branding, or a more reliable eating experience. A broader range of pack sizes and formats gives retailers more ways to meet those different needs and gives growers more opportunities to capture value.

However, the success of that approach depends on quality. Pack format can encourage a shopper to buy once, but the eating experience determines whether they buy again. As Charlie explained, increased purchase frequency is underpinned by genetics and consistency: “If the quality's not consistent, people won't come back. They can swap into other products.”

This is where BerryWorld's model becomes especially interesting. It does not rely only on producing a better berry; it builds a commercial structure around that berry so the consumer can recognise, trust and repurchase it.

The Australian connection: Piñata Farms and BerryWorld Australia

BerryWorld's Australian connection began formally with Piñata Farms. Piñata Farms, led by Gavin Scurr, has more than 1,010 hectares under cultivation across Australia and produces four fruit lines. Gavin and Stephen Scurr diversified into strawberries in 2000, and by 2015 Piñata Farms had become a leading Australian strawberry business.

Piñata Farms became Australia's first large-scale grower to grow strawberries under polytunnels in 2015. Substrate strawberry production was established in 2016 in preparation for the first commercial BerryWorld Australia-branded harvest in 2017. Specialty BerryWorld raspberries followed in 2018.

BerryWorld strawberries were selected through BerryWorld's exclusive access to the Edward Vinson Ltd. breeding program in the UK and Spain, with the first commercial specialty crop produced by Piñata Farms for BerryWorld Australia going to market in August 2017. BerryWorld strawberries are grown in Wamuran during winter and Stanthorpe in summer.

BerryWorld-branded raspberries are grown exclusively by Piñata Farms at Wamuran on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, with the first raspberry crop harvested in winter 2019. The Wamuran raspberry crop is produced between April and December and supplements the raspberry crops of other growing regions, including Stanthorpe in Queensland and Orielton in Tasmania.

Growing what can be sold

A recurring theme during my visit was BerryWorld's disciplined approach to matching production with market demand. As we walked through raspberry crops planted at different stages, Sam explained that florican raspberries give growers some ability to spread supply by planting long canes at different times. Each planting creates a slightly different production window, helping to flatten supply and improve the chances of fruit being harvested when there is a clear market for it.

“That gives us a different production window,” he said. “So again, we grow what we can sell — and I think that is a mantra that we've tried very hard to live by.”

For Australian growers, that phrase – *we grow what we can sell* – is one of the most useful takeaways from the BerryWorld model. It connects production planning with variety selection, labour availability, yield forecasting, packhouse capacity, retail programs and market development. A berry crop has its greatest value when it can be picked, packed, cooled and sold into a market that is ready for it. When production exceeds the available market window, that same fruit can quickly become a distressed-price product, or worse, waste.

This production discipline also explains BerryWorld's strong focus on shelf life. Later in the visit, Sam described flavour as a baseline expectation, but identified yield, shelf life and consistency as critical commercial factors. "If you don't have shelf life, you lose confidence in the product," he said. "People don't come back."

That message is highly relevant to the Australian berry industry, where recent supply chain work has reinforced the importance of temperature management from harvest through to retail. Genetics may set the potential for quality, but that quality is protected – or lost – through every step after picking. Rapid cooling, careful handling, efficient packing, cold chain integrity and strong stock management all determine whether the consumer experiences the fruit as the grower intended.

The most closely guarded part of the farm is Edward Vinson Ltd's active breeding program – a trial area where new selections are carefully assessed, but not examined too closely by visitors. It's so top secret that the photo I took from a considerable distance away was vetoed for publication! Such is the competitive world of global berry breeding.

Breeding for the future: labour, heat, water and mechanisation

BerryWorld's breeding objectives are not static. They are changing as labour availability tightens, costs rise and climate conditions shift.

'BerryWorld Ruby[®]', a newer raspberry variety discussed during the visit, was developed partly in response to the economics of raspberry production. Raspberries are labour-intensive, so breeders looked for fruit visibility, berry size, ease of picking, a wider acceptable colour range and yield along the lateral. Sam explained that 'BerryWorld Ruby[®]' does all of that: fruit visibility is good, it picks relatively easily, maintains size and has good yield.

'BerryWorld Ruby[®]' is very easy to pick as it detaches cleanly. Sam showed me a late planting of 'BerryWorld Ruby[®]' established in May for an August harvest window.

Mechanisation is also coming, although Sam expects strawberries and blueberries to move first, with raspberries and blackberries taking longer because of their complexity.

Water security is another major issue facing UK growers, a concern that we are all too familiar with in our fickle Australian climate. Sam predicted more attention will come in the near future on extraction licences, rainwater harvesting and water reuse. He noted that some growers are already collecting runoff, but that reuse brings additional challenges around disease treatment and nutrient management.

The timing of my visit on 16 June also proved significant. What followed was an extraordinary British summer. From June to August 2026, the UK recorded its hottest summer since national records began in 1884, surpassing the previous record set just a year earlier. Conditions became particularly extreme through July, when England and Wales recorded their driest July on record, and parts of southern England experienced exceptionally long periods without measurable rain. At Wisley in the southern county of Surrey, for example, the dry spell eventually stretched to 62 consecutive days. By summer's end, England had received only 64% of its normal rainfall and Wales 59%. For a berry industry built around protected cropping, irrigation and careful management of crop timing, the season provided a striking illustration of the increasingly challenging conditions UK growers are having to design their production systems and genetics around.

Climate change is definitely influencing breeding priorities. Sam highlighted that climate change is bringing more frequent periods of thermo-dormancy, where plants effectively shut down during heat events. Breeders, he said, will need to simulate heat events to identify genetics that can remain active under those conditions, as these extreme hot periods are only going to happen more regularly. That should sound familiar to Australian growers. What has become an emerging concern in the UK is already a central production challenge in many Australian regions.



'BerryWorld Ruby®' is very easy to pick as it detaches cleanly. Sam showed me this late planting of 'BerryWorld Ruby®' established in May for an August harvest window Photo credit: Jane Richter

Success measured in awards, markets and repeat purchase

BerryWorld's success is evident in its market presence, varietal reach, and independent recognition. Its varieties have received multiple International Taste Institute Superior Taste Awards since 2018, across blueberries, strawberries and raspberries.

In 2025, BerryWorld varieties were again recognised across the berry portfolio, including selected *Mountain Blue** blueberries, 'Sweet Karoline®' blackberries, 'Eves Delight™' strawberries, 'Eves Joy™' strawberries, 'BerryWorld Reyes®' raspberries and 'BerryWorld Jewel®' raspberries.

Awards are useful validation, but the more important commercial measure is repeat purchase. BerryWorld's model is built on the understanding that consumers come back when the eating experience is consistently good. Genetics may open the door, but retail execution, handling, pack format, supply planning and shelf life determine whether that promise is delivered.

For Australian growers, the BerryWorld story offers several clear lessons:

- Flavour needs to be treated as a baseline expectation, not an optional premium feature
- Premiumisation should not be seen as a risk if the eating quality genuinely supports the price
- Varieties need to perform commercially, not just in tasting panels, which means yield, shelf life, pick speed and consistency all matter
- Future production systems will also need to be designed around labour efficiency, climate resilience, water security and mechanisation from the outset

Perhaps the strongest message from the Faversham visit was that BerryWorld's success has come from connecting the whole chain. Breeding is linked to product quality and picking efficiency. Picking efficiency and quality is linked to shelf life. Shelf life and quality is linked to consumer confidence. Consumer confidence is linked to purchase frequency. Purchase frequency is linked to grower value.

As Charlie put it, the UK market has moved from a simple one-pack model to a more sophisticated category with something that everyone can buy into. That may be the real opportunity for Australia: not simply to grow more berries, but to give more shoppers more reasons to choose better berries, more often.

* Mountain Blue bred the original Eureka blueberry in Australia through Ridley Bell's breeding program, and the broader Eureka series remains part of Mountain Blue's genetics portfolio. BerryWorld has licensed Mountain Blue genetics for international production and marketing. That is why you will see names such as BerryWorld Eureka®, BerryWorld Eureka Sunrise™, Eureka Sunset, Eureka Dawn, Eureka Gold and Eureka Maxx in BerryWorld's international varietal portfolio.

BERRYWORLD AND AGROBERRIES

BerryWorld is now part of AgroBerries, a global berry business founded in Chile. AgroBerries first took a minority stake in BerryWorld's EMEA and APAC businesses in 2023, before acquiring BerryWorld Group Holdings Limited in 2024. The combination brings together AgroBerries' global production base and BerryWorld's strong European marketing, retail and varietal platform. For more information on the Group, visit: agroberries.com

The notable exception is North America, where the BerryWorld brand is totally separate and is owned and operated by Mastronardi Produce; AgroBerries is not related to Mastronardi's BerryWorld-branded business in the US market.



Sam Rowe

**Chief Genetics Officer,
AgroBerries Group**

Sam Rowe joined BerryWorld in 2009 as a management trainee. His career has taken him across customer-facing, supply development and varietal development roles, giving him a broad view of how genetics, growers, retailers and consumers need to connect. Sam is now the Chief Genetics Officer for the Group, reflecting his pivotal role in the company's global varietal development work.

Since 2012, Sam has been closely involved in berry varietal development, including BerryWorld Plus, BerryWorld's proprietary breeding programme for raspberries, blackberries and blueberries. He established BerryWorld Varieties in 2015 and leads the team as Chief Genetics Officer, most recently taking on full responsibility for the AgroBerries Group genetic portfolio. His work focuses on bringing commercially viable berry genetics to market: varieties that deliver flavour and consumer appeal, but also yield, shelf life, picking efficiency and sustainable returns for growers.



Charlotte Knowles

**Marketing & Communications
Director, AgroBerries Group**

Charlotte is Group Marketing & Communications Director and leads corporate and consumer brand strategy. Her role sits at the point where genetics, farming, retail, shopper behaviour and brand storytelling come together, helping to translate berry variety development into a clear proposition for retailers and consumers.

Charlotte has played a key role in BerryWorld's brand evolution and in 2026 won Marketing and Brand Leader at the inaugural Women in Food & Drink Awards.

